

**Statewide Arts Integration Programming:
A Closer Look at Successes and Challenges for
Elementary Students, Classroom Teachers, and Arts Educators**

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Abstract

When schools face issues of funding, arts programs are usually among the first to suffer, facing everything from cuts to full-blown elimination. However, the arts have been shown to be crucial for student development, not only for the joy of self-expression through the arts themselves, but also because of the social, emotional, and academic connections children can make through them. Recognizing this importance, several school districts across the nation have adopted a paradigm-changing method of instruction in which the arts are actually integrated into the curriculum as a means of teaching other core subjects. One organization making this possible is the Beverley Taylor Sorensen Arts Learning Program (BTSALP), an arts-integration statewide program now implemented in 400+ schools throughout the Intermountain West.

This qualitative study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of this particular program in a handful of schools through interviews conducted with arts educators, general-curriculum teachers, students, and parents. Schools were chosen for the study to reflect the different art forms in which the educators specialized and to include areas with differing student demographics. Results indicate that, despite some challenges, participants found this method of arts integration to be a highly effective way to teach core curricula while preserving the aspects of art that students find engaging.

Statewide Arts Integration Programming: A Closer Look at Successes and Challenges for Elementary Students, Classroom Teachers, and Arts Educators.

Review of Literature

With an increase in national arts integration programming within the United States, it seems natural and imperative to take a closer look at the successes and challenges associated with this ever-growing curricular paradigm (Diaz & McKenna, 2017; Isenberg & Jalongo, 2010; Werner & Freeman, 2001). Arts Integration, as defined by the Kennedy Center, is “an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form [where] students engage in a creative process, which connects an art form and another subject and meets evolving objectives in both” (Doyle et al., 2014, pg.3). The key takeaway concepts from this definition are (1) creative process and (2) evolving objectives. These concepts imply that students have a deeper responsibility for their own learning through a process of creation, which then influences the objectives that evolve over time.

Arts integration programming really serves two purposes. The first is to enhance academic learning in a way that caters to diverse learning styles and multiple intelligences (Doyle, Huie, Hofstetter, Kendig, & Strick, 2014). Essentially, this arts integration approach provides students—many of whom learn best through the arts—the outlet and resources they need to reach their utmost potential (Duma & Silverstein, 2014; Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson, 2012). The second purpose of arts integration is to recover lost arts programming in a meaningful way where the subjects surrounding the arts are the very academic subjects that each child is immersed in daily. Because nation-wide elementary arts programming cuts have continued to perpetuate over the past few decades, there have been revival efforts to reinstate the arts through different means, with arts integration being one. (Coysh, 2005; Jorgensen, 1995; Major, 2013; Schultz, 2006; Shaw, 2020). The arts integration approach allows students to make critical connections through the arts that might otherwise be missed. For instance, a group of 7th graders in Baltimore, Maryland were exposed to history through theater in an improvisation-based residency program. Over a one-week Shakespeare intensive, the students researched historical contexts, composed artistic renderings, practiced thoughtful decision-making, re-told stories, and accessed the tools of an actor to dive deeper into English Language Arts comprehension. It was through this carefully crafted arts integration program that the students embraced Shakespeare emphatically, which was something that their middle-school teacher had never seen (Weber, 2005).

Like many educational reforms, there are both successes and challenges that arise. Certain elements afford a curricular shift to be more beneficial than others. Rabkin & Redmond (2006) detail characteristics of powerful arts integration school programs that (a) promote healthy partnerships among teachers of varying disciplines and with community artists; (b) value student achievement both in the arts and academic subject areas; (c) champion the intersections between the arts and other core subjects that enhance student learning.

Despite these successes, there are multiple hurdles to overcome, one of which is the overall buy-in of the administration, teachers, and arts educators (Trent et al., 1998). A transition to arts integration in a school or district takes real commitment, for the simple reason that it is a change, and change is typically met with resistance. In education, change is inevitable. However, it takes time, energy, patience and, oftentimes, fiscal resources. There are also those who believe that arts integration is not the best solution for re-introducing arts programming where it has been

previously removed (Schmal, 2003; Thomas, 2014). Further challenges include varied interpretations of programming and limited access to resources, which can result in the art not being taken seriously (Trent, et al., 1998; Wiggins, 2001; Moore, 1995).

So, why promote change toward arts integration if it is sometimes difficult? The benefits must be explored, for they are numerous. One of the most powerful arguments that bend the ears of administrators, lawmakers, and legislators is that such programs are associated with rising test scores and academic growth (Schmal, 2003; Barry, 2008; Burnaford, Brown, Doherty & McLaughlin, 2007; Simpson Steele, 2016; Sadoski & Paivio, 2001). For instance, in a report released by the West Virginia School District, students who participated in two or more credits of arts courses from 2007-2010 were 1.5 times more likely to score at or above the national average composite score on the ACT (May, 2012). Across the nation on the west coast, a similar study of 25,000 students spanning over 10 years found that students who received music instruction scored significantly higher on the SATs and reading proficiency exams (Catterall, 1997).

Learning through the arts via arts integration also provides students with an opportunity to communicate through a variety of media (i.e., dance, drama, music or visual arts), as opposed to the verbal and mathematical structures around which the current curricula are designed (Fisher & McDonald, 2004; Moore, 1995; Simpson Steele, 2016; Warner & Andersen, 2004). For instance, the elementary students at Pomaika'i Elementary recently used a variety of dance strategies to explore the earth's structure, plate tectonics, land formation and erosion, rather than write an essay of their findings or deliver a well-rehearsed speech (Simpson Steele, 2016). Similarly, elementary students at Canyon Rim Academy composed and performed original xylophone compositions in rondo-form, showcasing their understanding of the diverse planet characteristics among our solar system (Penerosa, 2016). As expressed in these examples, arts integration combines different learning modalities that offer multiple tools for students to show that learning has occurred (Scheinfeld, 2004).

Another purposeful strength found in arts integration can be found in the curricular design involving English as a Second Language instruction. It is entirely appropriate to offer varying means of assessment and instruction for a child who is learning without fully understanding the language through which the material is being presented. According to Toppo (2016), the arts, including arts integration, heighten academic and social growth with schools servicing a wide number of ESL students. One aspect that is appealing to students under heightened stress, such as many of those who fall under the ESL category, is that of a safe environment to make mistakes while learning. Simpson Steele (2016) reminds us that one major strength of arts integration can be found in the embodiment of embracing mistakes as opportunities and failures as possibilities.

There are more facets to education than solely academic growth (Schmal, 2003; Barry, 2008; Burnaford, Brown, Doherty & McLaughlin, 2007). Social-emotional learning is growing in acceptance as an aspect of education that needs to be fostered (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019; Oberle, Domitrovich & Weissberg, 2016). The arts in all their varieties provide children with a vessel for creativity, which research has linked to positive social-emotional well-being (Moore, 1995; Penerosa, 2016). The risk-taking that is involved in artmaking affords students the opportunity for growth and reflection. This is often even more true for students who are shy and/or low performers in other academic areas (Doyle et al., 2014; Werner & Freeman, 2011). Simpson Steele (2016) claims that learning through the arts integration lens helps "students

develop in three primary areas: a) self-confidence; b) connecting with others in the learning community; and c) communication” (p.22)

Nationally, arts integration programs are gaining momentum and are more widely being implemented in schools (Burnaford et. al., 2007; Trent et. al., 1998). With this educational shift in place, research surrounding the successes and challenges of arts integration programming is warranted. This study does just that, taking a closer look at how a state-wide arts integration program is flourishing despite the various pros and cons of this paradigm.

Methodological Approach and Rationale

This research is qualitative in nature. According to Rossman and Rallis (2017), qualitative research seeks to find meaning of social phenomena and takes place in the natural world, drawing on multiple methods of inquiry (p. 5). The reason a qualitative approach has been adopted for this study is that it seeks to identify a variety of individuals’ thoughts, opinions and experiences on being part of the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program within their school.

Rossman and Rallis (2017) also note that qualitative research has roots in both “*phenomenology* (questioning the structure and essence of lived experience) and *hermeneutics* (questioning the conditions that shape interpretations of human acts or products)” (pp. 5-6). This study is a phenomenological study, as it will “seek to understand the lived experiences of a small number of people” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 81) from various perspectives and opinions surrounding the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program or BTSALP.

Setting

Representatives from four elementary schools were chosen to participate in this study. The schools were chosen from a purposive sample (Creswell, 2007), varying in demographic, geographic and LEA (Local Education Agency) type. LEA's in this particular region of the intermountain west are under jurisdiction by a school district or by individual charter. One school was located in the South Summit School District in a town demographic where approximately 1,700 students are 88% White and 12% Nonwhite students with a total of 24% being economically disadvantaged. Another school was located within the Park City School District, also a town demographic serving just above 4,500 students with 74% White and 26% Nonwhite students with a total of 20% being economically disadvantaged. The remaining two were public charter schools located in the Salt Lake Valley, an urban setting, one of which serves just under 400 students with a population distribution of 21% White and 79% Nonwhite students with a total of 69% being economically disadvantaged. The other public charter school serves just under 2,500 students with 81% being white, 19% being nonwhite and 24% of their total enrollment being economically disadvantaged. The length of time that the schools had been working with arts integrated programming varied from one to six years at the time of data collection.

Participants

A total of four participants from each of the four schools were asked to participate in this study: one general classroom teacher, one current parent, one current student, and the school’s Beverley Taylor Sorenson (BTS) Specialist, for a total of N=16 participants.

BTS arts educators were personally asked to participate in this study, because of their art form, location of the school and level of teaching experience, which was varied. By coincidence, all BTS arts educators at the selected schools were female. The arts educators were also asked to help find a general classroom teacher, a parent, and a current student at their school to participate

in this study. This sample approach was utilized because the BTSALP arts educator was more knowledgeable about parental involvement in the school community, regardless of their opinion of the program, and due to privacy concerns.

The BTS arts educators were licensed to teach one of the four major art forms (visual art, theatre, dance or music). All of the arts educators indicated that they were personally involved with their art form outside of work and were involved in community projects that centered around their art form. BTS arts educators must have a Utah State Board of Education license in their art form and be endorsed to teach at the elementary level of that art form. Prior to being BTS arts educators, one specialist had taught in the general classroom for three years, two arts educators had taught in their art form specifically, one for 12 years and the other for 40, with the last one teaching her art form in private studios.

The general classroom teachers who participated in this study had teaching career lengths of between four and 24 years; the participants included one teacher from each of the first four grades of elementary school (first-fourth grade). Teachers were specifically selected as a purposive sample due to their high level of experience with the program. In all cases, the experience of the general classroom teachers working with a BTS arts educator and the program overall was limited to their current school.

Three of the four parents interviewed had more than one child (but no more than two) who had participated in the BTSALP, while one parent had just one child who had participated. It is important to note that of the four parents who were interviewed, three were also general classroom teachers at the school, but were asked to give their perspective from that of a parent. As this research was conducted toward the end of the school year, availability of participants was limited, therefore convenience sampling was used to recruit participants. Sheer availability of participants who fell into either the teacher or parent category as separate entities was limited, which resulted in a high coincidence of parents also being teachers at the chosen institutions. In addition, three of the four parents who agreed to be interviewed also had their own children interviewed. As data collection took place after school hours, availability of children to gain permission from their parents was limited, so convenience sampling was utilized. Two of the four children interviewed were in fourth grade, one was in third, and one was in fifth. Three of the students had been participating in the BTSALP for as long as they had been at the school (Kindergarten onwards), while one child was experiencing their first year in the program.

Data Collection

The data-collection method for this project consisted of a semi-structured, one-on-one interview for each candidate that ranged anywhere from four minutes to over an hour in length, depending on their availability and willingness to expand on their answers. The researcher was not employed with BTSALP, but as a research assistant for a partnering institution of higher learning. Parental consent forms were signed for all children and parents were on site as they were being interviewed. All interviews involving minors were conducted in an open classroom or resource room with visible access at all times. It was important for children to answer questions without parental oversight or involvement to ensure that responses were authentic. The questions were open-ended to allow the individuals to give a richer description of their experiences. The interviews consisted of questions that were similar in nature and appropriate for the audience to whom they were directed. For example, one question directed to the BTS arts educator was, “How do your students feel about participating in the arts at school?” The same

question was rephrased for the parents as, “How do you think participating in the arts makes your child feel?” For a full range of questions asked of each participant, see Appendix A.

Data Analysis

The data collected for this project were compared and contrasted using the constant-comparative method (Boeije, 2002; Glaeser & Strauss, 1967). Boeije (2002) describes this approach as requiring the examination of data to identify key issues and/or recurring events that could shift the focus of the study, as well as the basis for how the data is categorized. The constant-comparative method requires the researcher to describe and explain phenomena found in the data, as well as to actively seek new incidences of these phenomena. Analyzing the data through the constant-comparative method allows for adjustments to be made to data collection methods during active research to accommodate new findings. Interview data were collected via two separate recording devices and then later transcribed using a secure, online, paid program called Wreally Transcribe. Interview tracks were then listened to with transcriptions, to not only correct mistakes made by the program but to identify common threads and themes, and to gather key quotes to use to support or challenge existing ideas or themes.

Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure that this case study remains valid and trustworthy, triangulation is achieved by using Multiple Perspective interviews, a framework that allows for various perspectives from interrelated persons on a particular matter (McCarthy, Holland, & Gilles, 2003; Santoro, 2013 & Vogl, Schmidt & Zartler, 2019). As Vogl, Zartler, Schmidt & Rieder state, “Interviews with only one member would fail to offer information to reconstruct mutual influences and differences in sense-making” (2018, pg. 179). Multiple interviews from different participants on the same subject make for a fuller, richer, and more descriptive analysis of a situation, circumstance, or event. Interviewees were interviewed separately and privately and none of the participants could discuss with each other what questions were being asked in the interview, as all interviews were done one after another at each separate site. By using a Multiple Perspective interview approach, it was easier to see what successes and challenges each school/art form faced in their particular environment, and to see what specific traits of arts integration were most prevalent in each setting.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of the purposes of the data collection as well as the goals of this research. All participants were issued consent forms and had the opportunity to ask questions about the study; all were informed of their right to discontinue participation at any time up until the final review of the publication. Minors were also informed of their rights, and their legal parent/guardian agreed in writing to their participation in this study (see Appendix B). Participants were informed that, for ethical and safety reasons, all names and confidential information would be kept private by using no identifying information on the first-hand record or notes. Pronouns of children have also been changed to they/them to protect anonymity. No information collected from any participant was shared with any other participant.

Findings

As this study is looking directly at the successes and challenges of an integrated arts learning program using a Multiple Perspectives framework, successes and challenges have been categorized into themes, and findings have been cross-analyzed using spreadsheet software to compare and contrast multiple similar perspectives from the 16 participants interviewed.

Successes

Meaningful Curriculum and Arts Integration.

The purpose of the BTSALP is to put an arts educator “trained in the areas of one of four art disciplines - visual art, dance, music and theatre - in elementary schools to work alongside classroom teachers to develop lesson plans for the core curricula that incorporate art” (“btsarts.org”, n.d.). This echoes the elements of a successful arts integration program as earlier mentioned, outlined by Rabkin & Redmond (2006): there must be healthy teacher/arts educator partnerships, academic achievement in arts and core subjects and an intersection of enhanced student learning.

Interviewees in the study were asked how the BTSALP classroom connected curriculum through art, and by comparing and contrasting responses from all of the interviews, it was found that 81.25% (13 out of 16) of all interviewees mentioned at least one tangible example of how the BTSALP had connected a core curriculum concept to the art form offered at their school. The older two students who were interviewed were both able to directly connect the core curriculum concept and the activity in which they participated in their BTSALP class. One student said, “She taught us fractions,” while another indicated that they had learned math concepts such as symmetry, as well as core concepts from social studies.

All of the elementary classroom teachers commented on efforts their arts educator had made to embed the curriculum into the art lesson. One teacher commented, “[The students] get the concept more concrete and solidify the concept in their mind, when they draw it, or when they're singing, or dancing or doing some kind of art activity that relates to the standard here.” Another teacher said, “She did a lot of different [things] like note reading and patterns with fractions, and then she did, like, different songs with the phases of the moon.” Another teacher commented on how helpful it was that the arts educator was so instrumental in incorporating the curriculum: “She did some really neat ideas . . . They really did incorporate into whatever we were teaching in science; it was very, very helpful, I think.”

One parent commented on the meaningful connection of curriculum through the BTSALP classroom, describing how her child had come home excited to show her art work, and indicating that her daughter had said, “Mom, look at what we learned about: the life cycle of a frog, and I made this art project that shows the life cycle of a frog.” Another parent commented on the importance of art to connect curriculum:

They remember things better with music and they can't always memorize something, but they can always learn a song and so being able to incorporate . . . the rhythm, the rhyme, the beat, the counting: all of those things developmentally help them progress in reading and writing and math and science.

Kids Love Art! Building Confidence and Social-Emotional Awareness.

All elementary teachers and parents interviewed (50% of the overall sample) mentioned the increased confidence they saw in their students. One elementary teacher said directly regarding the BTSALP arts educator, “At the end of their projects or an activity, just to see . . . what it turns out to be, is just so rewarding for the students. [Their] hard work paid off.”

The majority of the elementary teachers mentioned how the BTSALP classes helped their students with their social skills, including working in teams, communicating with others and working toward a common goal. One teacher said, “They don't always have the skills necessary to speak to each other and get along, but when they have to work together to create like a pattern . . . [the arts educator] helps them develop that confidence.” Another teacher commented, “They love it; they love music and when they have things to look forward to, they do better at school, like they're excited to come to school.”

A parent whose child is involved with the visual art BTSALP classroom articulated the transferrable nature of confidence by being involved in the arts culture at her child's school:

The kids are just making, and however they do it, through their own way, their own crooked nose, or their own pot that's got one eye up here and another eye down here, like it's okay and it helps them build confidence . . . they become even more creative. They're willing to think outside the box . . . 'I've never used this art material, but that's okay. I'm just gonna jump in and go for it' . . . I think that the creativity, the rules, the expectations in the art room . . . continue on throughout not just [the BTSALP] classroom, but . . . into their classrooms as well.

Another parent commented on the importance of feeling successful:

You watch all these kids of all different sizes and ages and everything doing their own different thing that they've mastered each with this huge smile on their face and they've accomplished something big and together, they're better and that's the whole point of music is that together we're better and the same thing in everyday life. Same thing as should be in society together. We're better for doing the right thing together, we can do more.

These are only a few personal accounts (within four of the over 300 elementary schools that participate in the BTSALP program) of the successes that parents, teachers, students and arts educators have seen with their involvement through the BTSALP. However, they are not unlike findings in other significant bodies of research that demonstrate how arts integration bolsters engagement, achievement, and morale in schools (Burnaford et al., 2007; Doyle et al., 2014; Duma & Silverstein, 2018; Mays, 2012; Scheinfeld, 2004; Schwartz, 2015; Werner & Freeman, 2001). In a recent case study, Simpson Steele (2016) found that “arts tasks require students to take risks, and each time they experience success students may potentially see themselves as more capable, more effective” (p. 23). Having an individual or collaborative goal such as an art project, or performing a dance, theatre or musical piece is the culmination of a student's understanding in the arts. According to the BTSALP website, the program stresses the importance for arts educators to “plan informances, performances and/or exhibits to celebrate students' arts learning with the school community as an audience at least once per year” (btsarts.org”, n.d.)

Eighty one and one half percent of all interviewees claimed that the BTSALP classes offered in their school directly contributed to the students' love of their art form. Three out of four of the students interviewed said that it made them happy to go to the BTSALP classes, and

three out of four parents commented on the enthusiasm their children had for attending those classes. The three of the four arts educators who were performers or private studio teachers all said that their main goal was to instill a love for their art form in their students. The one arts educator who had been an elementary classroom teacher before moving into an arts educator role said her main goal was to support the classroom teachers with the general curriculum through her art form. While both of these main goals are equally valid and important, according to the BTSALP roles and responsibilities (BTSALP, 2012), the process of teaching core curriculum content through visual and/or performing arts has made a lasting impression on all who were associated with and exposed to it. A parent who was filled with enthusiasm for the BTSALP class said, "I think that [the] program has really fostered a love of art inside of them." A teacher commented, "They just love it. Yeah, they really enjoy it."

The Arts support English Language Learners or Multilingual Students.

A surprising finding from this research was the emphasis placed on how the BTSALP had increased support and interest in the arts for students whose first language is not English. Two of the four schools chosen for this study participate in a Dual Immersion program, where students spend half of the day in an English-speaking classroom, and half in a Spanish-speaking environment. Another school in this study also placed great emphasis on cultural studies as a core concept of their overall school charter.

Three out of four classroom teachers commented on the effectiveness of BTS educators highlighting multiculturalism in their curriculum. One teacher was in tears when reminiscing about how grateful she was that the BTSALP had changed the life of one student who came from a non-English speaking background. The positive impacts for this child went above academics and supported his social-emotional growth as well. "The [non-English-] speaking students generally don't have money for [arts] class and things like that, and they just blossom... [a former student], he loved - *loved* – dance, and he was amazing. And one of the teachers got him a scholarship...with [a local dance organization]."

Another teacher commented on the value of the arts educator embracing multiculturalism:

She culturally just exposes them to all these different languages, and she's fluent in Spanish, which is one of our high populations here, and so she does a lot of things in different languages . . . I've noticed that every book that she has . . . always [has] multicultural students in it. She does a really good job of diversifying and making sure that what she's reading looks like the kids that she's reading it to.

The third teacher commented; "the fact that she, culturally, just exposes them to all these different things . . . to myself like I'm always like 'what I've never heard of this before. This is really cool'".

Two of the four parents also noted the integration of multiculturalism through the BTS program, one who commented; "We have an Arts Fest coming up next week... and during the art fest every grade dual class presents some sort of [multicultural] dance." Another parent mentioned the focus on Native American Culture through the BTSALP program; "[She] brought in Native American culture through pot[tery]." This was also found in an earlier study of the BTSALP where it was stressed that the "multicultural aspect of this

program affords students with diverse backgrounds the opportunity to enrich the curriculum with their input for artistic expression” (Penerosa, 2016). It would be beneficial to conduct further research on the impact of English language learners to see how this arts integration model directly affects student engagement and grades.

Higher Test Scores.

Even though the sample is small in this study, the results align with the findings of several previous studies (Schmal, 2003; Barry, 2008; Burnaford, Brown, Doherty, & McLaughlin, 2007; Simpson Steele, 2016; Sadoski & Paivio, 2001) which concluded that student participation in the arts is directly correlated with higher overall test scores. In Oklahoma, as part of their A+ (OAS) program, a study was conducted regarding students’ standardized test performance in arts integration schools. It was found that students either met or exceeded district and state averages over a five-year period while participating in arts-integrated curriculum (Barry, 2010). A personal example of this academic gain can be found in this study. A parent interviewed commented on her child being below grade level in reading before being exposed to the BTSALP:

It was January when [they] got these bad test scores, and I'm like... how did we drop below grade level? . . . [W]e found out it all stemmed from them not speaking one word to the person who was doing the test. [T]hen we did this testing in early May, so even just those two and a half months, they got just shy of being *above* grade level . . . We 100 percent attribute it to this class.

An arts educator who specialized in the performing arts said that her main goal was to teach in a kinesthetic way for students to remember elements of the curriculum. She said she wanted children to be able to say, “I remember it because I moved about it”; because . . . your muscle memory is so much more reliable than your memory-memory.” This approach provides yet one more way for children to learn in regard to their preferred learning style.

Challenges

Meaningful and Timely Collaboration Efforts.

Although meaningful integration of arts and the curriculum has been found to be a huge success in this study, there are challenges surrounding the current model of collaboration. In order to create meaningful lessons for students, arts educators are required to teach in their art form while relying on the elementary teacher to advise them on what areas of the curriculum they would like the specialist to focus on. In order for this particular model of arts integration to be successful, meaningful collaboration needs to happen between the arts specialists and classroom teachers.

An overwhelming theme that emerged from 100% of the arts educators interviewed was the challenge of meaningfully collaborating with the teachers in order to support the curriculum in a timely manner. In the 2021-22 edition of the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program (BTSALP) Handbook, under the Collaborative Planning and Instruction Models section, it is advised that, “the arts educator works with the grade levels to determine content for arts integration” (p. 22). Through this research, it was uncovered that in order to comply with the collaborative planning model, the arts educators are often expected to reach out to the classroom teachers to find out where in the curriculum they would like further strengthening of core curriculum concepts through art. This places a large burden on the arts educators, waiting for responses from every classroom teacher. The program model awards a .5 FTE paid for at 80%

from the state-funded Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Grant. This means that each school typically has one part-time arts educator. As one of these arts educators pointed out, the sheer number of classroom teachers (up to 5 per grade level) was challenging, especially as most “teachers weren’t teaching the same thing at the same time across a grade level.” These findings were also supported in a previous study conducted of the BTSALP, where it was stressed that “collaboration continues to be one of the greatest challenges” (Penerosa, 2016, p.9).

One arts educator was advised by her school administrator that it was up to her to reach out to teachers, and would often sit with them at lunch to informally discuss their curriculum and what meaningful lessons she could create. Another one of the arts educators collaborated with the teachers mainly through email, where she would reach out weekly to find out what elements of the curriculum teachers would be working on with their students and what they would like the arts educator to focus on. She commented that it had been working well enough for her, as she understood the curriculum of each year level. However, another arts educator found that the sheer lack of time between finding out what curriculum the teacher wanted her to integrate and having to put it into practice made it hard for her to plan age-appropriate material for a truly integrated lesson.

Yet another arts educator received a curriculum map from her teachers at the beginning of the year, and she would then ask what they would like her to reinforce through her art form. She did mention that, even though most of the general classroom teachers are very supportive of the BTS program, “Sometimes it’s a challenge to get teachers to see the importance in what you do because they just think you’re kind of a fun teacher.” This could pose difficulty in arts educators receiving timely curriculum information from teachers in order to create meaningful, core concept lessons.

This research seemed to uncover an underlying theme that teachers could be ‘too busy’ or not take the arts seriously enough to collaborate meaningfully. In fact, one teacher specifically commented on the lack of meaningful collaboration. When asked how often she met with the arts educator, she answered, “[P]robably not as often as we could. She’s reached out to all of us many times.” What is not known is what kind of time is spent with arts educators and teachers in regard to behavior management. The current issue of the BTSALP Handbook (2021) outlines behavior management expectations by inviting the arts educator to “learn and implement any school-wide classroom management techniques and procedures (p. 23).

Behavior During Arts Class.

Schools that participate in the BTSALP program have two options when a class attends the arts educator lessons. The first is the side-by-side model, in which the regular classroom teachers accompany their students and work as an aide to the arts educator, helping with behavior and participating as part of the learning experience. The second is the drop-off model, where the classroom teacher takes the students to the arts educator’s classroom and leaves them.

Two of the four arts educators favored the side-by-side model to assist with behavior and teaching ideas. The other two arts educators felt that the drop-off model was working for them. One of these two said that being an elementary teacher before being an arts educator gave her an upper hand with behavior management. The other simply felt that she did not need support because her students followed her classroom expectations most of the time. Overall, though, half of the research participants (including arts educators, classroom teachers, parents, and children) mentioned the behavior of the students in the BTSALP classes as a challenge, including one of

the students, who said that the performance of his peers during the BTSALP was distracting to having a quality experience in the classroom. He lamented the arts educator having to frequently stop to correct behavior: “I think if people would be more respectful and pay attention then it would make it better because then we have more time to do stuff and then not just like pausing in the middle.” Two classroom teachers said the behavior of their students sometimes was an issue during the arts integration class, but that it did not detract overall from the meaning or success of the lesson.

Administration Support and Cuts to Arts Programs.

Although the BTSALP is a growing and mostly privately funded arts integration model, there were some concerns from teachers and arts educators about the wavering support of some of the administrators, who are ultimately in charge of securing and allocating resources.

One teacher commented on how grateful she was to be at a school that had the BTSALP:

[Arts] is one of those things that’s just not funded and it’s not important to politicians . . . I think people forget that like everything else, to make a well-rounded child that’s happy and is excited to read and write, you need to have art, you need to have music, you need to have PE. You need to have all the things that allow a child to grow in every way . . . I’m so glad that [the BTSALP] is provided to schools like ours, because otherwise we wouldn’t have it.

Notably, the parent interviewed from the same school as the teacher quoted above echoed the same sentiment: “I would just love to see them stop cutting arts programs. I would really love for them to understand that those programs are key, just as key to the success of the students as is the English language arts or the math programs.”

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to glean from current participants the specific successes and challenges of an ongoing state-wide elementary arts integration program. The premise behind the research questions and overall design is to find out what works and what does not, and from there, brainstorm ways in which to perpetuate best practices and enhance areas that need improvement. In other words, this research took a closer look at which arts-integrated teaching strategies either did or did not inspire high student engagement while meeting objectives in both the academic and artform areas. Why is this important? It really all comes down to the children. Arts integration is for the students. Delivering the best arts integration programming is for the benefit of their overall general education experience (Vega, 2012; Schwartz, 2015).

Now that we understand a little about the why, we can unpack the what. The study yielded two main categories among the findings. There were successes and challenges. Among these two broad areas, there are more specific sub-categories. The successes revolved around one central theme – elevation. Among the successes, there were five main sub-categories. These were (a) an increased love for the arts; (b) heightened test scores; (c) strengthened social/emotional self-awareness; (d) improved ELL communication; (e) meaningful curricular connections for overall curricular sustainability.

For centuries, there have been debates on whether an appreciation for the arts is relevant for students (Duma & Silverstein, 2018; Eisner, 2002). For argument’s sake and for the purpose of this study, we will maintain that it is. Through a meaningful connection that marries the arts with other academic areas, the elementary students in this study share an increased love for the

arts. The flip side of this coin is that nearly all educators and administrators care about how well their students perform in their academic learning. Anything within reason that can help increase performance (often measured by test scores) is typically championed in curricular design (Gardner, 1993; Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program, 2012). If by adding an artistic lens to the existing curriculum test scores are higher, then why not also champion the arts in schools? Some might call that a win-win. For these research purposes, we certainly categorize that as a success.

Nowadays, social and emotional wellness is gaining momentum as a key area of focus in schools, with elementary schools included (Duma & Silverstein, 2014). Teachers are now expected to be well-versed in trauma-informed practice and to be caretakers of their students' emotional well-being to some degree. This research supports that the arts positively influence a child's self-esteem and social-emotional well-being. This can be especially important for students who are learning English. This study also found supporting evidence where the arts help to make learning and demonstrating English competency more accessible.

Lastly, an overarching theme throughout the comments displayed by the participants is that meaningful connections can be made when the arts and academics are thoughtfully integrated. Vega (2012) reports that Bates Middle School, in Annapolis, MD, has adopted an arts integration program where every teacher is committed to integrating the arts into their standard curricula. According to their reports, within the first three years of the program (2009-2012), the percentage of students who met or surpassed the standards for reading rose by 8% (from 73% to 81%) and those who met or surpassed the math standards rose by 15% (from 62% to 77%). Students internalizing and applying what they have learned is the ultimate goal of education, and to that end, the arts can help to make education both meaningful and memorable.

As this study was geared at learning about best practices for student engagement and reaching learning objectives, a close look was taken at the challenges surrounding the elementary arts integration paradigm as well. The challenges revolved around one central theme: deficits. Whether it was lack of support, constrained time, programmatic misunderstandings, or cuts in funding, shortages of one sort or the other were always a concern. Oftentimes, lack of support comes from a lack of knowledge about programmatic implementation or levels of impact. However, advocacy and time can often bridge the gap where support is lacking. For example, there is a private partnership between the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program that is housed at the Utah State Board of Education and the private entity founded by Beverley Taylor Sorensen herself, entitled Art Works for Kids. This private entity works tirelessly to advocate for legislative funding for the growth and added awareness of this program.

For the lack of time as described by the arts educators and teachers in this study, that is an ongoing problem in the profession as a whole (Duma & Silverstein, 2018; Isenberg, & Jalongo, 2010). One possible solution would be to streamline the collaboration process between arts educators and general classroom teachers. As the arts educators prepare their integrated curriculum, they could have built-in release time to attend PLCs where they can learn about the monthly or yearly plan. This way, both the arts educator and classroom teacher can orchestrate a design for implementation across the calendar year. Another option might be to concentrate on one academic subject area per grade level to minimize stress and overload in the planning process.

Just as time shortages seem to be a nationwide problem in education, so do cuts in funding (Catterall et al., 2012; Rabkin & Redmond, 2005). It is not news that the arts are often the first programs to be cut and when implemented are systematically underfunded (Duma & Silverstein, 2014). In this state-wide program, the grants issued to the schools cover 80% of a half-time salary. There are also programs available for continued professional development. What is not readily available, however, is funding for materials and supplies, which every school relies on. The BTSALP Handbook (2021) stipulates that, "Each school is responsible for providing the appropriate supplies, materials and instructional resources for arts instruction" (p. 15). Because this varies widely across the state, an underlying issue uncovered by this research is a lack of supplies that help perpetuate effective arts-integrated programming. At this time there is no extant research in the field of virtual arts integration efficacy. Indeed, this will be an interesting topic to explore in the future as the pandemic morphs and changes societal and educational structures.

Overall, is this change in the education paradigm worth the trouble? The overwhelming positive data found in this research would support the argument that it is. In a program that has grown from 5 schools to over 400, even the modest sample base for this qualitative study supports the ongoing argument that the arts hold a place in academic learning and that there is a growing paradigm where the two can be taught in a non-subservient fashion to enhance learning in both areas.

Discussion

The data and overall findings of these research efforts show that the benefits far outweigh the challenges when considering arts-integrated programming. With the challenges primarily stemming from what is lacking in education overall, it would be unfair to classify them specifically as problems with arts-integrated programming. The successes, however, continued to mount as data were analyzed. These included overall student growth, both emotionally and academically, which fosters the ability for communication and collaboration in both the student and teacher populations.

The challenges uncovered in this particular study – lack of meaningful and timely collaboration efforts, difficulty securing administrators' support, cuts to arts programs, and the behavior of students during arts class – could all be related to the overarching lack of support for arts educators (and really, all educators) in general. Lack of administrator support is not a clear-cut issue. It can often stem from a lack of understanding of the importance of arts programs, increased pressure to deliver in other areas of the curriculum, or a lack of funding. The lack of support, however, increases overall fears that cuts will be made to arts programs, and those who are directly invested and benefiting from said arts programs find it can be difficult to maintain a positive growth mindset for a program that may be cut at any time. The lack of administrator support also relates closely to the time that arts educators have to collaborate with classroom teachers for effective lesson planning and behavior management. Because the arts are seen as 'elective' or 'specialty' classes in half of the schools in this study, rather than an established part of the curriculum, this filters down from the administration to the classroom teachers and the parents and children, who, in turn, believe that they do not need to behave the same way as they would in their general classroom. The schools that had the BTSALP in place longer (for more than 3 years), not only had greater administrator support but saw fewer behavior issues overall.

One suggestion to increase administrator support is to demonstrate how beneficial arts programs are for children's emotional and social well-being and overall test scores using current research. Articles could be made readily available on the BTSALP and State Board of Education's websites. LEAs who are looking into possibly implementing arts integration efforts could be given the option to visit existing arts integration classrooms and meet administrators who support the arts programs for a first-hand look at how successful a longstanding program can be. Administrators who only have arts educators on a part-time basis could also look at the benefits of making their arts educators full-time employees; this would help make it a more effective program for classroom teachers, students, parents, and would help the arts educators to feel like a more established part of the school community.

This study uncovered the relationship between successful arts integration efforts and higher test scores, specifically in reading. Also, reiteration of core concepts in math such as fractions was also noted by the students themselves, indicating that students were retaining information taught to them in two separate classroom settings. This is largely due to the success, also uncovered in this study, of meaningful arts and curriculum integration, which involves collaboration by the classroom teachers and arts educators. Despite the time restrictions, the arts educators interviewed were clearly dedicated to making sure that their lessons contained meaningful curriculum content, which was evidenced by the remaining three participant groups (teachers, parents and students).

Another success was noted in the dual language immersion schools for the children who are English Language Learners, and how helpful arts integration was to increase confidence and skill not just academically, but socially. The evidence from each study participant pointed to a love of the arts and appreciation that their school community provided the opportunity for students to partake in the BTSALP. The students particularly felt that their arts classes were a good use of their time and that they had meaningful and worthwhile experiences and interactions within the arts classrooms.

Further Research

As the efficacy of arts integration in this particular setting has been established, it is important that we look to increased research to uncover some of the other questions that were raised in this study. The effectiveness of arts integration programs is increasing, but research must also remain focused on what works and why. While this study looked at a small sample of the many schools that have now adopted an arts integration program into their curriculum, it has also highlighted the need for future research. A longitudinal study that evaluates not only the social/emotional growth of children in an arts integration setting but also the effect that this has on overall academic achievement would be especially useful. With overwhelming evidence already that children are more likely to enjoy school with these programs, it is likely that further research will uncover strong supporting evidence that, over time, students learning in an arts engrained environment will continue to succeed both emotionally and academically.

Further research is also needed to evaluate administrative support of arts integration programs and how the success or failure of these programs is linked to how administrators choose to implement, encourage and protect such programs within their schools. Research in this area would also help to educate administrators on how best to support their school communities to ensure the success of arts integration and avoid mistakes. This study has also brought to light the need for further research on arts educators – specifically, their

teaching background, knowledge, support, and resources – to better understand how the BTSALP and other arts integration programs can increase the retention of high-quality educators in a field that is under constant scrutiny and often a victim of budget cuts.

Even with much of the research surrounding arts integration and increased academic success, there is still more that can be done to increase advocacy for arts integration programs. It is important to research how specific programs increase academic success for students. Qualitative and quantitative studies across schools with BTSALP would be extremely beneficial to not only look at ways of improving the current structure but also increase advocacy for this arts integration program to be instituted across the state. It could serve as a model to other states of how to manage successful arts integration programs.

In addition, with the current shift to online education due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be extremely beneficial for research to focus on how arts integration programs have shifted online and how it has affected the efficacy of student and teacher engagement. It would be interesting to take a deeper look at how arts integration is being taught through synchronous and asynchronous learning. Currently, the BTSALP Handbook (2021) does not address virtual or online learning, whether synchronous or asynchronous. This might perhaps be a valuable tool for the future given the unprecedented shifts that occurred in learning platforms over recent years.

Closing Remarks

The Beverly Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program is a specific and targeted arts integration program that serves over 400 schools in the intermountain west, and this study has uncovered just a few of the successes and challenges within four specific schools. However, it can be used as a template for how this program is performing state-wide. It is evident that parents, teachers, arts educators, and students who have the privilege of attending schools that have the BTSALP have successes that outweigh the challenges, and overall, the programs make learning meaningful through integrated arts. The movement in dance, composition in music, articulation in drama, and creation in visual art all supply children with an expressive outlet that helps them process and solidify both academic and artistic concepts. The hope is that this study has given insight into the importance of art in children's lives, not just for academic reasons but also social/emotional and creative benefits that will last a lifetime.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Question Guide

(The word “artist” may be substituted for “dancer”, “musician”, or other terminology as appropriate considering each respective program)

Elementary Student

1. What grade level are you in?
2. What kind of art classes do you have in your school?
3. Would you consider yourself an artist?
4. What types of things do you learn when in your art class?
5. How does participating in the arts at your school make you feel?
6. Does your art class help you learn other subjects, like math, social studies, science, language arts?
7. What are some successes and/or challenges you have experienced in your art program?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Parent/Guardian

1. What grade level is your child in?
2. What kind of art classes does your child have at school?
3. Would you say that your child considers himself/herself yourself an artist?
4. What types of things do you notice that your child learns in art class? (What sort of things do they bring home and/or stories do they tell?)
5. How does your child participating in the arts at your school make you feel? How do you think it makes them feel?
6. Does your child’s art class help them learn other subjects, like math, social studies, science, language arts?
7. What are some successes and/or challenges either you or your child have experienced in the BTSALP at your child’s school?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Classroom Teacher

1. What grade level do you teach?
2. How long have you been teaching and in what capacity? How long have you been partnering with the BTSALP?

3. Do you participate in the side-by-side model, or the drop off model, or somewhere in-between?
4. Would you consider yourself an artist? (What is your personal experience with art?)
5. What are some of your main goals for your students over the school year they are with you? Does arts integration assist in achieving these goals ? Why/why not?
6. How do your students feel about participating in the arts at their school?
7. Does the BTSALP your students learn other subjects, like math, social studies, science, language arts?
8. What is your experience with creating meaningful lessons that address both art form and academic standards?
9. What are some successes and/or challenges you have experienced in your association with the BTSALP?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

BTSALP Arts Educator

1. What art form do you teach?
2. How long have you been teaching and in what capacity? How long have you been with the BTSALP?
3. Would you consider yourself an artist?
4. What are some of your main goals when teaching your students in the art form?
(Same question for the academic subject areas)
5. How do your students feel about participating in the arts at their school?
6. Does the BTSALP your students learn other subjects, like math, social studies, science, language arts?
7. What is your experience with creating meaningful lessons that address both art form and academic standards?
8. What are some successes and/or challenges you have experienced in your art program?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B

Form B Consent Form for Adults

Before agreeing to participate in this study, it is important that the following explanation of the proposed procedures be read and understood. It describes the purpose, procedures, benefits and risks of the study. It also describes alternative procedures available and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. It is important to understand that no guarantee or assurance can be made as to the results. See below.

You have been invited to participate in a research study, the purpose of which is to further understand the successes and challenges experienced by students, parents, classroom teachers, and arts educators participating in the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program. The study procedure(s) have been identified as (1) gather data from semi-structured interviews of students, parents, classroom teachers, and arts specialists, (2) transcribe interviews, (3) utilize grounded coding for themes, (4) interpret and report data.

The duration of the interview will be approximately 60 minutes, depending on how much information is shared. Benefits that may occur from participation in this study have been identified as: (1) Identify best practices for student success in arts integration programming, (2) consider strengths and challenges of varying instructional paradigms, (3) utilize data patterns to inform 5-year strategic programming growth plan, (4) consider points of interest for legislative advocacy of arts programming.

There are no foreseeable side effects/ risks associated with this project. Your identity will be kept confidential throughout the study, and you will be assigned a pseudonym. Transcriptions and authorizations will be kept under a password-protected computer with only the researchers having access.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study any time you wish without any penalty to you. If you have any questions about this study or wish to withdraw, please contact the principal investigator.

The results of this study may be used in formal publications or presentations and may be made available to you upon request. If you feel that you have received a satisfactory explanation as to the risks and benefits of this study as well as your rights as a research participant and you would like to participate, please sign and date below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Signature of Subject

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Form D Parent/Guardian Permission Form Research Involving Minors (under 18)

Before agreeing to participate in this study, it is important that the following explanation of the proposed procedures be read and understood. It describes the purpose, procedures, benefits and risks of the study. It also describes alternative procedures available and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. It is important to understand that no guarantee or assurance can be made as to the results. It is also understood that refusal to participate in this study will not result in negative consequences for you or your child.

Your child is being asked to participate in a research study, the purpose of which is to further understand the successes and challenges experienced by students, parents, classroom teachers, and arts educators participating in the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program. The study procedure(s) have been identified as (1) gather data from semi-structured interviews of students, parents, classroom teachers, and arts specialists, (2) transcribe interviews, (3) utilize grounded coding for themes, (4) interpret and report data.

The duration of the interview will be approximately 20-40 minutes, depending on how much information your child would like to share. You will be notified of any significant variance from the stated duration of the study. Possible benefits that your child might realize from participation in this study are (1) heightened awareness of self-reflections concerning arts integration programming, (2) increased access to highly qualified specialists.

There are no foreseeable side effects/ risks associated with this project. Your child's identity will be kept confidential throughout the study, and he/she will be assigned a pseudonym. Transcriptions and authorizations will be kept under a password-protected computer with only the researchers having access.

Your child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and he/she may withdraw from the study any time he/she wishes without any penalty.

The results of this study may be used in formal publications or presentations and may be made available to you upon request. If you feel that you have received a satisfactory explanation as to the risks and benefits of this study as well as your rights as a research participant and you would like to participate, please sign and date below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Signature of Subject

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Form E Assent Form for Minors

“Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today about the art program at your school. If there is any question you would not like to answer, that is completely fine. Please let me know if you ever feel that way and we will skip the question. Also, if you would like to add any more information at any time, I’d love to hear what you have to say. Do you have any questions? If not, let’s get started!”

You have been asked to participate in a research study called:

Statewide arts integration programming: A closer look at successes and challenges for elementary students, classroom teachers, and arts educators.

The study has been explained to you by the co-investigator.

You don’t have to participate if you don’t want to, and you can quit at any time. All of your information will be kept private.

If you want to participate, please sign your name below and write the date next to your name.

Signature of Subject

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date