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The Role of Coaching by Teaching Artists for Arts-Infused Social Studies: What Project CREATES Has to Offer

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### Abstract:

One strategy used by Project CREATES to enhance the fusion of social studies with the arts was to provide various forms of professional development to artists and teachers (Montgomery, Otto, & Hull, 2007), including seminars, book clubs, and on-site Arts Resource Coaches. The purpose of this study was to describe the role of the coaches as they worked with teachers, arts educators, and community artists to infuse the arts in elementary school curricula, specifically social studies for fifth graders. Using qualitative methods over a seven-year period, data included interviews,



artifacts, field notes, and observations. Themes that emerged from the analysis included four types of connections resulting in school culture changes. Two types of connections to the curriculum were found, including facilitating lesson plans that have local, state, or national content standards and the implementation of evidence-based instructional practices. Additionally, coaches assured the collaboration and connections between teachers and artists, and they were catalyst for connecting community artists and arts agencies to the schools. In so doing, the coach acted as the catalyst for change to the school culture and teacher transformation. Implications for professional development of teachers and artists are discussed.

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## The Role of Coaching by Teaching Artists for Arts-Infused Social Studies: What Project CREATES Has to Offer

Professional development for teachers is a key component to successful arts integration in schools (Oreck, 2004). One strategy for transforming the work of teachers in keeping with school reform is the use of on-site coaching (Kise, 2006; Knight, 2007). Coaching is defined by Kise as “the art of identifying and developing a person’s strengths” (p. 139). The coach uses formal and informal assessments to get to know the teacher, her goals related to the level of arts integration desired, and the resources she needs in order to accomplish the collaboration with artists and arts educators. Using coaches makes professional development a process of evolution, changing the ways teachers conduct their work, plan their curriculum, and make use of community resources (Montgomery, Otto, & Hull, 2007) in order to increase student learning through the integration of the arts with other content areas.

In an age in which standardized assessment in reading and math takes center stage in elementary schools, learning outcomes for social studies across the United States is a continuing concern. Research on teaching social studies has indicated that inadequate training for pre-service elementary school teachers (Tanner, 2008) and inadequate instruction time (O’Connor, Heafner, & Groce, 2007) have influenced student learning and interest in social studies. Other instructional limitations may be a failure to relate skills and concepts in relevant ways to students’ lives or the teacher’s inability to identify instructional resources other than textbooks (Zhao & Hoge, 2005). These instructional deficits result in elementary school children having inadequate cultural appreciation, limited geographical knowledge, and distorted knowledge about famous historical figures (Zhao & Hoge, 2005). For example, Zhao and Hoge found that most elementary students could not name their own country of residence, understand the cultural relevance of holidays, or identify when George Washington was president.

As the awareness of social studies concerns for elementary children evolved, the benefits of arts integration as a means for improving student achievement (Goldsmith, 2003; Gullatt, 2008) was gaining favor as a method to achieve school reform. Arts integration is variously defined as a vehicle to engage students in the learning process. Davis (1999) delineated eight ways and levels of involvement of the arts in American education, noting that the arts should be used to enhance meaning and synthesis of all learning. As the importance of successful interdisciplinary instruction was proposed (Gullatt, 2008), Eisner (1998) suggested outcomes-based arts education with emphasis on the school environment. Bresler (1995) proposed four ways the arts could be integrated into the classroom, all of which described ways the classroom teacher used arts learning activities and opportunities with little or no involvement of artists in the process.

Such diversity in the theoretical foundation of arts integration has led to an equally diverse response in program development. Programs specifically related to music and social studies include interdisciplinary collaboration among teachers and artists. For example, Project Phoenix (Little, Feng, VanTassel-Baska, Rogers, & Avery, 2007) was developed by using the Integrated Curriculum Model (VanTassel-Baska, 1986, 1995) as a

multidisciplinary approach to connect social studies and the arts. Another collaborative arts education project engaged young school children in their learning by integrating traditional Nanyin music into language, mathematics, and social studies curriculum in Singapore (Leong, 2005). Other collaborations include the Canadian Learning Through the Arts (LTTA) program that offered lesson plans and online teaching resources for all subject areas encouraging collaboration among artists and teachers (Elster, 2001) and MISC-MUSIC, an Israeli program designed to promote cognitive processes in special needs children by studying music (Portowitz & Klein, 2007). Additionally, the arts have been integrated into secondary programs (Weber, 2005). More specifically, music was integrated with social studies in secondary education in the collaboration among the University of Michigan, the University Musical Society (UMS) in Ann Arbor and the School of Education in Dearborn with pre-service teachers in secondary social studies (Taylor, 2008).

These divergent theoretical and programming approaches have left the door open for disparity and disagreement between the arts and academic content teachers in schools, an especially difficult obstacle for music teachers concerned with delivering meaningful musical pedagogy with limited instruction time (Cosenza, 2005). Current literature suggests that these two areas may best be bridged through ethnomusicology, the study of musical practices through a social science lens (Nettl, 2005), an area that may go beyond the expertise and training of classroom teachers.

Based on the research generated from these and other arts integration models used as school reform, a collaboration was established in 2000 among Oklahoma State University, an interested philanthropic foundation, and a large public school district. Known as Project CREATES (Connecting Community Resources Encouraging All Teachers to Educate with Spirit), the purpose of the project was to conduct research on the transformation of teaching and learning by infusing the arts in all subject areas with elementary school teachers as the catalyst. Classroom teachers and artists co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess learning for students (see Montgomery et al., 2007). Professional development for teachers and artists included monthly Saturday Seminars, weekly teacher meetings, and artist workshops. Professional development evolved, based on the research and evaluation feedback from teachers and artists over the years of data collection. After the first few years of the pilot program, it was discovered that the teachers needed more on-site assistance to secure community resources, plan for the arts in the curriculum, and connect with artists and arts educators. Thus, the Arts Resources Coaches were hired and became a part of the research design of the project.

Project CREATES was based on an arts-infusion model, which differed from other arts-integration models in some key ways, foremost of which was the active involvement of the coaches. From the analysis of preliminary data generated in Project CREATES, the potential for performance anxiety and avoidance by teachers was evident. Although individual teacher participation was then purely voluntary, free from administrative pressure, we learned from the planned formative evaluation system the importance of using Arts Resource Coaches (ARCs). Coaches were intended to be and act as mediators, the bridge between the arts educators/community artists and teachers. In

order to negotiate effectively the pedagogy and curriculum, ARCs had to have feet in both worlds, so to speak. They were required to be both artists, actively involved in the local arts community in their own right, and have educational credentials (certification as a teacher). Hiring practices included a preference for extensive classroom experience. The role of the coach was to link teachers with artists. The formative processes brought an evolution to the role of coaches as they were immersed in the school culture, providing individualized, teachable-moment assistance, bringing teachers and artists together. This process was named co-creation, where the coaches facilitated the co-planning, co-teaching, and co-evaluation sessions. The role of the coach evolved to include supporting each teacher's interest in her own artistic talent development as the co-creation teams planned for student learning and creative expression. Coaches often served as the artists in the co-creation process.

It would seem that the CREATES model's use of coaches could serve as a workable model in helping educators and artists bridge music, social studies, and other curricular areas. The purpose of this study was to describe the implementation of coaches as a strategy for professional development in arts infusion. More specifically, it focused on the work of coaching for the integration of music, social studies, and geography.

### **Method**

This ethnographic study included data points gathered over a seven-year period. These data were extensive field notes from school involvement and observations, interviews with participating adults and stakeholders, and artifacts such as emails, meeting minutes, evaluation documents, coaches' time logs, quarterly reports, and presentation materials. As a way of gaining deeper understanding and gathering perspective specifically for the role of the coach, this study utilized written feedback from teachers about student success in the curriculum. Additional interviews with principals and coaches were conducted for the present study. As our research team information and feedback was an integral part of the Project planning and implementation, team minutes were kept and also analyzed.

The research team for the current study was lead by the principal investigator and included several graduate students. One graduate student was the ArtsBridge Scholar, whose duties included conducting research, serving as an arts educator in the classroom, and assuming administrative responsibilities for the Mapping the Beat portion of the project, a grant funding the music and geography portions of the project for fifth graders. Other graduate students assisted in field observations, video recordings, transcriptions, and data management. Members of the team met regularly in person, via telecommunication, and through email to discuss findings and interpretations.

Observations were made in primarily classrooms or other areas of participating schools. These included observations of planning sessions, lesson implementation, lesson evaluation, professional development opportunities, faculty meetings, meetings with CREATES staff, encounters with school support staff, after school extra-curricular activities and family events, and student assessment sessions. Principal interviews took

place in the principal's office at the school; teacher interviews in the teacher's primary instructional area. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the graduate students working on the project. This arrangement, both in terms of data collection and corroboration of findings, allowed for triangulation of data among investigators (Patton, 2002). Data were coded, discussed in terms of patterns and themes, and used to interpret the meanings of the data.

## **Context**

The four elementary schools in this study were all part of the same public school district in Oklahoma. The schools were located in three of the geographical areas delineated by the district, including an area that is primarily African American, with mixed economic groups; another area that is Caucasian/Native American, blue-collar/working class; and a third that is primarily Hispanic, blue collar/working class. All the schools had at least 97% of their faculty listed as "highly qualified" status. This indicates that they are certified within the area that they teach. The examination of district-wide descriptive statistics shows no distinct patterns for the level of teacher education. However, what may be of more interest is that those schools with the highest level of experienced teachers (that is, with 11 or more years experience in the classroom) are those with the highest percentage of Caucasian students and lowest levels of free and reduced lunches. Only schools of need (highest poverty) participated in CREATES, with one school serving as the host for the Mapping the Beat (MTB) project.

Mapping the Beat was funded by the National Geographic Society through the University of California, Irvine, for several universities in the United States to integrate music, geography, and social studies for upper elementary students. Lesson plans were provided to host teachers by the ArtsBridge Scholar, a graduate researcher with a background in the arts and pedagogy. Resources were available for the ArtsBridge Scholar and the Arts Resource Coaches from the website (<http://artsbridge.ucsd.edu/MB5default.html>). Host teachers at the MTB schools and ArtsBridge Scholars participated in regular conferences at the University of California, Irvine to continue their own professional development and to enhance use of the lessons provided by MTB. National geography standards were the foundation of the lessons designed for the Mapping the Beat project. State social studies standards for all lessons were identified in a combined effort between the ArtsBridge Scholar, host teacher, and coaches.

Mapping the Beat was an essential component and resource to Project CREATES; however, we describe it as a subset of the larger project. For example, MTB lessons were designed for fifth graders in social studies and geography, whereas CREATES constructed these and other content lessons for all elementary students at the schools. Furthermore, MTB lessons suggested music integration, while CREATES lessons often infused various combinations of visual arts, music, drama, and movement. All lessons followed the CREATES process and implementation model, which means that all lessons had at least three sessions with the artist (plan, teach, evaluate); learning outcomes

designed by local, state, or national standards in the arts and social studies; included participation from both the classroom teacher and the artist.

## **Results**

Interviews and observations of teachers and Arts Resource Coaches (ARC) were compiled during 2008-2009 and composited with field notes of previous interactions during the seven-year project. Data were analyzed to yield a rich description of interactions of the MTB staff and the school culture in which they participated. To move beyond descriptive narrative into analysis to understand the role of the coaches within the arts infusion model, the data were analyzed by reading all interviews, field notes, and artifacts and integrated to categorize patterns of impressions. Initial data analysis revealed the metaphor of a bridge to represent the role of the coaches in the project schools. Again, data were read and additional observations of music lessons integrated with social studies were conducted, particularly those co-taught with the music coach. From this metaphor analysis, a typology of connections emerged. Inductive analysis revealed coaches connecting in four ways resulting in culture changes in the school. The data were interpreted to explain the ways that the coaches connected the instructional content to local, state, and national standards. They connected the instructional processes to evidence-based best practices using the arts. The coaches were instrumental in making instructional personnel connect to each other, and they connected school personnel to the arts community. Finally, these connections resulted in a cultural change in the classrooms of teachers who chose to work with them. These major themes are described here with the supporting evidence. Direct references to field data provide the date of documentation and a code for whom and from where the data were obtained.

### **Connection to standards-based instruction**

As lessons were developed and co-created with classroom teachers, standards were incorporated into the goals and objectives for the lessons. The data showed clear evidence of the coach assisting teachers and artists in lesson development based on standards. For example, during one planning session the coach made sure that the lesson under development met not only language arts standards for vocabulary, but concentrated on the social studies standards dealing with use of natural resources in cultural development, the impact of explorers and exploration on culture, means of travel for exploration, and elements of culture. This lesson series was designed to take place over at least one week. In addition to using geographical travel, the students met standards in music by making their own musical instruments with what was environmentally available. The standards of travel, trade, and culture in social studies were evident, along with the standards of variation in sound in music. In other data, pre-K standards for small and gross motor development, sensory awareness, audience participation, and movement were highlighted in letter-sound connections and the musical instrument. These students constructed a sistrum, a percussion instrument used in African culture. The music coach worked with the teacher to use the sistrum in sounding out letters. Finally, interviews with the principals confirmed the link to state curriculum objectives.

### **Connections with classroom teachers**

Analysis of the data revealed evidence of connection with classroom teachers by the presence of the coach in lesson planning, implementation, or evaluation with the teacher. Interviews with teachers and principals provided more insight into the length and depth of those connections. Teachers expressed relief to have ARC assistance and the coach's musical expertise to supplement lessons. Working closely with coaches to develop lessons produced collaborative experiences that underscored constructivist pedagogy. One method coaches employed was to highlight teachable moments for teachers. Most important, coaches worked as a scaffolding agent to build teacher expertise and empower them to incorporate arts on their own. For instance, speaking of her relationship with a coach, one teacher revealed: "It was one [lesson that she had done with my class numerous times in the past years and this time she had me do the teaching of it and she was more the assistant ... we kind of reversed roles and that worked really well." (031605CH).

Our analysis of field notes uncovered the importance of the coach's personal characteristics, both in the classroom during lessons and in outside meetings and encounters with researchers. In class observations, the coach was seen laughing with the classroom teacher and allowing or encouraging the children to laugh, providing positive feedback and support, as well as inviting the children to participate and improvise during lessons. The word "fun" can be found in every classroom observation at least once. This accounted for the positive response from children to the coach both in and out of the classroom setting. For example, the children cheered when they learned she would be co-teaching. Teachers appreciated the level of rapport the coach had with the students as reported in a vast majority of interviews. Walking through the hallways, she was inundated by children wanting hugs, revealing how immersed in school culture she had become. Students' enthusiasm for the coach underscored not only the power of arts integration to actively engage students, but encouraged the teachers to transform their own teaching practice (Duma & Silverstein, 2008).

### **Connections to the arts community**

The data revealed how the coach served as a connection to the greater arts community and its resources. Community musicians would volunteer to assist the coach. This was due to the coach's personal connections in the community of musicians and to the musicians' interest in school involvement. The music coach invited a variety of musicians to perform with her during a lunch-time concert series. She was responsible for assembling a group of musicians to help with an African drum talent development group at the schools. The children would often be commissioned for community events, and they played for a family fun night. Because of the coach's personal relationships with these area musicians, the schools were exposed to many talented artists they would not have had access to without her. When needed, the coach brokered services to support teacher needs for supplementing project sources from her knowledge of available resources within the arts community. One such resource was the relationship the coach had with the city's conservatory and community music school.



### **Connections to research-supported best practices**

In addition to the connection to the curricular content and local, state, and national standards, specifically those related to elementary social studies instruction and the arts (Tanner, 2008), the coach provided direct instruction as demonstrations and invited the use of an ethnomusicological approach to arts instruction by community musicians. The use of ethnomusicological connections is supported in the arts literature (Nettl, 2005). The use of authentic instruments and the opportunity for students to play them has been documented (Abril, 2006; Edwards, 1998) as significantly contributing to children's positive attitudes toward multi-cultural music instruction and performance on tests of cultural knowledge (Pembroke & Robinson, 1997). Abril (2006) found this instructional approach to increase the socio-cultural knowledge of students.

Further, the form of instruction in African percussion lessons co-taught by teachers and the coach follows suggestions presented by Mans (2000) by developing lessons that foster communal participation, circle formation, call and response structure, freedom for improvisation and exploration, a general understanding of the culture and history of the music, and varied sensory input in terms of sound and body movement. The data show that all African percussion lessons were taught in circle formation, with some discussion about the reasoning behind this in at least one lesson. Elements of call and response were either explicitly stated or implied by the activity with the group. All observations showed that student improvisation was accepted and encouraged, with time spent in question and answer discussions concerning the culture and history of the instruments and music. As the children actively participated by playing the instruments in the lessons, they had opportunities to imitate and practice playing at least one instrument in a call and response form.

Elements of the Mans approach were observed in MTB lessons co-taught by both the coach and another area musician as well. During these lessons, the coach had at least one authentic djembe, djun-djun, and ashiko (022108RMLV and 022108RMRW) for student use. For example, in one observed lesson, the coach structured the class so that all students had a chance to play each of these instruments, in addition to playing the more Americanized tubanos. The coach explained the origins of each, including their geographic beginnings in Africa. In other observed lessons, these authentic instruments included talking drums, bira/kalimba, caxixi, nsakala, balfon and clave. Again, the coach discussed origins, cultural uses, and implications of each instrument with the children through a question and answer format. Similar knowledge was shared by the area musician this coach connected with the MTB host teacher for an adapted lesson from the MTB curriculum on the origins of the banjo and slave trade. During this lesson, the artist explained the history and development of the banjo from the original ngoni, an instrument brought from Africa by slaves. At the end of the lesson, the artist told the children that he "was thrilled to listen to them play their instruments much like those of the early slaves." (022708MTB).

### **Change agent in classrooms and schools**

Evidence of the effectiveness of the coach as an agent of change in regular classrooms and through work with regular classroom teachers was enacted through the connections she was building in the school and community, such as in the context of helping the teachers infuse music as both content and method of instruction. This meant changing not only the teachers' views of using music in the classroom, but their comfort level and their self-perceptions of success. In some cases, this meant giving permission for mess-making for the involved adults, as the coach was observed doing in one classroom observation of a lesson with a group of pre-kindergartners: "I heard (the coach) say 'It's gonna make a mess, but ... so what?'" (022609MK).

In other situations in the school, enacting change meant co-teaching with one teacher until she was comfortable enough to take the lead on a previously developed lesson. Overall, the perception of the school by teachers changed because of the coach's interactions. Teachers and principals spoke with pride about being "an artsy school now." (122008RB). The view that the school had become an arts school created excitement, pride, and satisfaction among teachers and furthered teacher buy-in to the project. Another principal said of the excitement surrounding co-created lessons, "Probably the most important thing is seeing the teachers and the kids smiling and laughing and having a good time learning ... when the CREATES people are in the building ... we know there's something good going to come of it." (022609RM).

Change was gradual and observed over several years. Originally, the music teacher at the host school declined to participate in the project and allowed only the use of her room during her planning time for community musicians and classroom teachers. The coach expressed gratitude and acceptance for this choice. Later, the process evolved, and soon co-taught lessons were observed by the researchers. The music teacher not only reinforced music principles about differences in pitch, components of a piece, and connections to previous lessons, she actively assisted in the geography portion of the lessons by finding and facilitating use of the maps in the room during discussions and helping to show the children the differences between countries and continents. The change was reported by other teachers who worked with the music educator and the coach.

### **Conclusion**

On-site coaching, such as our use of the Arts Resource Coaches, has been proposed as a useful strategy for transforming teachers (Kise, 2006; Knight, 2007). This study revealed four ways coaches make connections and serve as change agents within the school system. First, as these coaches are steeped in both teacher and artist culture, they provide invaluable access for schools to the greater arts community. These resources are instrumental in initiating changes in school culture, specifically for schools to value and see the ways they can participate in the arts community. Secondly, the coaches provide a means for individual teachers to connect with artists. Working with both the coaches and artists, teachers garner personal experience implementing arts infusion with social studies and gain confidence in incorporating arts integration across

disciplines. These connections expose teachers to best teaching practices for utilizing the arts to achieve state and national standards. The relationship the coach forms with the teachers assists them in recognizing personal strengths (Kise, 2006). Finally, these connections result in the culmination of the arts resource coaches serving as change agents within the schools. Schools and teachers who embrace the practice of arts infusion transform school culture, increase the impact of programs such as Mapping the Beat and Project CREATES and lay the groundwork for sustainability after funding sources diminish.

As professional development grows beyond the after-school sessions or afternoon lectures by professionals (Dettmer & Landrum, 1998), we found that it is important to use teaching artists as the tool for working with teachers (Duma & Silverstein, 2008) to infuse the arts into curricula. The coaches provide the emotional support, skills, disposition, and collaboration to reduce performance anxiety and encourage teachers to try the arts for themselves and for their children. The influence of the coach can be greatly increased by educating teachers on how to use arts integration techniques in their own practice (Duma & Silverstein). Coaches provide needed support for transitioning teachers who may not be confident in their abilities in the arts (Kise, 2006). Professional development workshops inform teachers about best practices, but arts resource coaches go beyond the sessions to work in tandem with teachers to actively engage them in the continual and frequent process of transforming their teaching practices. Coaches use a variety of techniques in the teacher change process, such as observations, collaboration, immediate interactions, and discussions. Most important, having arts resource coaches in the classroom legitimizes the teaching of the arts. Coaches connect teachers to research, evidence-based practices, and standards-based curricula. In this way, coaches serve as a means of transforming teachers' views of the arts from simply a supplementary activity or a means to entertain or have fun (Hull, 2003) when school work is completed to a legitimate tool to enhance learning across disciplines.

When implementing the coaching model for professional development of teachers, it is important to select teaching artists who have particular personal characteristics (Duma & Silverstein, 2008) to ensure success. The Arts Resource Coach becomes immersed in school culture by forming multiple relationships and performing multiple roles with students, teachers, and administrators. Their influence and outcomes for programming is reliant on characteristics, such as inquisitive, analytic, firm and consistent, attending to detail, and creative (Duma & Silverstein), in addition to their pedagogical beliefs and commitment to the arts. The personal characteristics of the coach can have bearing on their effectiveness for implementing curricular change. The precarious nature of the arts and host teacher relationship are not to be underestimated. Coaches can face resistance from teachers who are reluctant to implement new techniques, who are not open to arts infusion, or who do not see the importance of their own role in the process. It is vital that coaches have strong interpersonal skills to work with a variety of personalities. Collaborative partnerships between the teachers and arts resource coaches are essential to manage change effectively (Knight, 2007).

Because coaches have the potential for greatly influencing the implementation and sustainability of programs such as Mapping the Beat and Project CREATES, the selection of on-site coaches is critical to ensure that the program mission and goals are followed. Strand (2006) emphasizes the need for arts organizations to first develop a clear mission and then to employ coaches whose beliefs match that mission. The adherence to program goals acts as a benefit for both the organization, in this case the school, and the coach. Because coaches may have limited authority or power within the schools and classrooms (Strand, 2006), following the mission of the school and project gives them greater legitimacy to implement curriculum planning, thereby ensuring that the artists' commitment is congruent with the school's mission and goals.

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