Teacher as Artist
Artist as Teacher

Learner as Artist
Artist as Learner

Leader as Artist
Artist as Leader

VSA arts Research Study: Using the Arts To Help Special Education Students Meet Their Learning Goals

2004
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Founded in 1974 as an affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, VSA arts is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to the participation of people with disabilities in the arts and society. VSA arts provides educators, parents, and artists with resources and tools they can use to support arts programming in their schools and communities; showcases the accomplishments of visual and performing artists with disabilities; and promotes increased access to the arts for people with disabilities. Currently, five million people participate in VSA arts programs each year through a network of affiliates nationwide and in more than 60 countries around the world.

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Contents

I. Executive Summary 1

II. Overview of the Study 2
   Origins and purpose of the study 2
   Study design 3

III. The Value of Arts Education for Students with Special Needs: A Review of the Literature 4
   The arts and student achievement 4
   Neurological effects 6
   Affective effects 6
   Social effects 7
   The arts and special education students 8
   The arts in the context of No Child Left Behind legislation 8

IV. Methodology 10
   Research framework 10
   Site Development and planning 10
   Instrumentation and data collection 10
   Data analysis 11

V. Preliminary Findings 12

   VSA arts of Indiana: Unleashing the Potential of Learners, Teachers, Artists, and Leaders through the Arts 12
      Key Features of the VSAI Model 12
      VSAI at Work: Promising Practices 15
      Impact of Instructional Practices on Student Outcomes 18
      The Capacity to Make the Case 19

   SAIL Charter School Washington, DC: One Child at a Time 24
      Key Features of the SAIL Model 24
      Impact on Student Outcomes 27
      The Capacity to Make the Case 27

   The Brentwood School, Merrimac, NH: The Challenges to Change 36
      Key Features of the Model 36
      The Capacity to Make the Case 38

VI. Summary Findings and Implications for Further Research 41

VII. From Here to There 45

VIII. References 46

IX. Appendix 50
   A Research Framework 51
   B Site Development Protocol 54
   C Interview Protocol 56
I. Executive Summary

With the increase in demands for research that links educational practice with proven student outcomes, the VSA arts national office is working to make explicit the link between VSA arts practices and student outcomes. This report provides findings from an exploratory research study of models for using the arts to provide educational access and opportunity for students with special needs at three VSA arts state affiliate sites: the SAIL Charter School operated by WVSA arts connection in Washington, D.C., the VSA arts of Indiana’s Teaching Artist model, and the Inspired Learning through the Arts professional development model supported by the New Hampshire VSA arts. The research was conducted to identify promising practices for using the arts to help students with special needs meet their learning goals.

At two of the sites, VSA arts of Indiana and the SAIL Charter School, researchers identified several features and practices that hold promise for future research about the impact of VSA arts practices on students with special needs. These features and practices are described in the case studies of each of the affiliate models.

The third site, The Brentwood School in New Hampshire, had discontinued its work to implement the VSA arts model that began three years ago. All three sites, including The Brentwood School, revealed that leadership that supports and sustains the arts is important and necessary to the educational success of special needs learners. Cross-site analysis yielded the following four summary findings:

1. There is significant opportunity for documenting the use of the arts as a primary strategy for meeting the learning goals of students with special needs within the SAIL school and VSA arts of Indiana models.

2. Teachers who are trained as artists and special educators provide optimal arts-infused instruction for students with disabilities.

3. Passion and artistry in leadership is critical to creating and sustaining arts-based learning environments for special needs students.

4. Evidence of student progress is currently collected and reported to meet individual affiliate program requirements. Data about student progress on Individual Education Plan goals is not, at present, systematically collected.
II. Overview of the Study

The mission of VSA arts, an international organization serving 64 countries, 49 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, is to create a society where people with disabilities can learn through, participate in, and enjoy the arts. Designated by Congress as the coordinating organization for arts programming for persons with disabilities, the VSA arts holds as a core belief that the arts enhance learning and that programs in the creative arts offer children with disabilities valuable academic advantages.

VSA arts operates within an environment shaped and guided by two federal policies: the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The need for access to education through the least restrictive environment called for in IDEA and the demands for accountability and research-based strategies required in NCLB pose a unique challenge for VSA arts organizations – to demonstrate how the arts provide access, equity, and enhanced learning opportunity for individuals with special needs.

Origins and purpose of the study

Through a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), VSA arts is developing a base of research to document the effects of VSA arts practices implemented in educational settings by state affiliate organizations. VSA arts program leaders identified three models of using the arts with special needs learners that would serve as viable settings in which to conduct this research - a whole school arts environment (implemented by the WVSA art connections in Washington DC), a teaching artist model (implemented by VSA arts of Indiana), and a professional development model for arts integration (supported by the VSA arts of New Hampshire).

In the fall of 2003, VSA arts invited RMC Research Corporation to begin planning for their program of research with national office and state affiliate representatives. Representatives from the national VSA arts office, three VSA arts affiliates, and RMC Research Corporation held their initial planning session November 17th. At this meeting we began defining the purpose and
parameters of the study and determining how the selected sites would contribute. Conclusions drawn from these and follow-up telephone conversations shaped the design of this initial study.

The planning team defined the research purpose as *documenting promising practices within the VSA arts network to demonstrate the effectiveness of arts instruction in helping special education students meet their learning goals*. The group agreed that the research program must ultimately show how involvement in the arts programs affects students’ ability to meet their learning goals, as evidenced through progress on individual learning plans. As a first step, the planning team agreed to document the practices that will ultimately be examined in light of data on student outcomes. Finally, the group agreed that a research program on the effectiveness of student involvement in the *VSA arts* models must both understand and demonstrate the benefits of teaching and learning through the arts in ways that honor the arts as highly creative, personal, and often life changing learning experiences.

### Study design

RMC developed and implemented an exploratory research design that would serve to inform future research. RMC first developed a conceptual research framework (Appendix A) that incorporates dimensions important to include in a comprehensive research effort seeking to link the *VSA arts* models with student learning outcomes and the relationships among them. The conceptual framework was based on a review of research about interventions and services designed to improve student outcomes.

RMC then designed and implemented an exploratory case study protocol (Appendix C) to collect data at the three *VSA arts* sites based on the research framework. Two-day site visits were conducted to document features of the arts models, their implementation, the context in which they operate, and their perceived effects. This study did not set out to describe the effects of certain practices on student outcomes, but rather to set the stage for *VSA arts* national to conduct such research in the future.
III. The Value of Arts Education for Students with Special Needs: A Review of the Literature

The arts are time-honored ways of learning, knowing, and expressing, older than literacy, schools, or numbers. The value of the arts in human development and in the creation of healthy communities and societies is demonstrated across the world. Many argue that promoting arts education for their role in academic achievement minimizes the power and value of the arts. The value of the arts for students with diverse learning abilities is clear to educators who engage in this work in their day to day interactions with special needs learners.

A review of literature related to the role of arts education for special needs learners reveals a compelling need for research that explicates how the arts enable educators to access and develop the potential of special needs learners. A review of research into the effects of the arts on student achievement and development follows, in addition to a description of what little is currently known about the effects of arts-based education on students with special needs in particular. Finally, the policy context of the No Child Left Behind provides both compelling need and complex challenges for research on the arts for special needs learners.

The arts and student achievement

Research on the relationship between involvement in the arts and student achievement shows that “students involved in the arts are doing better in school than those who are not—for whatever constellation of reasons.” (Catterall et al., 1999). These findings are confirmed by Project Zero’s REAP research (Reviewing Education and the Arts Project, 2000), a meta-analysis of 188 reports (Darby & Catterall, 1994), and analyses of 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Survey data LS:88 survey¹ (Catterall et al., 2000).

Catterall et al. (1999) found 16 to 18 percentage point differences in academic

¹ The National Educational Longitudinal Survey, a panel student which followed more than 25,000 students in U.S. secondary schools for 10 years.
performance (as measured by test scores) between arts-involved students and non-involved students. Percentage differences in performance for lower income students were nominally lower—10 to 12 points—but still significant. They also found that academic achievement tends to increase over time for art-involved students. This is consistent with Ingram and Riedel (2003), who found “gain scores” (year-over-year comparisons of student achievement) significantly higher for 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders who participated in arts-integrated classrooms: the greater the arts integration, the more students gained in test scores. The effect was particularly strong for low income and ESL students.

Stronge (2002) also found that students who experience an arts-infused curriculum outperform peers who received traditional instruction. An Anneberg proposal (undated) cites findings by Deasy (2002) that high-quality arts education correlated with academic achievement in large and small samples of students in the United States and that art education experiences especially benefit young people who have historically been undervalued and undereducated.

Burton (1999) concludes that creativity is a “capacity for learning” that arts-based education can develop. Psilos (2002) found that arts-based education improved thinking skills of comprehension, interpretation, and problem solving. More specifically, Eisner (2002) and Efland (2002) both argue that arts-based education increases student ability to interpret symbols and construct their meaning, which leads to deeper, more conceptual thinking. Researchers have linked arts with general learning; Efland (2002) suggests that art education improves higher order thinking, whether or not it improves academic achievement or test results.

Fiske (1999) reports that the arts enhance learning environments by contributing opportunities for engaged, active, cross-disciplinary teaching and learning. Such an environment in itself promotes learning. Eisner (2002) and Winner and Hetland (2000a and 2000b) argue that the arts provide learning experiences for which there is no substitute and enhance decision-making, problem-solving, perception, and thinking and communicating in different ways. A Project Zero report (2003) on teaching students interpretive skills using paintings found students improved their evidentiary reasoning skills and broadened their understanding of interpretation itself.
Neurological effects

New findings on the plasticity of the brain—its capacity to “rewire” itself in response to new learning—holds promise for the arts in education. Art’s complex and rich sensory stimulation may help the brain reorganize neural networks. In work with rats, researchers at the University of Illinois (2002) found that complex physical learning increased (by 25%) the number of synapses in rats exposed to alcohol, suggesting that instruction in dance and other physically complex arts may help children overcome some mental disabilities resulting from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

There is strong evidence, dating to 1993 (Rauscher & Shaw) for “the Mozart effect”—that music instruction improves students’ spatial reasoning skills. Citing Rauscher & Shaw (1997), Lu (no date) reports that preschoolers exposed to weekly keyboard lessons improved their performance on spatial-temporal skill tests 34% better than children who had taken either computer lessons or group singing instead. Weinberger (2003) has pioneered the study of music’s role in neural plasticity, and suggests music increases learners’ brain cells, circuits, and interconnectedness—expanding learners’ problem-solving skills.

In studying how the brain perceives and produces rhythm. Thaut, Moore and Peterson (2003) found music has profound therapeutic effects on patients with traumatic brain injury, cerebral palsy, and other brain impairments. To Ellis (1999), because perception is active, rather than passive, art furthers the brain’s “dynamical self-organizing patterns of activity” and differs from decoration in evoking explication, not merely pleasure.

Affective effects

Arts-based teaching and learning increase student interest and motivation, reports Morrow (2001). Eisner (2002), Ritter (1999), and Stronge (2002) find that it also enhances self-esteem, willingness to experiment, and tolerance for uncertainty. Burton et al. (1999) report that art education increases communication skills, leading to greater cooperation among students, greater rapport with teachers, more sustained focus, and a greater willingness on the part of students to display their learning publicly.

Darby and Catterall (1994) point to drama in particular as increasing interpersonal relationships and communication skills, both of which enhance learning. Researchers for the New American Schools (2003) found that students involved in music show fewer
at-risk behaviors. Catterall et al. point to “a slight edge in self concept” in students who studied drama. Parsons (1987) finds that young people grow in knowledge and awareness of both self and others as their understanding of paintings evolves; citing O’Neil and Johnson (1984), Catterall et al. (1999) suggest that student empathy for others is a possible and even likely outcome of drama instruction.

Catterall et al. (1999) found that arts-involved students tend to stay in school longer, have better attitudes about school and community; he also points to a likely positive peer association as well. The Annenberg proposal cited above reports claims by the International Association of Visual and Performing Arts High Schools (2000) that students in urban high schools of the visual and performing arts experience higher rates of acceptance and persistence in their secondary education than students in non-arts programs.

Social effects

Fogg and Smith (2001) and an evaluation from North Carolina (2001) report that arts-based teaching and learning appear to improve school “climates”—increasing participation, communication, flexibility, creativity, student self-esteem, and attendance. They improve “school ecologies” (Seaman, 1999). Art also plays a role in educational equity. Because the arts are instruments of cognitive growth and agents of motivation for school success, unfair access to the arts “brings consequences of major importance to our society (Catterall et al., 1999). According to the 1997 National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP] report, (no date), among all disciplines in which students were tested, music scores reflected the narrowest gap between students of varying races and minorities. Pili (2000) argues that arts-based education has special value for disadvantaged children, for its therapeutic effect in ameliorating persistent stressors in their lives as well as its value in cognitive, social, and motor abilities.

The Annenberg Challenge report (1998) cites evidence that arts instruction increases family and community support. The New American Schools (2003) report some greater involvement and rededication on the part of teachers who see higher levels of learning by all arts-involved students, especially at-risk and under-achieving students. Analyzing a body of qualitative research into out-of-school art education,
Heath (1999) finds dramatic increases in “syntactic complexity, hypothetical reasoning, and questioning approaches” in young people. These linguistic skills, she argues, enable planning and give young people language with which to collaborate productively and respectfully, inducing young people to participate in social enterprises and reshaping their communities.

The arts and special education students

Eisner (2002) finds that arts instruction introduces flexibility to the classroom that allows teachers to promote individuality and diversity. Populations who benefit from arts-based teaching include students who struggle with academics. The National Center to Improve Practice (1994) reported on successful uses of multi-media (from photographs, objects, videos, tape recordings, to advanced computer software) to support students with disabilities in increasing their writing skills.

Arts-based teaching and learning appears to benefit students who are not part of the dominant culture by opening more avenues, including multicultural ones, to learning (Darby & Catterall, 1994; Annenberg, 2003). Ingram (2003) found that arts teachers tend to be more diverse as well. He also found a significant relationship between arts-based education and improvements in reading and math, especially for disadvantaged and low-scoring students. Arts-based education encourages out-of-school learning for students who are preparing for the workplace (Fiske, 1999).

Most research about the link between the arts and the academic achievement of students with special needs takes a broad look by analyzing student achievement data by subgroups of students. No research was found, beyond basic descriptive cases, that makes any explicit link between specific arts education practices and the effects on students with special needs.

The arts in the context of No Child Left Behind

Uniquely among federal education laws, NCLB identifies “the arts” as a core academic skill, suggesting that art’s place in school is—or should be—comparable to that of language arts, math, or science. This broad support of the arts is confounded by NCLB accountability and research policies that favor scientific processes associated with objective, quantitative data over artistic
processes associated with authentic, qualitative processes.

This policy environment sets forth expectations that schools will a) help students with special needs meet the same academic standards as their non-special education counterparts and b) adopt programs and practices that are proven to be effective in scientifically based research. NCLB provides both opportunity and enormous challenge for educators whose work is grounded in the use of the arts in helping students with special needs achieve their learning goals.

Schools throughout the country are faced with identifying and implementing practices that will enable students with special education needs to meet the expectations for attainment and improvement set forth in state accountability systems developed to support the legal and policy requirements of No Child Left Behind. Bringing the capacity and expertise of the VSA arts network to bear on this problem can only be done through systematic and rigorous research that makes the link between VSA arts practices and their beneficial effects on students with special needs.
IV. Methodology

The research design for this exploratory phase of VSA arts research consisted of four major phases: developing the research framework; planning and site preparation; data collecting and data analyzing; developing a written report.

Research framework

A conceptual framework explains, in either graphic or in narrative form, the main dimensions to be studied – the key factors or variables—and the presumed relationships among them (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Developed from existing research, the VSA arts research framework identifies several factors that an investigation of the link between the arts models and student outcomes must account for.

Site development and planning

In order to build on the primarily tacit knowledge that exists within the VSA arts about the impact of their arts practices on special needs students, RMC developed and implemented a case study approach to document the practices and features of the three VSA arts models included in the study.

RMC researchers consulted with each VSA arts site—VSA arts of Indiana in Indianapolis, VSA arts Washington SAIL Charter School, and The Brentwood School in Merrimack, New Hampshire—to collect information about their programs and to prepare them for participation in the site visits. RMC’s protocol for site development (Appendix B) attempted to help sites frame their work in terms of student progress in meeting learning goals, evidence of progress, and the practices and structures that affect student progress and to prepare our hosts so that we would have access to that range of data. Based on those planning meetings, RMC and site contacts developed schedules for site visits.

Instrumentation and data collection

RMC created protocols for individual interviews and focus groups with program leaders and staff at each site (Appendix C). During the site visits, RMC researchers interviewed administrators, teachers, artists, and other staff members; and in two of the three sites, we conducted observations of classroom and program activities. Data
collected from The Brentwood School in Merrimac, New Hampshire includes information from a VSA arts of New Hampshire affiliate 2002 evaluation because it is pertinent to this research study.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using content analysis methods. Site visit notes were coded using the scientific qualitative data analysis program ATLAS.ti, a tool for the qualitative analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical, and audio data. The program enabled researchers to code and examine all data according to the variables in the research framework both by individual site and across sites. Once this was complete, all data were analyzed to identify key themes and implications for future research.
V. Preliminary Findings

VSA arts of Indiana: Unleashing the Potential of Learners, Teachers, Artists, and Leaders through the Arts

Since 1989, VSA arts of Indiana (VSAI) has played a lead role in providing a range of opportunities for artists, teachers, and learners of all ages and abilities to engage with the arts in Indiana. The VSAI mission is to expand the potential of persons with disabilities by developing learning skills, nurturing independence and self worth, and enhancing well being in every area of their lives. VSAI now has eight full time staff members at its center in Indianapolis, staff at eight district offices in partner organizations throughout the state, and employs a number of artist teachers who provide services in its three program strands.

RMC Research conducted a two day site visit at the VSAI Center in Indianapolis on April 28 and 29, 2004, during which two researchers interviewed key personnel, including administrators and teaching artists, and observed classes held at the center. Due to time limitations, we were unable to observe any school-based VSAI activities. Though limited, this exploration identified several programs and practices with promise for demonstrating how the use of the arts in VSAI programs affects students with special needs.

Key Features of the VSAI Model

Three elements stand out in the VSAI model—what VSAI does (services), how VSAI carries out its work (strategies), and why it does what it does (rationale).

VSAI services

School-Based Programs

The Artist-in-Residence program places a professional, trained VSAI artist at a school for 5, 10, or 15 days to work with students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. While in residence, VSAI artists team-teach classes with the regular classroom teachers. Students chosen to participate in the residency must see the VSAI artist at least four times in a 5 five-day residency, eight times in a ten-day residency, or 12 times in a 15-day residency. In addition to providing a learning opportunity for students, an Artist-in-Residence may also assist teachers (Special
Education, Art, Music, and PE, as well as general classroom teachers) to learn adaptive techniques and strategies for working with students with disabilities, and integrate the arts and creativity into everyday lesson plans. Residencies take place in a variety of educational settings across the state, including public schools, alternative schools, and residential facilities for at-risk and special education students.

*Contractual Services* with the Indianapolis Public Schools include (a) two service programs for at-risk students, including students with diagnosed disabilities and (b) extended school day (after school) and school year programs (summer school). Three service providers in two Indianapolis public schools maintain the *ABACUS* service program, a collaborative mental health program. Students take part in an arts-based curriculum implemented by *VSAI*, receive mental health support through a mentoring agency, and participate in therapeutic riding at a local horse farm. A *60-Day Diagnostic Program* accommodates students who are not able to function in the regular school environment. *VSAI* gives students in this program special support during the 60 day period.

Every Wednesday and Friday, classes of students and teachers come to the Center for *Festivals*. These comprise three art studio sessions designed to involve students in learning through the arts and to let their teachers observe the power of the arts in engaging students who have a range of disabilities. Each class participates in clay, visual arts, and music studio classes during their visit. In partnership with Indianapolis city officials, *VSAI* supports an annual *Day of the Arts* that provides opportunities for expression and recognition through the arts for persons with disabilities.

*Community-Based Programs*

*Urban Artisans* is a vocational program for at-risk and special education students ages 16 through 22. The program teaches students a variety of vocational, life, and arts skills and secures commissions for students to produce artworks. The *VSAI* Center holds *Community Classes* for children and adults of all ages and abilities. A *Hospital Program* offers therapeutic arts activities to patients with serious illnesses. *VSAI* partners with a variety of educational and community organizations to design and create outdoor and indoor *Mural Projects*. 
**VSAI Core strategies**

**Developing the Artist as Teacher/Teacher as Artist**

*VSAI’s* most explicitly developed strategy is developing *artists as teachers.* This strategy aims to create a “cadre of committed, trained artist teachers” who (a) engage learners in arts activities that promote growth and provide opportunities for expression and (b) model for teachers the use of the arts as a powerful learning tool for students with disabilities.

*VSAI* uses a tiered system to train and develop a workforce of artist teachers. Through mentoring and support, artists progress from apprentice to teaching artist to master teaching artist. *VSAI* has developed a system of expectations for apprentice teaching artists, teaching artists, and master teaching artists to guide staff development and eventual program evaluation.

While *VSAI* did not explicitly promote it, we discovered embedded in the *VSAI* model the notion of *learner as artist* and *artist as learner.* Programs assist students in tapping into and developing their artistic abilities and expression while developing a range of skills through their arts experiences. *VSAI* also encourages and expects artists, including leadership staff, to be learners, to learn from and about the students and to provide and participate in professional development activities.

Several *VSAI* leaders are also trained artists and continue to pursue their work as artists. In the qualities and characteristics of leadership, described later in this report, we found an implicit strategy of leaders as artists and artists as leaders.

**Learning in the Least Restrictive Environment**

The concept of Least Restrictive Environment set forth in the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) legislation shapes how *VSAI* implements its work. Committed to providing access and opportunity, *VSAI* offers its services to students of all ages and abilities, asserting that we all learn from each other and all have special needs. The *VSAI* teaching model uses a student-centered approach, reminding teachers that the first focus is the student: teachers are to engage students based on what they learn from and about the students. As one teaching artist stated “the way to do it is to offer them as much as you can. Then see what they respond to and go
Building Capacity

Developing and nurturing partnerships and alliances with a variety of constituencies has enabled the VSAI to grow and develop. The organization has involved and rallied the support of key state leaders, policy makers, and funders in sustaining its work and growth. VSAI has expanded leadership capacity across the organization by ensuring it hires the “right people” who fit the organization’s purposes and passions, and investing in their development. Ongoing efforts to examine its effectiveness inform VSAI’s growth and development. At the behest of the Board, VSAI carried out a capacity review and developed a long range strategic plan based on those findings. Over the past year, VSAI has enlisted the services of an evaluation consultant, who is also a trained artist, to develop a strategy to measure the effectiveness of the artist teacher model.

VSAI Rationale

Interviews with key staff about VSAI’s work revealed the beliefs and principles that inform the organization’s model and its practices. First and foremost, the VSAI works from a shared belief in the arts as a transforming experience, particularly for people with disabilities. Staff members’ work begins with a strong belief in each learner’s inherent worth and his or her ability to use the arts to express who they are and what they can do, to learn new skills, and to experience success. Because the arts provide avenues for learning and expression not available through other means, in their work in public schools VSAI maintains that offering special education and at-risk students equal opportunities to learn requires use of the arts.

VSAI at Work: Promising Practices

As set forth in the study’s research framework, we collected data about a range of variables to inform future research on the effects of the VSA arts models on student outcomes. Data collected during observations of VSAI classes (at the Center only), interviews with staff, and a review of documents point to ways that VSA arts programs and practices promise much and also pose challenge for future research.

Access to data about the instructional practices of the teaching artist was limited in this exploratory research to interviews with teaching artists and observations of festival
and community classes held at the Center. Analysis of data revealed qualities and characteristics of instructional practices and programs that warrant further documentation and study.

The VSAI approach to teaching and learning
Artists who join the VSAI organization are employed at one of three levels: Apprentice Teaching Artist, Teaching Artist, or Master Teaching Artist. Each level has explicit standards for professional behavior, knowledge and use of educational concepts, artistic discipline, and evaluation and assessment of self and others. All teaching artists new or returning to VSAI begin as Apprentice Teaching Artists. Artists are trained in approaches to teaching and learning that facilitate learning in and through the arts.

Learning from the students
Instructional practices observed over the course of the two days embodied the notion of student-centered teaching. The VSAI’s first principle in teaching is to “get to know the students.” Teachers worked to understand what students are communicating, whether through eye contact, physical response, or verbal communication. Teachers then strategized how best to engage the students “where they are.” A teaching artist illustrates how this is done and what can happen:

“Two weeks ago a boy came with his mom – he is autistic – about 12 years old. She said he had never painted before. Said he doesn’t like to get his hands dirty. I adapted what he would do by giving him a credit card that he could hold. I held his hand and helped him dip it into the paint and just dribble it all over the paper. Then he was using two credit cards and making all kinds of enthusiastic noises. He finally let go of the credit cards and was using his hands directly in the paint. His mom let him be noisy and get dirty which is something that was hard for her. We have to try different things and see how kids respond.”

Teaching artists work with students of all ages and abilities, including students with severe cognitive and physical disabilities. In all of our class observations, we saw teaching artists engage every student in arts activities. A master teaching artist of music, for example, worked with a class of students with very diverse abilities, and quickly enabled each student to experience all or most of the lesson elements, which included strumming, singing, movement, chanting, and working with a synthesizer.
During this class period, a young boy with severe cognitive and physical needs had a difficult time engaging in the activities. He would grimace, cover his head, and moan when the teacher came near him with a guitar. The teacher artfully adapted his approach to the boy by gently sitting next to him, softening his voice and music, and working with the class while he was near the boy. Gradually, the boy reached out and strummed the guitar.

**High expectations**

_VSAI_ teaching artists exhibited a strong belief in the ability of all students to engage successfully in the arts. We observed blind students, students with autism, with cognitive impairments, and with learning disabilities treated with respect and high expectations for what they can and would do. A master teacher of clay presented and facilitated a group of 13 students of varying abilities in creating clay still lifes.

Each student accomplished a series of complex tasks involving drawing, working with clay slabs and coils, and glazing. Assistants helped students, but each student produced a unique product that required him or her to develop and use hand-eye coordination, follow multiple-step directions, and use a variety of art techniques.

**Use of materials and adaptations**

_VSAI_ expects teaching artists to “know relevant materials and techniques required to teach the art form” and “know the basics of adapting lessons, settings, and materials to people with disabilities and exceptionalities.” We observed teaching and master teaching artists skillfully using materials to provide access and engage students with a wide spectrum of abilities:

- During a painting class, a teacher played soft classical music in the background to soothe and calm students. “This helps them to focus. If I see it becomes a distraction, then I turn it off.”
- A teacher artist aided a teenage girl with severe disabilities in working with clay on the wheel using a hand-over-hand technique. Though the student was strongly resistant at first and made many attempts to distract him, the teacher successfully redirected her into her work.

**Respectful and Supportive Interactions with Students**

Throughout our observations, teachers encouraged students in a warm, nurturing fashion without losing sight of their

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2 From VSAI Teaching Artist Criteria, _VSA arts_ of Indiana, Inc. 2004
expectations of students’ engaging and completing the tasks. Teachers approached students not from a knowledge or sense of their limitations, but with honor and respect for who they are and what they can do. Teachers used humor often and successfully to engage students.

Impact of Instructional Practices on Student Outcomes

During our two day site visit, we heard and saw several examples of how the practices inherent in the VSAI model affect students with special needs. Most of this evidence is anecdotal, based on the experiences and observations of the teaching artists and VSAI staff. Documenting these observations and experiences is a first step in linking these practices to student outcomes. These and other examples are windows into how the arts can empower special education students as learners and creators.

“There was a boy who I worried was not getting much out of the class (Saturday rhythm and drumming class for preschoolers). One week, he came back to class having practiced a lot. He did all of the African rhythms. He remembered a lot. His mother said ‘I have never seen him do that before.’ Drumming is very therapeutic. It also teaches kids how to observe, listen, and develop coordination.”
Teaching Artist

“I worked with one student for three years. She is 17 now. First time she came, she didn’t do anything. Her dad did everything for her. She is autistic. Now she comes and sits in the same chair every week. She only comes to my class. Her dad does not come in anymore. She is limited in what she can do but she manages to do everything the class does at her own level. Her dad leaves her here now. I communicate with the parents and they told me they never thought she could do it on her own.”
Teaching Artist

“We did a case study of a boy who was brain injured. He was not talking and had no friends when he first came here. He is now talking and has really taken to the guitar.”
Evaluation Consultant

“J. is 19 years old and is a student intern artist in our Urban Artisan program. He is moderately mentally disabled. He was not being successful in school and as a result, had a significant attendance problem. He ‘woke up’ when he came here. He loves to draw. He works on painting and glazing clay works. Since he started coming here, his attendance in school has greatly improved. He has one of his own works on display in the gallery and is very proud of it.”
Master Teaching Artist

Data collected during classroom observations at the VSAI Center indicate that VSAI instructional practices could be studied for their impact on a range of student outcomes, including:
Overall academic performance  
Problem solving skills  
Motivation and commitment to learning  
Initiation of ideas and solutions  
Independent thinking and action  
Cooperative and interpersonal skills  
Following directions  
Attention and focus  
Ownership and pride in work  
Artistic knowledge and skill  
Attitudes and image of self  
Attendance  
Work habits  
Life skills

The Capacity to Make the Case
Recognizing the need to develop systematic means of collecting information about the impact of its services on students, VSAI has enlisted an external evaluation consultant, who is working with the organization to project outcomes and develop processes for collecting data to evaluate VSAI’s effectiveness. The challenge of creating such a system is determined, in large part, first by the nature of the teaching artist model, and second, by the nature of each program strand.

The VSAI Teaching Artist Model
The teaching artist model has two primary goals a) to engage students of all abilities successfully in the arts and b) to model and train teachers in using the arts to help special education students develop. This model gives teaching artists an opportunity to define and describe the practices they have found effective. However, teaching artists have limited contact with students they work with and in most cases, do not have access to student IEPs and thus cannot explicitly assist them in achieving their IEP goals.

School Based Programs
VSAI’s School Based Programs appear to hold the most promise for research into the effect of the arts on student progress in meeting their learning goals. In the ABACUS and 60 Day Diagnostic programs, artists work with students identified for intervention to help them achieve specific goals as set forth in their plans. These programs have assessment methods in place to track student progress in meeting artistic goals, academic goals, and in developing a range of “developmental assets.” At this time, the extent to which the data is systematically analyzed and reported is unclear. Once VSAI Teaching Artist instructional practices are made explicit, these practices can be examined in light of outcome data. The challenge in this context would be to isolate the effects of VSAI practices on student progress from the effects of other components of the model.

3 From Healthy Communities Healthy Youth Toolkit 40 Developmental Assets tool.
The Urban Artisan Program
The Urban Artisan program serves the needs of a particular group of students – young people ages 16 to 22 who are at-risk or who have special learning needs. A vocational program, Urban Artisan tracks student progress in meeting a range of individual goals.

The Artist in Residence Program
The VSAI Artist in Residence program aims: a) to engage special needs students and their non-disabled peers in the arts and b) to help teachers learn adaptive techniques and strategies for working with students with disabilities, and integrate the arts and creativity into daily lesson plans. The limited time that Artists-in-Residence spend with students poses a challenge for documenting its effectiveness on student outcomes.

Festivals
Wednesday and Friday Festivals at the VSAI Center in Indianapolis are unique, exciting arts experiences for students and staff. At present, there is a loose connection between the festival experience and the ability to make claims about student outcomes. Festival teachers receive broad information about the students signed up for classes: there is little evaluation or follow-up once students leave. Again, a set of clear expectations of and opportunities for professional development by visiting teachers could enable tracking of VSAI’s impact on classroom practices in schools.

Strengthening this program’s professional development component to track changes in school-based teacher knowledge and practice in using the arts to meet the needs of special education students holds particular promise for measuring the impact of this model. Engaging classroom and other teachers as learners willing to apply new knowledge and skills may enhance the credibility of research into the effects of teacher artists in residence.
**Snapshots: VSA arts of Indiana**

Master teacher demonstrates clay process to group of students

Applying clay coils to slab

Glazing her clay still life
Indianapolis public school students in Festival music class

Using hand-over-hand technique to assist student potter
Snapshots: VSA arts of Indiana

J, an Urban Artisan at Work

J’s work in the gallery
SAIL Charter School, Washington, D.C.: One Child at a Time

Located in Washington, D.C., the School for Arts In Learning (SAIL), was founded by the WVSA arts connection as a public elementary charter school. SAIL serves over 100 students in grades K-6. Approximately 80 percent of SAIL students have been identified as needing special education services. More than 70 percent qualify for the national free and reduced-price lunch program.

SAIL opened in 1998 with a staff of six and a budget of $500,000. Six years later, its budget exceeds $5 million and supports a staff of 65. WVSA is preparing to open its high school program in September 2004, and planning for a new middle school.

RMC Research conducted a two-day site visit at SAIL on May 4 and 5, 2004. Over the two days, two researchers interviewed key personnel, including teachers, administrators, and teaching artists, and observed classrooms to document practices at SAIL that hold promise for helping special education students meet their learning goals.

Key Features of the SAIL Model

Three key features of the SAIL Charter School stand out in using the arts to help special education students meet their learning goals.

A whole school environment

Based on the premise that all children can learn, the SAIL model uses the arts as the basis for all learning experiences. Central to its mission is the recognition that the arts hold special significance for children with special needs, who typically bring a vast variety of learning styles and capacities to the educational setting. SAIL uses an arts-infused approach to motivate children who have been unsuccessful in traditional educational settings.

The use of the arts in learning, as reflected in the school’s curriculum, instructional, and assessment practices, is at the center of the SAIL whole school model. This central purpose is supported by nine organizational elements:

1. A school philosophy that supports teaching and learning through the arts;
2. An environment that supports students’ personal and interpersonal growth;
3. An arts-based curriculum aligned to the D.C. standards for learning;  
4. Authentic assessment methods that demonstrate student learning;  
5. School staff members who work together to foster a child-directed learning environment;  
6. WVSA organizational resources and involvement;  
7. Volunteers and artists who are brought in to support students;  
8. Community resources that enhance student opportunities; and  

Capacity Building and Sustainability through Partnerships

WVSA and the SAIL Charter School are linked and mutually supported through the organization’s governance structure, facilities, and use of human resources. Incorporating research-based elements of model partnerships that sustain the arts (Seidel and Eppel, 2001), the partnership between WVSA and SAIL enhances the school’s capacity in several ways. Both organizations place the needs of the students and the school at the center of their missions and share a sense of purpose and commitment to the educational power of the arts fiscal, as well as, physical, financial and human resources.

SAIL Practices at Work

Teacher Qualities and Characteristics

SAIL expects teachers to use a range of knowledge and skills to meet students’ needs. While our research gave only a limited view of teaching and learning at the school, data suggest that SAIL accomplishes its instructional goals by recruiting and supporting teachers who are both artists and special educators. Most SAIL teachers are trained and practicing artists; five of the eight classroom teachers also have special education training and certification. One example was a kindergarten teacher, a visual artist (painter) who had an art gallery in Guatemala before coming to the United States, and earning her Masters degree in Special Education.

A Standards-Based Arts Curriculum

The SAIL curriculum is based on learning standards set forth by the District of Columbia standards. These standards are evident in instructional exhibits displayed throughout the school and reflected in teacher lesson plans. To meet these learning goals, the school uses core curriculum materials in language arts and reading (First Steps in Language Arts, Wilson Reading, Saxon Math, and Everyday Mathematics) along with a myriad of arts resources and materials. The art curriculum provides learning opportunities in and through painting, sculpture, dance and creative movement, drama, music, and poetry.
Instruction
A basic instructional tenet at the SAIL School is captured in this statement by the President and CEO of WVSA arts connection. “Research shows that children learn 25 percent of what they see, 40 percent of what they see and hear, 60 percent of what they see, hear, and feel, and 95 percent of what they do.” The goal for each teacher is to instruct students in ways that honor who they are as learners. Many children have IEPs that articulate their learning goals; most reflect the need for hands-on and multi-sensory approaches to learning. The school’s Special Education Director explained, “Infusion of the arts is a different way to approach learning and the kids really get the concepts because they can see it, touch it, and create it. Goals are usually accomplished through hands-on activities, use of manipulatives, multiple intelligences, and multiple strategies.”

Throughout the school, and most vividly in the elementary classrooms, teachers used the arts to model, present, and illustrate concepts and information to motivate and engage students. We saw students use the arts to express themselves and to demonstrate their knowledge, skill, and understanding. Many examples and illustrations pointed to the power of these practices at SAIL.

As we entered a first grade classroom, students were busy working in groups and independently on activities related to their study of the human digestive system. On the walls student-created visuals depicted concepts and ideas related to human digestion, while on the floor masking tape outlined the human system. The teacher explained:

“We created a human system on the floor with tape. Kids walk through the digestive system. When we created it, we sang a song that taught the vocabulary and the concepts. Then we did profiles of the kids’ bodies and we put the parts together. We were also reinforcing directions—what do you do first, etc. Kids could choose the materials they wanted to use. Kids who are challenged can access different tools such as songs to describe their work. This addresses all learners. We also gave them a sheet – they drew while we asked them to think about what happens when they eat. They drew their heads, necks, esophagus, intestines. We supervise the gluing and labeling.”

One student proudly displayed his work to us and the teacher explained how the arts help him to access and express knowledge.
“D is very visual and kinesthetic. He constantly draws. He thinks in drawing before he writes. Once he sees a representation, then he can pursue it. This gives D an opportunity to demonstrate what he knows. It keeps him calm and focused. If he does not have the visual, he is off track. I can’t imagine teaching anywhere else.”

Impact on Student Outcomes

The SAIL Charter School is engaged in a continuous effort to find and use the most effective assessments to show its students’ growth in academic and social development. The limited number of students who take the school’s standardized tests show steady improvement in their reading and math scores. Because most SAIL students do not take standardized tests due to reasons of special need, the school attempts to use authentic assessments as primary tool for assessing student progress. Our research indicates that the portfolio system is in its early stages of development, and lacks appropriate criteria and measures for credible reports of student outcomes. Anecdotal data from teachers show how the arts are effective in meeting students’ needs.

“J. (a sixth grade student) is a very talented artist who has been here since 2nd grade. She has very low academic ability but is vice president of the student council. Here, there are a number of ways she can demonstrate her ability. These have helped her make progress in her reading and writing. In math, she is now doing well.”

Kids with severe reading dyslexia do really well here. They can flourish in the arts and can think with auditory support.

“T is very visual. He has multiple learning disabilities. He needs a lot of examples. Simple 1 to 2 step directions with modeling, illustration, and frequent monitoring. He needs a lot of opportunities to show he is successful.”

The Capacity to Make the Case

Efforts have been underway for some time to track outcome data systematically. In 2001, WVSA contracted with the Economic and Social Research Institute to develop an evaluation model to “more accurately capture change in affective, experiential, and cognitive domains (Riccio, et al., 2003). The evaluation model includes a range of quantitative and qualitative assessment and data collection tools to track student and school performance outcomes. More recently, the school has developed a new database for entering, analyzing, and reporting data, including information from student IEPs as well as a range of performance data. Such a system should
provide a viable means for tracking progress on individual student learning goals.

According to the school principal, the school is also looking at using a checklist or rubric for checking art processes. While there is much practical, procedural and implicit knowledge about how the arts affect students at SAIL, a systematic articulation of specific practices and their impact on individual learners remains to be conducted.

Leading and sustaining the mission
The system of governance and leadership created by the \textit{WVSA} is critical to SAIL’s success. Strategic planning, cross membership on the \textit{WVSA} and SAIL boards, and regularly scheduled meetings have developed the organization’s capacity to grow and sustain itself.

The \textit{WVSA} staff members make SAIL’s continued success possible. For example, \textit{WVSA}’s director of research and program development is a grant writer who is successful at procuring grant money for many of the SAIL programs. The artist in residence helps infuse the arts into the curriculum. Through their partnership, \textit{WVSA arts connection} and SAIL keep the adult to student ratio low. Through a partnership with George Washington University, student interns assist SAIL in student assessments.

Parents and family members are recognized as important partners in the education of their children. To keep parents (many single) involved, SAIL staff has been proactive in involving parents, for example, scheduling schoolwide and individual parent meetings around school performances. There is a 75% attendance rate for these parent meetings.

In the SAIL community, “Everyone works together with these kids. This environment is more caring than other schools I have been in. The well-being of the kids comes first,” said a staff member.

K-2 classrooms and hallways display a gallery of student projects and art works; school exhibits also show the power of this approach to teaching and learning.
Snapshots: SAIL Charter School

―D‖ inside and out

Graphing Eric Carle’s *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*‘s eating habits
Kindergarten!! Still Life Paintings

As early as kindergarten, students learn about the lives and work of artists, such as Cezanne, above, as a means of developing their own repertoire of artistic representations.

Kindergarten clay and print number line

Kindergarten students learned numbers by creating clay numerals.
Kindergarten students visited the National Gallery to see the work of African American artist Romare Bearden. Integrating social studies, science, and art standards, students created their own portraits, first using real objects and then watercolors.
Multimedia body collages

In the hallway outside the classroom, multimedia body collages show first graders’ depictions of food groups and the body.

A first grade illustration of the story of “Jackaroo Bingo.”
First grade students developed and illustrated their classroom rules and responsibilities.

Based on a writing prompt, a first grade student created this intricate diorama that conveys more than she is able to communicate in written word.
This second grade teacher illustrated geometric concepts through the use of real objects.
Hallway exhibits feature the story of the Underground Railroad and portraits of African American figures done by upper grade students.
The Brentwood School, Merrimac, New Hampshire: The Challenges to Change

The Brentwood School, located in Merrimac, New Hampshire, was founded in 1980 by the Southeastern Regional Education Service Center (SERESC) to meet the needs of learning and emotionally challenged students. Approved by the New Hampshire Department of Education as a special education facility and a private high school, it offers a regular high school diploma requiring 19.5 credits, has a low student to teacher ratio, and is staffed by certified educators.

Brentwood was selected as the first pilot site for the Inspired Learning Through the Arts Professional Development model supported by the New Hampshire VSA arts affiliate.

For this research study, RMC Research conducted a one day site visit at The Brentwood School on May 17, 2004 during which all teachers and the administrator involved in the implementation of the model were interviewed. Due to time limitations, student interviews and classroom observations were not conducted. In 2001, RMC Research Corporation was hired by the New Hampshire VSA arts affiliate to conduct an evaluation of the model in place at The Brentwood School over a two-year period. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the program’s effectiveness as a model that other schools and sites could replicate. The results of that evaluation augment the data collected for this National VSA arts research study.

Key Features of the Model

As a way to move the school from an Artist Residency model to an integrated arts model for professional development, The Brentwood School staff members participated in the Inspired Learning Through the Arts Professional Development model. This model offers educators comprehensive professional development in interdisciplinary and inclusionary instructional topics and practices. Based partially on Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences, it seeks to increase access and opportunity for all children by addressing different learning styles and infusing the arts into the curriculum. Artists in residence also participate in this model.
Important elements of the model include a) interdisciplinary Mini-Units aligned to the New Hampshire Curriculum Frameworks and Standards, b) the use of portfolios, c) critical and reflective questioning, and d) supporting students in using the arts to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, understandings, and capabilities.

Implementation strategies
The training process began with the Brentwood principal’s attendance at a week-long Arts-in-Education Institute sponsored by Plymouth State University that immersed participants in using the arts to help students succeed. (The teachers currently working at The Brentwood School did not attend this summer Institute.) In the first year of participation in the Inspired Learning Through the Arts, a consultant provided on-site professional development that was well received by the ten teachers involved. Classroom implementation did not get underway until midyear.

Over the course of two years, teachers at Brentwood developed Mini-Units and experimented with portfolios and the use of critical and reflective questioning. By the end of the second year, eight of 10 teachers were experimenting with portfolios. Nine teachers experimented with critical and reflective questioning. Most teachers experimented with offering students the arts as ways to demonstrate knowledge, skills, understandings, and capabilities.

Changes in practice
Most teachers reported that their instruction had changed since implementing the Mini-Units. They now have moved beyond traditional verbal and written responses to include the arts as opportunities for their students to demonstrate their knowledge. Teachers reported that they have become more open to ideas about using art activities in specific lessons (e.g., business, mathematics) and indicated that collegial exchanges in the initiative had broadened their perspectives and instructional repertoire.

Impact of the Model on Student Outcomes
Teachers using the strategies supported in the Inspired Learning Through the Arts reported that students understanding of academic concepts increased when they were presented through the arts. The use of hands-on activities increased their interest and participation. Mini-Units developed by teachers helped students reach their academic goals and make connections...
across the curriculum. Teachers reported that creating Mini-Units raised their consciousness of using the arts to keep students interested and deepen their understanding of subject matter.

Several teachers reported that they will continue to use the arts in their classes even if that is not done school wide. Several teachers could see positive changes in students. One student, described as a closed person who does not interact with others, is very good at drawing. The arts projects gave him a way to excel and share his skills with others. Without the arts instruction, his teacher said, “It [drawing ability] would never have come out.”

The Capacity to Make the Case

In Year 3 of the Inspired Learning Through the Arts professional development model at Brentwood, the school faced several challenges: budget cuts, layoffs, and a drop in staff morale. One of school’s two campuses closed and the staff at the remaining campus were reported to be “nearly uncommunicative”. The teachers requested fewer professional development meetings with VSA arts of New Hampshire. The school suffered the loss of a student killed in an accident shortly thereafter.

During the one-day site visit to The Brentwood School for this research study, teachers reported that the school had moved away from its commitment to the model. Reasons cited included differences among administrators about the value of the arts in learning, a transitory student population, and a lack of time and insufficient art resources.

Data from this year’s study and from prior evaluations suggest that The Brentwood School lacked some necessary conditions to sustain the initiative including shared views about the work, leadership that provide for a supportive culture for change, and adequate attention to all phases required for successful implementation (Cooper, 1998; Hall, et al., 1987; and Hall, et al., 1975). At the time of the site visit, it appeared likely that the promise of years one and two for using the Inspired Learning Through the Arts to meet the needs of students was lost as a result.
The catapult building teaches logical reasoning through problem-solving, as well as measuring and ratios.

Portfolio and book-making

Splatter painting was used to engage students in book making. Students learned the interconnectedness of form and function.
Heads sculpted during heath class illustrate diseases contracted during the Holocaust.

Hand sculpture
VI. Summary Findings and Implications for Further Research

This section provides the cross-site summary findings based on our inquiry into the VSA arts’ use of the arts to help special education students meet their learning goals. An analysis of data across the three research sites revealed five key findings, each of which has implications for future research.

1. There is significant opportunity for documenting the use of the arts as a primary strategy for meeting the learning goals of students with special needs in the SAIL school and VSA Indiana models.

   As described in reports of the VSA arts of Indiana and the SAIL Charter School in Washington, D.C., observations and interviews with key staff revealed several instructional and supporting practices that are effective in using the arts to meet the learning goals of special needs students. Practices included, but were not limited to, the assessment of student intelligences, student-centered approaches to instruction, the use of arts for illustrating concepts, the use of a variety of processes and materials to engage students, the adaptation of strategies to provide learning opportunities based on student abilities and disabilities. Further work is needed to explicate the practices inherent in each of these facets of teaching and learning. In addition to describing the practices, the work should also identify the rationale and theory related to the practices, the particular learning needs addressed, and the indicators of the effects on students.

   While this study was not successful in identifying the practices associated with New Hampshire’s professional development model due to the contextual challenges of implementation at the site, other sites that are successfully implementing the model could participate in this work.

   VSA arts models that have the direct and sustained involvement of teacher artists with students provide the most direct means for linking practices with student outcomes. Models that rely mostly or completely on the professional...
development of other educators provide a viable but more challenging opportunity for research linking VSA arts instructional practices with student outcomes.

2. Teachers who are both trained artists and special educators provide optimal arts-infused instruction for students with disabilities.

Teacher effects on student outcomes have been proven to be significant. Interviews and observations of teachers at both VSAI and the SAIL School suggest that teachers with training and experience as artists, teachers and optimally special educators, are best able to meet student learning goals through a skillful use of the arts in instruction. Some teachers are practicing artists and have degrees and certifications in special education. These characteristics reflect the expectations of NCLB for “highly qualified teachers in every classroom.”

Teachers also demonstrated their commitment to student-centered instruction, working to meet the needs of students “one child at a time.” A key feature of their work is to base their instructional decisions and practices on what they know of the children.

Promoting a culture of high expectations and the belief in all learners (adult and children) was another prominent feature of these learning communities, undoubtedly contributing to the success of learners.

Further study of sites that employ such highly qualified educators would allow researchers to articulate and illustrate the successful arts-based instructional practices.

3. Passion and artistry in leadership is critical to creating and sustaining arts-based learning environments for special needs students.

A wide body of research supports leadership as a make-or-break variable in the successful innovation and change in educational settings (Fullan, 2001; Berand et al., 2001).

Data collected from all three VSA arts implementation sites point to a need for leaders who both understand and support the arts and embody artistry in their practice. Through the study of the New Hampshire professional development model, we are reminded once again of the importance of leadership in promoting, supporting, and sustaining
initiatives adopted to improve teaching and learning.

A glimpse into leadership at the SAIL Charter School and the VSA arts of Indiana programs suggests something else about the leadership qualities that support the use of the arts in learning for students with special needs. These leaders are passionate about their work, the arts, and their roles in the lives of special needs learners and their families. They embodied the concept of artistry in leadership as framed by Bolman and Deal (1997). In their work to “capture the subtlety and complexity of life in organizations” in a simple conceptual frame Bolman and Deal help us to understand leadership in four dimensions: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic.

Such “artist leaders” honor and value the arts as instruments of healing, as important symbols of history and culture, and as avenues for human expression and connection as shown in their leadership practices. They attend to the structural features of their organizations – developing and implementing goals, plans, roles, policies, and procedures – but also demonstrate an acute understanding of the human, political, and symbolic dimensions of their work. They attend to the needs of personnel, while using and developing leadership capacity across the organization. The lead administrators successfully rally resources and allies, and tap into the expressive and spiritual dimensions of the work in which they are engaged.

4. At present, evidence of student progress is collected and reported to meet individual affiliate program requirements. Data about student progress on Individual Education Plan goals are not, at present, systematically collected.

In all three sites, because of the mandates of the IDEA law, multiple assessments are used for students who have IEPs. While a variety of informal and formal assessments are used to document student progress, no site had fully developed systems to track, report, and analyze student progress.

Two of the three sites are developing systems for documenting, analyzing, and reporting student outcomes. The SAIL Charter School is developing a data base through which they will be able to
record and track a range of academic and behavioral data, including IEP data. Work continues there to systemize their portfolio assessment measures.

The VSAI ABACUS and 60-Day Diagnostic programs do record and track individual student progress. Beyond individual reports, there is no system for looking at student progress across the program or beyond the time of service.

VSAI is working to articulate indicators of the teaching artist model and enable a more explicit look at the impact of practices on student outcomes.

Future research should include substantial support for collecting information about student progress. Individual sites could enhance this effort by preparing student work, reports, and other data for use by researchers.
VII. From Here to There

This exploratory research highlighted promising practices that merit further research into *VSA arts* practices and student outcomes. Based on our research framework, we were able to illuminate features of the *VSA arts* models, features of implementation, and elements of context that affect their success. A next phase of research would require a more rigorous and sustained effort to document the specific instructional practices at work in the VSAI and SAIL School models. This could be done through several mechanisms:

1. Engaging practitioners in reflective work to identify practices;

2. Planning and implementing a sustained unit of work with students, supported by classroom documentation, tracking of student progress on IEP goals, and ideally by video-recording practices and engaging practitioners in observing and describing the practices; and

3. Asking successful practitioners to maintain logs and journals of their practices and note evidence of impact of their practices on student learning.

The success of the next phase of on-site documentation work will be dependent, to a large extent, on the advanced planning and preparation done by each site with support from researchers and the *VSA arts* office. Specific practices inherent in each model must be articulated and described in order to be able to study these practices in light of student outcomes. Particular attention must also be given to how programs assess students’ progress in meeting their IEP goals.

The success of any research into *VSA arts* practices will depend on the ability of this research to demonstrate to special and regular education teachers in a variety of educational settings that these practices are beneficial in helping special education students meet their IEP goals. Finally, research should account for elements, such as leadership and professional development, that are critical in developing, promoting, and sustaining the use of the arts in educational settings.


The International Association of Visual and Performing Arts High Schools, annual meeting, Mobile, Alabama, February 2, 2000.


IX. Appendix

A. Research Framework
B. Site Development Protocol
C. Interview Protocol
A. Research Framework
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARTS INTEGRATION MODEL</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Elements</td>
<td>B. Rationale/Theory</td>
<td>C. Standards And Criteria for Success</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODEL IMPLEMENTATION</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Leadership</td>
<td>B. Resources</td>
<td>C. Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. School and classroom systems/structures</td>
<td>E. Professional Development</td>
<td>F. Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Instruction</td>
<td>H. Assessment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I. Evaluation</td>
<td>J. Engagement and Collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<th>ENVIRONMENT RESPONSE AND CHANGE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Depth and breadth of adoption</td>
<td>B. Changes in Teaching Practice</td>
<td>C. Changes in Organizational Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Changes in Organizational Culture</td>
<td>E. New Knowledge and Skill</td>
<td>F. New Initiatives</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT OUTCOMES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Academic Attainment and Improvement</td>
<td>B. Engagement and Participation</td>
<td>C. Motivation and Interest</td>
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<tr>
<th>FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL CONTEXT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Laws, Regulations</td>
<td>B. Fiscal</td>
<td>C. Other Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Leadership</td>
<td>E. Politics</td>
<td></td>
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<td>F. History</td>
<td>G. Environment/Culture</td>
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B. Site Development Protocol
Prior to conducting the on-site data collection for the VSA arts exploratory study, the research team will engage site contacts in developing shared knowledge and procedures that will facilitate smooth and meaningful site visits. Toward that end, the following guiding questions will be used to plan for site visits to the SAIL Charter School in Washington, D.C., VSA arts in Indianapolis, Indiana, and the Brentwood School District with VSA arts New Hampshire.

1. Can you identify particular students, perhaps with varying learning needs, that have been successful in meeting their learning goals as a result of involvement in your program?
   - What are the learning needs, IEP descriptors
   - What are the sources of the learning goals – standards, IEPs

2. What is the evidence of their success?
   - Portfolios, progress reports, tests, other?

3. What are the particular educational processes, structures, practices that have enabled students to make progress?
   - Teaching practices
   - Assessment practices
   - Curriculum
   - Classroom and school systems, structures
   - Other

4. How can we document these while on-site?
   - Arranging and scheduling

5. How can we organize the following data collection activities to best document the above?
   - Evidence of student progress (Progress reports, student work, other performance and progress data)
   - Document review (reports, evaluations, policy / program information)
   - Interviews with students, parents, teachers (in various roles), other school personnel, administrators
   - Observations (students at work, students and teachers at work, professionals at work, other aspects of school life)

6. Can we take pictures while on site?
   - Permission
C. Interview Protocol
National VSA arts Site Visits
Interview Protocol
April, May 2004

RMC Research Corporation has been under agreement with the National VSA arts office to conduct exploratory research to document promising practices within the VSA Arts network for demonstrating the effectiveness of arts instruction for helping special education students meet learning goals. We are conducting visits to the WVSA arts connection SAIL Charter School in DC, a whole-school model for infusing the arts, the Indiana VSA Arts, and the schools in New Hampshire implementing a NH VSA Arts professional development model.

Our goal over the course of this site visit is to collect information that will enable us to clearly and specifically describe the models used at these three sites and to document particular practices that sites use to help special education students meet their learning goals.

(refer to conceptual model).

1. What is your role in the __________________________? How long you served in that capacity?

2. How would you describe the features of the _______________ model? What are the essential elements?
   • Teaching practices
   • Structures and systems
   • Human Resources
   • Supports
   • Training
   • Time
   • Curriculum

3. What was the rationale for this particular model? Why this particular approach?
   • past practice
   • beliefs about teaching and learning
   • research
• available resources
• funding
• laws/regulations

4. What are the anticipated outcomes for implementing these models? How do you know if the model is successful? On what basis is this determined?
   • Specific changes in teacher practice
   • Increased use of arts throughout the curriculum
   • Development of skills and knowledge
   • Increase in numbers of people involved
   • Increased access for all learners, especially special education students
   • Changes in student performance
   • Program evaluation

5. What does it take to implement this model?

6. What factors have enabled the model to develop / to succeed?

7. What have been the major challenges to implementation?

8. What have been the major successes to implementation?

9. What has been the response to model implementation across stakeholders?
   • Depth and breadth of adoption
   • Change in organizational culture/practices
   • New knowledge and skills

10. What impact has the model had on:
    • Students
    • Teaching practices
    • Teachers as professionals
    • The school community
    • The broader community

    b. How do you know? What is the evidence?

11. What feedback is used to make adaptations/refinements

12. What changes have been made as a result?

13. Have there been new initiatives created/implemented as a result of this model?
14. Can you identify students that have been successful in meeting their learning goals as a result of this model...approximate number of students?

15. What evidence do you have that attributes student success to the direct use of this model?

   • Motivation and interest
   • Engagement and participation
   • Academic attainment and improvement
   • Increased attendance
   • Self-directed learning
   • Connectedness to themselves and to others
   • Direct involvement with the arts and artists

16. How does this model support students’ learning expectations based on the...local district’s standards and accountability?

17. state standards and assessments for learning?

18. federal context of No Child Left Behind and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act?

19. What resources do you receive to implement this model from the local, state and federal levels?

20. What are the funding streams that support the implementation of the model? Do you think funds will increase, be approximately the same or decrease?

21. What supports are in place to sustain the implementation of this model?

22. What future challenges, if any, could impact the support for this model?