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# Arts Integration Implementation Experiences of Elementary Educators

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

Amy E. Jefferson

Bachelor of Arts, Major Studio Arts

Concentration Elementary Education

University of Richmond, 1996

Master of Early Childhood Education

University of Georgia, 1997

Adria Hoffman, Ph.D. (Co-chair)

Joan Rhodes, Ph.D. (Co-chair)

Committee Members:

Lisa Abrams, Ph.D.

Lisa Donovan, Ph.D.

Yiwen Wei, Ph.D.

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia  
November 2022



## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to the educators who participated in this study. You are making a difference in the lives of children. Your drive to integrate the arts is changing the learning experience and opening possibilities for the future. I greatly respect and appreciate your efforts to create a classroom experience where all types of learners feel motivated, valued, and engaged in meaningful learning.

## **Acknowledgments**

Dr. Adria Hoffman has seen my name displayed in her inbox more than I would like to admit. The words thank you are not enough to express how much I appreciate her time, advice, sharing of resources, and interest in supporting the success of this project even after a job change. Dr. Hoffman's feedback during every stage of the process and her attention to detail helped create a clear and coherent study. In addition, the suggestion to incorporate exhibit questions throughout the study and invite participants to share artifacts helped illustrate what arts integration looks like in their classrooms.

Dr. Joan Rhodes, thank you for graciously joining this team during the home stretch. I very much appreciate your willingness to help support my success by taking on multiple responsibilities as my advisor and co-chair. Your positive attitude and answers to my questions helped reduce my worry about bringing the study to completion.

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include the artifacts, such as photos of students engaged in learning through the arts that truly captured implementation in practice.

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No part of this journey would have been possible without my family. To my parents, Betty and Larry, thank you for supporting my interest in the arts while I was growing up and allowing me to pursue my extracurricular and academic interests. Thank you for patiently listening to me talk about my coursework and research. I very much appreciate your love, consistent support, and continued interest. To my dear children, Riley, the composer, and CJ, the visual artist, the intense love you both have for the arts further drives my desire to make them accessible to all children. I am so sorry for the events I have had to miss. Thank you both for hanging in there with positive attitudes even when you were beyond done with mom being busy with schoolwork. I love you both more than you know.

Most importantly, to my husband, Jeff, you are my person. Thank you for putting up with my absence at soccer tournaments, team family gatherings, and sometimes life during this process, and for your many work and personal sacrifices. I know it has been a lot. You have truly earned the title Best Dad Ever over the past three-plus years. None of this would have been possible without your love, support, flexibility, and understanding. Thank you for patiently listening to me, reading my work, and believing in me. There are not enough words.

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine how elementary teachers applied their professional learning to integrate arts in the classroom. The research questions guiding the study included: (1) What content, skills, and understandings do teachers transfer from professional learning to practice? and (2) How do teachers navigate the implementation of arts integration? Knowles' (1978) Adult Learning Theory was used to examine how meeting the needs of teachers as adult learners during professional learning influenced the implementation experience.

A case study design employing qualitative data collection methods such as focus groups, individual interviews, and the sharing of artifacts from practice was used to better understand the knowledge transferred from professional learning to practice and the influences on these participants' actions during implementation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Four participants were purposefully selected to ensure they work with Prek-5 students, have attended professional learning for arts integration through the same organization, and planned to employ arts integration methods in the spring of 2022. Transcripts were analyzed through memoing, inductive hand-coding, and the development of themes, while shared artifacts informed the understanding of participant responses.

The central finding of this study suggests that the use of an experience-based instructional approach during professional learning for arts integration supports the acquisition and transfer of new knowledge to practice. This finding is significant because it suggests implications for the field of arts integration and adult learning. Specifically, being in the role of a student while immersed in the arts helps teachers acquire and transfer specific arts concepts, skills, and understandings to practice, thus expanding their instructional capacity to provide meaningful learning for students. Other key points of significance in the findings show that the

variation in the support these participants received and the obstacles they faced did not influence whether implementation occurred, only to what degree. Similarly, the participant's district, building leadership, and subject/teaching responsibility appeared to influence the support received and the obstacles faced. Recommendations for further research suggest a more extended timeframe without restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic to allow the researcher to develop an increased understanding of implementation through classroom visits and observation of arts integration in practice.

*Keywords:* arts integration, professional learning, arts integration implementation studies

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background

I did not plan to become an educator. School had always been limiting, frustrating, and uninspiring. As a studio art major, I envisioned a future working in museums or advertising. However, the universe had other plans. So, when I found myself teaching elementary school, it seemed a natural fit to include the arts when teaching other subjects. The diversity of student ethnicity, culture, and ability also made it apparent that innovative methods were essential to increase student engagement in learning while also meeting the needs of all students. However, without specific professional learning for employing methods to teach through the arts, I did not know that the approach I employed had a name: *arts integration*. As defined by the Kennedy Center's Changing Education Through the Arts (CETA) program, "arts integration is an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject and meets evolving objectives in both" (Silverstein & Layne, 2010, p. 1). When using an arts-integrated approach, I observed heightened student engagement and concept understanding, which drove me to wonder why integrated methods are not used in more classrooms. Through conversations and observations of colleagues, I found educators are often aware of the value of arts integration and intrigued by the possibilities integrated learning provides but profess a lack of knowledge, ability, and confidence to implement such methods. These experiences led me to question whether professional learning for arts integration results in changes to teacher practice and how teachers' experiences when implementing arts integration influences the transfer of professional learning to practice.

## **Rationale**

Learning in the arts and across disciplines makes knowledge more accessible and meaningful by engaging the whole child and encouraging connections (Bordelon, 2010; Marshall, 2019). However, as arts philosopher Maxine Greene (1995) observed, “standards, assessment, outcomes, and achievement: these concepts are the currency of educational discussion today” (p. 9). Student access to teachers capable of using methods that encourage fluid and innovative thinking becomes essential as the climate of accountability in general education classrooms moves toward assessing learning in more culturally responsive ways, such as project-based assessment. Arts integration has the potential to support schools’ multiple assessment goals by providing opportunities for authentic, culturally responsive measurement of learning. When effectively implemented, arts-integrated methods can center culture to provide authentic, culturally responsive instruction, learning, and assessment (Hardiman, 2019); however, not all educators know how to implement arts-integrated methods effectively. Because a paradigm shift to traditional teaching methods is required, educators need structured professional learning for arts integration that covers planning, facilitating, and assessment approaches (Hardiman, 2019; Hartle et al., 2015; Kulasegaram & Rangachari, 2018; National Education Association, 2002-2019; Reif & Grant, 2010). Darling-Hammond et al., (2017) defines,

Effective professional development as structured professional learning that results in changes to teacher knowledge and practices, and improvements in student learning outcomes. We conceptualize professional learning as a product of both externally provided and job-embedded activities that increase teachers’ knowledge and help them change their instructional practice in ways that support student learning. (p. 2)



A better understanding of effective implementation of professional learning for arts integration could allow teachers to make learning more meaningful and culturally responsive (Koch & Thompson, 2017).

The intentional planning of arts integration throughout the curriculum provides students the opportunity to explore and express their thinking, connections, and understandings in ways unhindered by language or the generation of the written word (Foreman & Fyfe, 2012). When an educator's instructional methods connect the student's background knowledge with new knowledge, students can better build understanding (Biermeier, 2015). For example, teachers in the early childhood schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, believed that children should “construct their own knowledge through a carefully planned curriculum that engages and builds upon the child's current knowledge, recognizing that knowledge cannot simply be provided for the child” (Biermeier, 2015, p. 73). Similarly, educational philosopher John Dewey believed that the arts support these meaningful connections across disciplines, since knowledge grows through experience and, when demonstrating “learning dramatically, visually, or musically,” students make choices that require a thorough conceptual understanding (Dewey, 1934, 1938; Lynch, 2007, p. 37).

Under the Kennedy administration in 1962, The Arts in Education movement highlighted the importance of all students learning in the arts (Madeja, 1992). Soon after, the National Endowment for the Arts provided direction and guidance in arts education, prompting educators to look at changes to curriculum development to make learning more meaningful (Pakieser, 2017). Fiske's (1999) *Champions of Change* report also drew correlations between academic achievement and study of the arts suggesting that “learning in and through the arts can help level the playing field” for young children (p. 11). In addition, research suggested integrating the arts

with core content learning increased engagement, especially for students from low-income backgrounds due to their feeling more connected to learning and transforming “the learning environment into places of discovery and achievement” (Miller & Bogatova, 2018, p. 4).

Reif and Grant (2010) explained that teachers who employ arts integration methods could potentially expand learning opportunities by effectively meeting the needs of all students in ways traditional methods cannot. Ludwig et al. (2017) claimed that the National Education Association believes arts integration is maybe the best approach for educating the whole child. Therefore, as time allocated for assessing state content standards increases and arts education decreases, the practice of arts integration becomes even more important to consider (Bowen & Kisida, 2017; Grey, 2010; Shaw, 2018).

Arts integration has the potential to support schools in serving multiple assessment goals by providing opportunities for authentic methods that also address the issue of culturally responsive measurement of learning (Riordan, et al., 2019). Therefore, a better understanding of teachers’ experiences during implementation of arts integration will benefit practice by helping educators recognize the “complexities” of personal and structural challenges to transferring arts integration learning to practice (LaJevic, 2013a, p. 16). A better understanding of implementation in the literature may also influence professional learning program planning for arts integration and increase the use of arts integration in classrooms. If educators can effectively employ more culturally responsive practices, such as arts integration, opportunities for students to express their layers of understanding may become more accessible, and educators might then be able to discover what students know (Bautista et al., 2016, p. 619; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Donovan & Anderberg, 2020; Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015). Few studies in the field of arts integration have focused on the implementation experience after professional learning which

may hinder student access to integrated teaching and learning. This study could build on the existing research and add a missing perspective: an understanding of arts integration implementation experiences of elementary educators.

At the elementary level, students typically spend most of the instructional day with one teacher, who is responsible for making pedagogical choices about how students experience learning (LaJevic, 2013a). In addition, because elementary educators are responsible for teaching social skills, the arts are particularly valuable in the early years of schooling; studies have shown that integrating the arts on the elementary level promotes social and emotional development, influencing confidence, communication, attitudes towards learning, and academic achievement (Brouillette, 2009; Deasy, 2002).

Culturally responsive teaching methods such as learning through the arts in early childhood classrooms can help students feel valued for their background experiences which leads to increased confidence (Purnell et al., 2007). Furthermore, providing opportunities for students to make connections between core content and background understanding through multiple avenues of expression unhindered by language such as drawing, dancing, singing, or acting encourages student diversity. “The intuitive need to express ourselves is precisely why the arts are an ideal vehicle to develop language, deliver content, and encourage academic exploration in school in culturally responsive ways” (Reif & Grant, 2010, p. 101).

However, as Darling-Hammond (1994) suggests, simply using innovative practices does not make classrooms equitable. To encourage a shift in teacher practice and increase student access to knowledge, educators require effective professional learning in culturally responsive practices such as arts integration, so methods translate into practice, “making learning more personally meaningful” (Gay, 2018, p. 32). Effective professional learning for arts integration

has the potential to promote the implementation of arts integration methods (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; Ingram & Seashore, 2003).

Research on professional learning suggests that professional learning, supports, and challenges—influence the transfer of learning into practice. During professional learning, the design of the instructional model contributes to the way the content is transferred: Presenting the same information in a different way may lead to different outcomes (Saraniero et al., 2014). For example, an experience approach centers on the intentional practice of arts-based skills (Lowenberg & Foranzi, 2009), whereas a partnership approach nurtures a relationship between local universities and/or art-based organizations and the participants who they are supporting (Best, 2017). By comparison, a schoolwide reform approach promotes arts-integrated teaching and learning throughout all grade levels and classrooms within a school (Biscoe & Wilson, 2015). Professional learning is only one influence on implementation; there are additional influences that can facilitate or present challenges to transfer such as perceived value of the arts, lack of confidence and knowledge, as well as structural challenges including lack of time and resources (Hipp & Sulentic Dowell, 2019; LaJevic, 2013a).

These three influences are interrelated during the implementation experience of a teacher and impact how the teacher navigates their experience. For example, a teacher may want to overcome the lack of time to complete assignments and want to reimagine the way in which they make use of time by sending art assignments home for optional completion. This may have the unintended consequence of conveying the message to students and parents that arts are an extra activity and not essential for classroom learning (LaJevic, 2013a).

By examining the implementation experience, the focus of this study was on the transfer of professional learning into classroom practice. By identifying challenges, educators may

develop strategies to overcome roadblocks faced during implementation and increase their ability to provide effective integrated learning for students. Findings from this study might also inform arts integration program planning for in-service and preservice teachers and begin to encourage educators to welcome change to traditional methods to better meet the needs of students (Burnaford et al., 2001). To implement arts integration methods in the classroom, teachers must possess knowledge of specific arts skills and understand how to employ non-traditional methods. To gain such knowledge, Ludwig et al. (2017) explain that professional learning experiences should include opportunities to practice technical arts skills and lesson implementation. As Sandholtz (2002) explains,

The quality of teacher learning experiences is no less important than the quality of student learning experiences. Similar to their students, teachers appreciate opportunities to explore, reflect, collaborate with peers, work on authentic learning tasks, and engage in hands-on, active learning. Just as teachers strive to meet the needs of each individual student, professional development should aim to meet the needs of each individual teacher.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine the arts integration implementation experiences of elementary educators. The research questions used to guide this study focused on the experiences of educators when implementing professional learning for arts integration. The central research questions for the study include:

1. What content, skills, and understandings do teachers transfer from professional learning to practice?
2. How do teachers navigate the implementation of arts integration?

## Research Background

The literature supports myriad benefits of arts integration while explaining the challenges to implementation and access. By exploring professional learning models such as experience, partnership, and schoolwide professional learning approaches, studies in this review are also used to examine the promotion of transfer to practice. Throughout the review, the lens of professional growth is used to consider how the unique needs of teachers as adult learners must be met for professional learning to influence teaching methods (Knowles, 1978).

The National Commission for Social, Emotional, and Academic Development claimed that learning is more accessible to students when teaching methods extend beyond academic learning to address the needs of the whole child (Berger et al., n.d.). As Farrington et al. (2019) further explained,

In a country that is both rich in diversity and deeply divided socially and politically, with stark and widening economic inequality, many are calling upon schools to teach empathy, social responsibility, engagement, and the skills to communicate with another across differences. (p. 6)

According to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Gay's (2010) culturally responsive pedagogy, purposeful selection and effective instructional practices can enhance learning due to the relationship between culture and development. For example, elementary educators can facilitate strengthened complex thinking abilities in students by selecting instructional practices such as arts integration that prioritize student culture. Building new knowledge on what a student already knows supports the development of meaningful understanding (Calarco, 2014; Gredler & Shields, 2008; Wertsch, 1993). Although research shows that students from low-income schools benefit the most from integrated learning, they

often have limited opportunities due to disparities in access to teachers with high-level skill sets and resource allocations, creating perpetual opportunity gaps (Fiske, 1999; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Miller & Bogatova, 2018; Milner, 2017). As Deasy (2002) explained, because arts integration teaching uses multiple modalities and provides a choice of expression, learning is more likely to be accessible to all learners. Hence, a need exists for specific professional learning in arts integration because integrated teaching and learning demands a teacher possess pedagogical skills beyond those employed when using a single discipline approach (Parsons, 2004). Chapter 2 will provide a full review of the literature.

### **Methodology**

To answer the research questions guiding this study, I used a case study design with qualitative methods since Baxter and Jack (2008) explain that qualitative data collection methods enable the researcher to gain a more complete "understanding of the phenomenon being studied" (p. 554). Similarly, Easton (2008) argues the importance of teachers having an opportunity to share their experiences so other educators have "access to reliable, valuable, and direct sources of information" (p. 760). Algozzine & Hancock (2017) also explain that since case study employs multiple sources of information such as quotes from interviews or focus groups and the sharing of documents or artifacts accompanied by explanation this method "brings to life the complexity of the many variables inherent in the phenomena being studied" (p. 16). In addition, I purposefully selected four elementary classroom teachers who attended the same professional learning for arts integration to reduce the possible impact of different arts integration learning experiences on implementation. The use of focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews allowed me to center the study of the phenomena and adjust questions to better

capture each participant's context and unique experience by "responding to emergent insights" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 88).

With the current constraints on teachers of time and need for social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I selected a limited timeframe—spring 2022, and a virtual platform for data collection (Santana et al., 2021). To increase my understanding of the experiences of educators during arts integration implementation, I examined recurring themes in the memos, the transcripts from the two focus groups, and the interviews to develop codes for analysis. Chapter 3 will expand on the methodology process.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter presents a review of literature on topics relevant to professional learning for arts integration and the influences on elementary educators' transfer of learning to practice. First, learning in the arts is explained through examples related to policy, funding, and student access. Then, the literature is used to show how arts integration can be a culturally responsive teaching method that makes learning more accessible to students (Gay, 2018). Next, because it is important to consider the learning needs of teachers, Knowles's (1978) Adult Learning Theory (ALT) of andragogy is explained to identify the six assumptions of adult learners and the four principles that promote adult learning. Because the literature indicates that research focuses on the value of arts-integrated learning for students, leaving questions about best practices in professional learning to support arts integration implementation unanswered, I examine three arts integration instructional approaches—experience, partnership, and schoolwide—through the lens of ALT and the reasons for creating Communities of practice (Best, 2017; Diaz & McKenna, 2017; Donohue & Stuart, 2010). I also describe professional learning programs that illustrate the different characteristics of each instructional approach that address the influences affecting implementation such as personal and structural challenges. Finally, I identify the need for further research to examine the experiences of teachers during implementation of professional learning for arts integration to better understand transfer.

### **Learning in the Arts**

According to curriculum theorist Elliot Eisner, learning in the arts broadens the options for how information is represented (e.g., auditorily, visually or kinesthetically), leading to a multiplicity of interactions with information and increasing a learner's ability to understand the world (as cited by Bresler, 1995). However, federal policies and funding mechanisms over the

last two decades have significantly reduced opportunities for student art education. For example, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and 2009's Race to the Top program put a stronger focus on testing and assessment and, as Pederson (2007) explained, reduced funding and scheduling for non-tested subjects such as the arts (Tutt, 2014). As Bassok et al. (2016) argued, when standardized testing is the focus, non-tested subjects such as the arts suffer. In fact, initial state plans reported for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) showed that only "eight states included arts within key areas of their state accountability systems" (Tuttle, 2018. p. 1).

Based on research from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2019), racial and ethnic diversity increased among U.S. school-aged children from 2000 to 2017. For example, the percentage of Hispanic students increased from 16 to 25 percent, students from multi-race backgrounds from 2 to 4 percent, and Asian students from 3 to 5 percent. Conversely, the percentage of school-aged White students decreased from 63 to 51 percent. As Easton (2008) argues, educators need to learn so they can change their instructional practices and better meet the evolving needs of today's students. Thus, the increased diversity of learners in classrooms warrants the imminent need for instructional practices that are culturally responsive (Gay, 2018).

Viewing culture as an asset creates a sense that a learner is valued (Donovan & Anderberg, 2020). In schools with a climate centered on student culture, teachers make instructional choices that connect background knowledge with new content to support conceptual understanding (Hammond, 2015). As Reif and Grant (2010) explained, valuing a student's culture is essential; however, teachers must be mindful that students within a given culture are also individuals with unique learning needs and preferences. These multiple layers further support the need for teachers to expand traditional teaching practices beyond a one size fits all approach. As Eisner (1998) argued, embracing a culturally responsive approach to teaching such

as arts integration leads to ancillary learning outcomes in the arts. For example, a learning environment where knowledge is accessible to all students provides opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse learners to process information in ways that invite understanding by centering culture.

Eisner's (1998) three-tiered model of arts outcomes explains the arts' value for students and draw attention to the connection between the arts and culture. The three tiers are arts-based outcomes (learning arts content and skills), arts-related outcomes (using artistic skills to better describe and understand core content), and ancillary outcomes (the benefits of using the arts and core content simultaneously to gain deeper conceptual understandings).

During interviews with American and Brazilian educators and artists, Wooton (2008) found that integrating learning and the arts with multi-aged students in Brazil helped create a culture in which learners were valued as multifaceted individuals in the school family. Such a culture of learning established a family of learners, which is intentionally more interdependent than a community. Furthermore, integrating the arts connects students with new knowledge and inserts joy into learning through the arts (Reif & Grant, 2010).

Although arts integration has the potential to align with culturally responsive practices, effective implementation does not always occur. For example, when schools fail to create a feeling of family, some students may feel that only some are members leaving others on the outside, hindering confidence, relationships, engagement, and academic learning (Wooton, 2008). In addition, when teachers merely deposit knowledge without building upon their students' background experiences, they assume that all students begin with the same understandings (Freire, 1970). Similarly, inserting the arts into a lesson without purposefully planning connections to students' background and understandings and relevancy to core content

creates a surface level experience for the learner, which diminishes the potential for deeper connections (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006; Wooton, 2008).

Culturally responsive education through arts integration is more than simple additions to the curriculum with some art on the side; instead, a different perspective is needed. In other words, teachers hold the potential to change how students build knowledge and create meaning, if they know how to effectively implement arts integrated practices. Thus, an understanding of how teachers navigate the implementation of arts integration is essential.

### **Adult Learning Theory**

Adult Learning Theory, or andragogy, acknowledges the science of cognitive development and life experience that influence the knowledge acquisition of adult learners (Knowles, 1978). While pedagogy is commonly known as the science or art of educating children, andragogy is the parallel approach for educating adults. Adults learn differently than children, and thus instructors must consider their unique professional learning needs (Barnum, 2017). Acknowledging the teachers' needs as adult learners can influence the effectiveness of arts integration professional learning and their decision making during the transfer to practice.

Knowles's (1984) ALT is rooted in six assumptions of adult learners (see Table 1) that led to the formation of four principles to promote adult learning. First, adults need a sense of ownership in their learning through planning or evaluation. Second, learning activities need to be experience-based. Third, interest in learning connects to understanding the relevance of learning. Finally, adult learning should address a problem and not just deliver content (Kearsley, 2010). The need for teachers to meet both the needs of diverse student learners and achievement expectations further warrants the importance of employing professional learning that is meaningful to teachers as adult learners (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). As such, ALT can help

arts integration program planners identify and address the learning needs of teachers when designing programs in order to better promote transfer of professional learning to practice (Best, 2017). For example, Duma (2014) explained the importance of employing an active, social approach with direct relevance to classroom practice to meet the needs of adult learners when designing arts integration professional learning experiences.

**Table 1**

*Adult Learning Theory's Six Assumptions*

Assumptions	Explanation
The Need to Know	Adult learners want to know the purpose of new learning.
The Learner's Self-Concept	A learner's self-concept shifts to one of more self-direction with age.
Adult Learner Experience	The background knowledge of adult learners increases and influences new learning.
Readiness to Learn	With adults' readiness to learn, becomes more connected to social roles.
Orientation to Learning	Adult perspectives on knowledge application shift to more immediate use, changing the purpose of education from content acquisition to problem-solving.
Motivation to Learn	The reasons for learning shift to often more intrinsic motivators as learners age.

*Note:* Based on Knowles (1978) Adult Learning Theory Model

**Professional Learning for Culturally Responsive Teaching**

The intent of professional learning for arts integration is to present instructional content while also teaching educators how to promote student engagement in meaningful learning (Best, 2017). As Donovan and Anderberg explained (2020), “the arts can provide potential bridges between the curriculum and students’ needs, interests and learning styles” (p. 34). Research points to professional learning having the potential to teach educators arts integrated methods

and equitable practices while including several key aspects of culturally responsive teaching: presenting content focused on equity and critical pedagogy, modeling of practices to promote equity, establishing a classroom environment where equity and inquiry are valued, and including student feedback on the teacher's practice to fully understand the impact of professional learning on student learning (Riordan et al., 2019).

Riordan et al. (2019) further explained the importance of providing teachers with opportunities to engage in practices that they will later employ in their classrooms. For example, "Socratic seminars" and "turn and talk" activities encourage social interactions whereby learners discuss, debate, and consider different perspectives (Gay, 2018). Their findings also showed the importance of centering equity and viewing teachers as collaborators throughout the entire experience, including planning, professional learning, and implementation, to increase the effectiveness of teacher learning and potentially decrease the disparity in their students' learning opportunities (Best, 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Riordan et al., 2019).

Effective professional learning has the potential to guide teachers in helping "students of a variety of abilities and backgrounds to understand high-level content and express their knowledge in a variety of ways" (Riordan et al., 2019, p. 11). For example, when educators effectively employ arts integration practices, students make connections to content that are meaningful while simultaneously meeting standardized testing expectations (Sheehan, 2011). A unique aspect of Riordan et al.'s (2019) research was using student voice to better understand the impact of professional learning on teacher practice. As Moje (2007) explained, there is no one set of practices to promote equity for diverse learners and practices should be adjusted to meet the needs of specific learners. Moje's point further supports the importance of student voice.

When educators train in arts integration, their knowledge of strategies and overall pedagogical expertise expand. For example, teachers may learn ways to incorporate concepts from math and music that support a deeper understanding of patterns, thus creating possibilities for students to connect ideas in ways not previously available in a classroom setting (Vitulli et al., 2013). This expansion increases an educators' ability to connect learning across disciplines and beyond standards leading to more inclusive learning and authentic assessment of student understanding (Best, 2017; Greene, 2013; Reck & Wald, 2018). As Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) explained, effective professional learning “results in changes to teacher knowledge and practices, and improvements in student learning outcomes” (p. 2). They continued by suggesting that to increase effectiveness, professional learning should be structured (i.e., planned with built-in support and follow-up to support teacher learning) to intentionally include content focus, active learning, expert support/coaching, collaboration, reflection, feedback, modeling, and ongoing support (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

### **Professional Learning Instructional Approaches for Arts Integration**

Professional learning for arts integration is essential because educators interested in integrating the arts often feel unprepared for purposeful integration, making it challenging to align standards and meet goals across disciplines (Brophy & Alleman, 1991; Carpenter & Gandara, 2018; Mackin et al., 2017; May & Robinson, 2016). In addition, many teachers did not experience arts integration as students resulting in their using the arts as an activity, not “a way of thinking through and knowing” (LaJevic, 2013a, p. 3). However, Donahue and Stuart (2010) explained “appropriate” (p. 147) professional learning that is organized, intentional, and relevant can increase teachers' comfort in their ability to implement arts integration (Burnaford, 2010; Leysath & Bronowski, 2016; Scripp, 2012).

There are different types of professional learning programs for arts integration which have distinct characteristics but may also share overlapping traits (Southworth, 2016). For the purpose of this review, I divided these programs into three main instructional approach categories: experience (learning by doing), partnership (learning through collaboration), and schoolwide (learning with a unified focus). In the next section, I examine how the characteristics of these different instructional approaches meet the needs of adult learners (Best, 2017; Knowles, 1978). Then, for each approach, I describe arts integration professional learning models to illustrate the approach's characteristics. An understanding of these different approaches provides an awareness of the possible differences in the backgrounds of participants in my study and how professional learning characteristics may later influence how teachers navigate the implementation of arts integration.

### **Experience Approach**

When a professional learning program for arts integration is designed to employ an experience approach, teachers learn through actively engaging in arts integrated lessons (Dewey, 1938; Lowenberg & Foranzi, 2009; Mayes, 2019). An experience-based approach to professional learning supports the ALT principle that adults need learning activities to be experience-based (Kearsley, 2010). As Boy (2013) further explained, because knowing and understanding are different, teacher participation in the same types of integrated activities and practices (creating, collaborating, and performing) during professional learning promotes a deeper understanding of how theory translates into practice (Best, 2017). Research in adult learning also points to the importance of providing active engagement opportunities for teachers during professional learning (Sandholtz, 2002). For example, when teachers create projects or participate in activities before planning for their own classrooms, "learning is internalized and becomes part of a



person’s schema” leading to a deeper understanding of how and why to integrate the arts effectively (Barnum, 2017, p. 131). The Partners in the Arts (PIA) program at the University of Richmond and the CREATIONS project are examples of how the intentional use of an experiential approach supports implementation of the same experiences in practice.

In the PIA program, teaching artists lead arts integrated experiences—such as creating movement sequences to express the spectrum of personal feelings throughout the COVID-19 pandemic during summer institutes and workshops—to train local teachers in how to plan, implement, and assess learning in the arts. This type of hands-on, arts-integrated professional learning increased educators’ instructional skillsets leading to positive student responses to new teaching methods (Wynn & Harris, 2012). For example, using sketchbooks and observation during PIA professional learning enabled teachers to later guide sixth graders in connecting science and arts understanding using sketchbooks with the students reporting they were “excited,” “curious,” and motivated to provide feedback to classmates (Wynn & Harris, 2012, p. 46).

The CREATIONS project uses the same creative play and inquiry methods to deliver professional learning to educators as are used to teach students; the intent being for teachers to experience the process of learning and the method of instructional delivery. A new concept that fourth-grade teachers had not previously taught (particle physics) was used to guide teachers through the experience of teaching and learning through STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math + Arts). Without prior knowledge of how to teach this concept, the teachers became learners during multiple learning modules with activities involving hands-on exploration, inquiry, experimentation, and play. Conradt and Bogner (2020) suggested that professional learning experiences mirroring activities an educator may use in the classroom

increase understanding of integration methods; thus, they may be more successful implementing those methods. Their longitudinal study of 138 fourth-grade students found that student creativity and motivation increased after 8 months of weekly STEAM lessons. They attributed this finding to the educators' understanding of integration methods due to the use of the experience approach in the professional learning program.

### **Partnership Approach**

A partnership instructional approach to professional learning is a collaboration between classroom educators and an arts-based program that shares a sense of ownership for increasing student access to learning in the arts (Burnaford et al., 2007). Professional learning through a partnership approach supports the ALT principle that an adult's interest in learning is connected to understanding the relevance of learning (Kearsley, 2010). Professional learning for arts integration through art-based programs guides teachers toward acknowledging the value in the process of expressing conceptual understanding. Thus, when teachers understand the importance of encouraging creative processes in the classroom (e.g., brainstorming, designing, creating, evaluating, sharing), opportunities for students to make learning visible expand (Donahue & Stuart, 2010).

Partnerships between non-arts teachers and arts experts such as teaching artists, art specialists, and arts-based programs support teachers' understanding of the purpose behind the arts integration methods taught during professional learning, thus promoting transfer (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Dwyer, 2011; Vitulli et al., 2013). Understanding relevancy increases the potential to shift traditional instructional practices to more exploratory practices that invite personal and cross-disciplinary student connections (Best, 2017). As Diaz and McKenna (2017) explained, professional learning must provide teachers the opportunity to construct an

understanding of arts integration practices by “developing an ability to apply abstract concepts across disciplines seeing the connections that integration offers” (p. 10). The Intensive Development in Education through the Arts (IDEA) model and the Partnership for Arts Integration Research (PAIR) project illustrate how a partnership approach to professional learning for arts integration can influence teachers’ understanding of the importance of learning in the arts (Kearsley, 2010) by directly connecting professional learning to teacher practice through mentorship, coaching, and collaboration (Barnum, 2017).

The IDEA model uses workshops, collaboration, and ongoing support to build teacher capacity for arts-based instruction and an understanding of the value to learning in the arts when there is “an elegant fit” of arts and core content concepts (Burnaford et al., 2001/2009, p. 28). This partnership model extends professional learning beyond foundational arts and integration strategy workshops and into the classroom. Teachers select the type of teaching artist mentoring support (co-planning, co-teaching, modeling of strategies, or observation and feedback) that would best meet their needs. K–5 teachers participating in Garrett’s (2010) study reported their ability to reach diverse learners increased after receiving mentoring in their own classroom by an IDEA teaching artist for three years. Garret’s findings suggest that a partnership approach that connects professional learning workshops with coaching during implementation supports teacher understanding of the benefits of effective arts integration in practice and, therefore, the relevance of learning in the arts, leading to more informed planning, teaching, and assessment.

The Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) program connects artists, teachers, and researchers through arts integration professional learning projects to train teachers while examining the impact of learning in the arts. PAIR is a three-year CAPE project designed to increase teachers’ ability and understanding of how to use arts integration methods (Burnaford,

et al., 2009). Fourth- through sixth-grade teachers attended professional learning sessions and then collaborated with pairs of teaching artists who were assigned to six schools each (Scripp & Paradis, 2014). Through participation in action research, the teachers also learned how to conduct student portfolio conference interviews focused on topics such as the creative process, representation decisions, and relationships across disciplines to measure learning. The portfolio conference interviews conducted by CAPE facilitators served the purpose of assessing both student learning from integrated learning and teacher learning after professional learning and work with a teaching artist. The interviews began with the teacher explaining the project goals, after which the teacher observed a CAPE facilitator interviewing a student about selected works and learning connections. At the end of the interview, the teacher was asked to explain how the conference showed student learning through integration (Scripp & Paradis, 2014). The PAIR model demonstrates how the continuation of professional learning into the classroom provides opportunities for teacher growth through collaboration with an arts expert and how observation connected to reflection leads to a better understanding of the relevance of arts integration to capturing student understandings through the arts.

### **Schoolwide Approach**

When using a schoolwide instructional approach, learning in the arts becomes an integral part of the school mission, influencing scheduling, resources, and teacher support through a unified commitment to change. When ongoing professional learning continues in the classroom, the entire school transforms into “a community of creators” (Seidel et al., 2009, p. viii).

Examination of professional learning models for arts integration that use a schoolwide approach such as A+ Schools and Turnaround Arts shows additional ongoing implementation support for teachers due to the unified move toward instructional change. A schoolwide reform approach to

professional learning for arts integration supports the ALT principles that learning should address a problem and not just deliver content (Burnaford et al., 2009; Kearsley, 2010).

The Turnaround Arts model is intended to counteract the fundamental challenges of high-poverty schools. Arts-integrated teaching can positively affect student engagement and learning, especially in low-income school populations; however, disparities in student access to learning in the arts exist (Kimball, 2006; Miller et al., 2016). To address this problem of inequity, schools awarded a school improvement grant due to performing in lowest five percent of schools in the state receive resources for ongoing, strategic professional learning in integration techniques, administration coaching, connections with artists, the establishment of community arts partnerships, and an arts leadership team to oversee implementation, collaboration, and professional learning delivery (Stoelinga et al., 2015). In a study of eight elementary and middle schools, Stoelinga et al. (2015) found that Turnaround Arts schools with a high degree of effective arts integration employed “high-quality professional development opportunities” such as professional learning groups, artist coaching, and ongoing collaboration to promote implementation (p. 16). Effective integration was demonstrated by increases in students’ math and reading proficiency, overall academic improvement, increased attendance, and decline in disciplinary action. Data sources included educator interviews, questionnaires, observations, surveys, and student attendance, discipline, and achievement data.

The A+ model provides an opportunity for ownership and the planning of professional learning, which addresses one of Knowles’s four principles of adult learners (as cited by Kearsley, 2010). For example, teachers can request more professional learning in specific areas, such as employing art integration methods to support diverse learners and communicating integrated learning goals with families (Barry, 2010). The A+ Schools model supports all types

of schools in promoting a schoolwide culture of creativity throughout the curriculum and thus requires a commitment of all faculty and staff to an arts-integrated approach (Miller et al., 2016). professional learning continues beyond summer institute sessions to include ongoing support for curriculum planning, innovative approaches to assessment, collaboration with artists, and access to arts resources (Burnaford & Scripp, 2013; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). In an examination of six Oklahoma A+ Schools and six control group schools, Kimball (2006) found students in A+ Schools had higher Grade 3–5 Core Curriculum Test scores in math and reading performance, suggesting a schoolwide approach to professional learning for arts integration may have a positive impact on student learning (Miller et al., 2016).

### **Communities of Practice**

Communities of practice (CoPs) are described by Wenger (2011) as, “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p. 1). According to the 2011 report of the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, the use of CoPs may help promote arts integration in classrooms. The report suggests that collaboration between the different arts integration program models could provide an opportunity “to identify best practices in arts integration, organize curriculum units, bring together training approaches, and create a common frame for collecting evaluation results” (President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 2011, p. 5-6). The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) comprised of leaders in the arts and learning from across the nation, is an example of a CoP created to further develop the field of teacher education in arts integration by increasing the capacity of teachers to implement integration methods and student access to learning in the arts (Diaz & McKenna, 2017). Since 2005 AEP has worked to share what they

have learned about professional learning approaches for teachers and building administration to extend arts integration into practice.

### **Influences on Implementation of Arts Integration**

Professional learning experiences for arts integration are essential to provide a space for teachers to collaborate, explore, and understand the potential possibilities for their students when learning in the arts (Hartle et al., 2015). However, a confluence of influences can impact what content, skills and understandings teachers transfer from professional learning and practice and how the implementation of arts integration is navigated. Personal barriers, such as a lack of arts knowledge and experiences or low confidence, and structural barriers, such as school schedule, curricular constraints, and limited resources, may prevent educators from using approaches they learned in professional learning to shift traditional teaching methods to an arts-integrated approach (Charland, 2011; McBee, 2000). A lack of background for learning in the arts can lead to personal barriers such as fear of changing traditional practice (LaJevic, 2013a) and structural barriers resulting from “deeply entrenched school cultures and attitudes that support more traditionally segmented, by-the-book approaches” (McBee, 2000, p. 259). Structural and personal barriers such as “national, state and district curriculum standards, as well as teachers’ behaviors, assumptions, beliefs, interests, values, and dispositions” hinder arts integration transfer (Krug & Cohen-Evron, 2000, p. 259).

#### **Personal Barriers**

Teachers come to the classroom with different K–12 and university experiences that influence their arts background knowledge and confidence for teaching in the arts (LaJevic, 2013a). As Simpson Steele (2013) explained, “teachers seem to hold a contradictory state of mind; the arts are valuable but a low priority for teaching and learning” (p. 148). Recent research

in arts integration professional learning suggests that when teachers undervalue the arts, the purpose and relevance for employing an innovative approach is lost to them (Brouillete, 2012; Hipp & Sulentic Dowell, 2019; LaJevic, 2013a).

### ***Disposition***

The teacher's disposition toward learning in the arts impacts their interest level toward arts integration. Professional learning for arts integration should begin by addressing "pre-existing structural, cultural, and dispositional barriers to teacher professional development that may defeat program acceptance and persistence" (Charland, 2011, p. 2). Strand (2006) found that educators who believed in the value of creative integrated learning and viewed collaboration as essential for implementation were often steadfast in their belief in arts integration, unafraid to take risks, open to change, and reliable. In international studies across varied contexts Bereczki and Kárpáti (2018) found teacher dispositions about creativity also influence classroom practice. Hartle et al. (2015) further explained that teachers who effectively implement arts integrated practices into the classroom know that the construction of knowledge and skills occurs through doing.

### ***Arts Knowledge and Experience***

Teachers' perceptions of insufficient personal arts knowledge (LaJevic, 2013a; Strand, 2006) or lack of experience learning in the arts can create challenges because specific knowledge of the arts and core content is needed for successful implementation (Oreck, 2004; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001). Difficulty aligning standards across disciplines results in an inability to meet learning goals across content areas, leaving arts learning at a surface level and failing to reach the benefits of integrated learning (Appel, 2006; Bresler, 1995; LaJevic, 2013a; May & Robinson, 2016).



An educator's level of arts knowledge directly influences their confidence in integrating the arts (Battersby & Cave, 2014; Hipp & Sulentic Dowell, 2019; Lee et al., 2015). Feelings of anxiety or low comfort levels may lead to an ornamental use of the arts instead of purposeful integrated learning (LaJevic, 2013b). Whereas positive art experiences increase confidence to integrate and use integration strategies learned during professional learning (Lummis et al., 2014; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005), negative experiences can hinder both the quantity and quality of arts-integrated teaching (Barry, 1992).

Fowler (1996) suggested a lack of school arts experiences leads to teachers without an arts background on which to build. It can take a classroom teacher years to acquire confidence in their ability to teach skills in the areas of music, theater, visual arts, and dance while effectively integrating those skills with the core content curriculum (Andrews, 2008; Patteson, 2002a; Upitit & Smithrim, 2003). For these reasons, the Collaborations: Teachers and Artists (CoTA) and Honolulu Theater for Youth (HTY) models both begin by teaching arts concepts to provide teachers with a background of understanding before teaching them how to align standards across disciplines (Doyle et al., 2014; Simpson Steele, 2013).

Research supports the importance of ongoing active arts learning from artists, suggesting it is the most productive way for educators to bridge the knowledge gap across disciplines and increase understanding of arts practices and readiness for planning when employing an arts integration approach (Best, 2017; Patteson, 2002b, 2003). For example, HTY teachers indicated that watching the interactions between the teaching artist and their students was essential to understanding art skills and concepts and how to react to students' questions and responses to integrated learning during implementation (Schlaack & Steele, 2018).

## **Structural Barriers**

Charland (2011) explained that any change to teacher practice faces different types of barriers. Structural barriers of leadership support, time, and resources are ultimately controlled by “social, economic, and political forces that create educational limits and possibilities for daily teaching” (Krug & Cohen-Evron, 2000). Additionally, because the arts are often undervalued (LaJevic, 2013a) they are vulnerable to funding cuts in a climate when the focus is on testing and assessment (Hetland et al., 2007).

## ***Leadership Support***

Scripp & Paradise (2014) found that it takes at least two years of effective, continuous professional learning for arts integration methods to show an influence on student learning. Research also indicates that administrative support for ongoing professional learning such as scheduled collaborative planning time and access to arts resources enables teachers to collaborate fully, plan, implement, assess, and reflect (Bellisario & Donovan, 2012; Purnell, 2004; van Eman et al., 2008). However, Purnell’s (2004) survey of 75 elementary teachers found a reoccurring lack of administrative support for arts integration. This finding suggests administrators focused on tested subjects due to not knowing of the achievement gains possible with supported arts-integrated learning or because, as McBee (2000) explained, “school cultures and attitudes” are stuck in traditional methods (p. 259).

Research found that museums can create professional learning experiences that challenge school leaders to think creatively about change (Kaimal et al., 2016; Monk, 2013). In Kaimal et al. 's (2016) qualitative study of 14 intern and veteran principals, participants in a class entitled *Art of Observation* experienced the value of arts integration and the importance of supporting innovative teaching methods. Led by teaching artists, leadership participants observed, reacted

to, discussed, and created art in a museum setting. The program was elective, and some of the participants chose not to attend. Nevertheless, participant observations and interviews revealed these personal professional learning experiences with art and creativity broadened leaders' understanding of the value arts have in learning, the range of possibilities for change within a school, and the support needed by teachers to employ innovative methods such as arts integration.

### ***Assessment and Evaluation***

The lack of assessment of arts-integrated learning perpetuates the assumption that the arts hold less value than tested subjects (Bresler, 1995; LaJevic, 2013a). As Donovan and Anderberg (2020) explained, educators often continue to use “tried and true” methods to measure student learning because they are unaware of the possible outcomes of using the arts to evidence understanding (p. 47). In fact, using art-integrated methods such as performance-based assessment, a relevant and purposeful application of student skills and understanding, enables students to authentically demonstrate understanding (Donovan & Anderberg, 2020; Hardiman, 2019). Expressing understanding of a concept through performance (e.g., a diorama, a dance, a skit, a song) provides more opportunities for learners challenged by the standardized format of traditional assessments (Best, 2017). Additionally, teachers “discover abilities and capabilities, which would not have otherwise been revealed” (Barnum, 2017, p. 129)

Professional learning models such as PIA train teachers to use a planning framework for aligning arts and core content standards with assessment. The evidence section of the framework encourages purposeful assessment, which is determined during the planning stage. Using a backward design approach ensures clarity in identifying learning goals and selecting appropriate experiences to support student success (Donovan & Anderberg, 2020; Wiggins & McTighe,

1998). Similarly, CAPE continually supports educators in understanding the value of arts integration through strategic coaching in designing innovative learning experiences, documenting the outcome of the approach, and assessing learning (Burnaford, 2007).

Ongoing program evaluation of both teacher and student learning measures also aids in maintaining professional learning program effectiveness (Burnaford, 2007; Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; Gandini, 2005; Gardner & Rinaldi, 2001; Mason & Steedly, 2008); however, longitudinal measurement of student outcomes is often complicated by high educator turnover, redistricting, and student movement between schools (McBee, 2000; Miller et al., 2016; Miller & Bogatova, 2018; Stoelinga et al., 2015).

### *Time*

The most cited challenge to arts integration is time (Hipp & Sulentic Dowell, 2019; May, 2013; McBee, 2000). As Day (1999) and Patteson et al. (2002a) explained, change to teaching practice requires a time commitment for ongoing professional learning, collaborative planning, and implementation. Furthermore, changes to teaching resulting from professional learning in the arts are less likely to continue without time for ongoing communication about practice (Charland, 2011).

Burnaford et al. (2007) attributed educators' unwillingness to commit to ongoing professional learning to their limited understanding of the value of arts integration and low confidence in arts skills. A possible solution is a shift in focus from product to process, which might help educators think of the time commitment required for professional learning as sequential chunks that build upon one another (Werner, 2002). Because many schools do not allocate time for professional learning in arts integration, initiatives through universities and art-based programs may conflict with other district-required professional learning (May &

Robinson, 2016). In anticipation of such scheduling conflicts, the WolfTrap Foundation for the Performing Arts provided a one-day overview of an integrated math and arts institute to increase professional learning access for educators (Rabkin et al., 2011).

Teachers report feeling overwhelmed due to integrated planning requiring more time than single content planning (Hipp & Sulentic Dowell, 2019; McBee, 2000). Research indicates that a lack of professional learning or professional learning that fails to promote the purposeful alignment of core content and arts standards increases the time needed to plan (Brophy & Alleman, 1991; Carpenter & Gandara, 2018; LaJevic, 2013b; Mackin et al., 2017). Working consistently with an arts integration coach can reduce planning time, help with the alignment of standards and content, contribute to the selection of learning targets, and increase the sustainability of integration efforts (Burnaford, 2007; Ludwig et al., 2014; Ludwig & Goff, 2013; Rabkin et al., 2011). Similarly, planning with teaching artists and art specialists may expedite the process; however, time for collaboration may be minimal or non-existent due to rigid school schedules (Miller & Bogatova, 2018).

Teachers' perceptions of the time needed for integrated teaching can be a barrier when trying to balance scripted curricula, required testing, compartmentalized instruction, and lack of instructional flexibility (Hipp & Sulentic Dowell, 2019; LaJevic, 2013b; Miller & Bogatova, 2018). However, consideration of the role the arts can play in increasing academic performance in reading and math (Caterall, 1997) and the intrinsic value of skills learned when engaging in the arts, can change their perspective and motivate schools to build arts integration support into the schedule (Hetland et al., 2007). Interviews of 130 Canadian educators during a three-year intervention by ArtsSmarts indicate the importance of continuous professional learning collaboration between artists and classroom teachers, including reflecting on the lesson delivery

and outcomes to plan the next steps (Stack, 2006; Patteson, 2002b). Building time into the school schedule to focus on art integrated practice for the entirety of program implementation was essential. Educators often request additional professional learning in arts integration methods after witnessing positive student outcomes from integrated learning (Hipp & Sulentic Dowell, 2019; Saraniero et al., 2014; Snyder et al., 2014).

### ***Resources***

Lack of access to resources for arts integration within the school or community can prevent the transfer from professional learning to practice (Brouillette 2012; Hutchens & Pankratz, 2000; Miller & Bogatova, 2018). If, for example, instead of considering which arts discipline best aligns with the core content to create an “elegant fit,” teachers make decisions based on available arts experts and their area of expertise, space, and materials, integration and selection of activities may be limited (Brouillette, 2012; Burnaford, 2009, p. 28; LaJevic, 2013b; Saraniero et al., 2014). Expanding the teachers’ instructional skills, reimagining resources, and addressing misconceptions of arts integration can help promote implementation of professional learning to practice.

Expanding educators’ instructional capacity increases student access to learning opportunities (Spillane & Lewis, 2002). In other words, the more skills a teacher can employ, the higher the chance of meeting the diverse needs of the students. “Creating classroom climates, lessons, activities, and assessments that appropriately meet the needs of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse requires changes in the way we have traditionally taught” (Reif & Grant, 2010, p. 111). Thus, as Alter et al. (2009) posited, professional learning in the arts enables teachers to expand their range of teaching resources by expanding and improving their knowledge and skills.

The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts's CETA program is a whole-school reform model that approaches arts integration by increasing teachers' ability to use integration methods to support learning (Duma, 2014). Duma's (2014) study reviewed three multi-year studies (Kruger, 2005; RealVisions, 2007; Isenberg et al., 2009), to evaluate the CETA program and found the structure of the professional learning model, in-classroom arts coaching, study groups, and programs offering ongoing support were essential resources for influencing transfer to practice. Isenberg et al. (2009) explained that 93% of teachers reported arts integration professional learning through CETA added to their resource of instructional strategies, which helped them better meet the needs of all types of learners while increasing engagement, interest, and transfer of learning. Teachers reported the importance of the school art specialist's role evolving to a resource for integrated planning and collaboration (Duma, 2014). RealVisions (2007) found that through the program, essential resources developed including a shared language and a school environment that encouraged innovation, collaboration, and feedback.

Using available resources creatively can positively influence transfer of professional learning to practice. The Arts for Academic Achievement (AAA) model focuses on student achievement through arts integration by building pedagogical skills to increase the varied resources teachers have available to change practice and meet learners' needs. When examining the effect of AAA model on the practice of 90 educators, Werner and Freeman (2001) noted two significant change areas: increased instructional choices and increased understanding of how learning can occur. By shifting previously unyielding ideas, teachers creatively used resources such as physical space, displays, materials, and furniture (Werner & Freeman, 2001). In addition, human resources were reimagined as partnerships with community and building arts experts to provide new perspectives on aligning standards and resource opportunities. Similarly, another

model used a three-day urban retreat with resources such as local artists. Participating teachers reported feeling more capable of using a comprehensive range of teaching resources such as new strategies, methods, and skills than before the retreat (Werner, 2002).

The implication that all arts integration requires materials stems from the misconception of integration only referring to visual arts (Hipp & Sulentic Dowell, 2019; McBee, 2000). Flexibility to tailor the arts integration program to the school's needs and creativity with planning such as collaborating over technology proved valuable in three Minnesota schools with very different resources. LaGarry & Richard (2018) conducted a three-year, longitudinal, mixed-methods study to evaluate the state-funded Perpich Arts Integration Project (PAIP). The project uses the Collaborative Arts Integrated Framework, which consisting of six parts: "forming teams, exploring arts integration, planning backward, teaching students, reflecting on work, and sharing learning" (p. 148). Team members serve as resources to one another, while state funding covers local teaching artists, materials, and substitute teachers so teams can plan and co-teach. The program also provides additional on-site planning, virtual conferences, online planning, and linking teams to widen the resource network.

Brouillette et al. (2015) found the Teaching Artist Project (TAP) to be a cost-effective way to help teachers meet the needs of K–2 English language learners by increasing language development through arts-integrated strategies. Community-based professional artists, which were more cost-effective than an outsourced professional learning program, provided one-on-one classroom coaching that included modeling integration in weekly lessons. Brouillette et al. (2015) interviewed 24 participating teachers and found that coaching, gradual release to independent teaching, and learning of California Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards increased the teachers' understanding of the value, purpose, content, and skills needed to



increase confidence to integrate the arts. Free online videos were also available for teachers to review theater and dance strategies, which further increased the transfer and sustainability of the program.

Challenges also occur due to the misconception that arts integration replaces the need for systematic arts instruction by school arts specialists, possibly preventing a complete collaboration of faculty resources (Dwyer, 2011). As Mishook & Kornhaber (2006) indicated, some Virginia schools with adequate funding and time for the arts select integration practices in place of arts instruction to allow more time for testing preparation without teaching educators to integrate effectively.

### **Summary**

The first objective of this chapter was to highlight the vast amount of arts integration research focused on the benefit for students, different models for professional learning, and the barriers teachers face during implementation. The second objective was to highlight the limited research on transferring professional learning to practice and the implementation experience. Finally, since the research supports the benefit to students when learning in the arts, a need to increase student access exists. Therefore, my study examined how PreK-5 teachers transfer the content, skills, and understandings from professional learning to practice and how they navigate implementation. This study could add to the knowledge base of arts integration studies and help educational researchers and program planners identify focus areas when planning to better support transfer to practice and implementation.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

Arts Integration research typically focuses on student outcomes from learning in the arts or the challenges educators face during the implementation of professional learning. Researchers studying arts integration have not purposefully examined how educators' experiences during implementation influences transfer; however, "since the actions of general classroom teachers can greatly influence the future of arts education, it is imperative that we explore the possibilities and complexities of teaching and learning with arts integration" (LaJevic, 2013a, p. 16).

The purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of elementary educators when implementing professional learning for arts integration. The central research questions for the study included:

1. What content, skills and understandings do teachers transfer from professional learning to practice?
2. How do teachers navigate the implementation of arts integration?

In this chapter, I explain the research methodology that guided my study and the parameters for selecting participants. I primarily examined studies using qualitative methods in chapter two to illustrate the importance of hearing from educators about their arts integration experiences. Unlike the implementation studies discussed in chapter two, my study aimed to understand the complexity of elementary teachers' experiences during arts integration implementation (Weibe et al., 2007).

Qualitative methods such as focus groups, interviews, and self-selected documents invite teacher reflection and response; however, a need exists to design this inquiry based on the current context of the teaching profession due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As Tremblay et al. (2021) explained, the two main obstacles the pandemic presents to qualitative research are

constraints due to time and physical distancing protocols. With these constraints in mind, I selected a limited timeframe—spring 2022, and a virtual platform for data collection to address social distancing concerns (Santana et al., 2021).

### **Design**

A qualitative case study design can help a researcher examine the experiences related to a study by promoting discussion and explanation of individual circumstances and the "complexity" of influences on transfer and implementation (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 121). A case study facilitates asking questions and understanding contextual influences on decision-making (Yin, 2003), leading to a complete understanding of a phenomenon (Hafiz, 2008). Additionally, the selection of a case study design allowed me to examine the implementation experience of elementary teachers bound by the same professional learning for arts integration (Yin, 2018).

### **Participants and Recruitment**

The study focused on four elementary educators who implemented methods learned during professional learning for arts integration. A small sample size allowed for a comprehensive understanding of each participant's experiences, which is the goal of qualitative case study research. For example, Yin (2014) suggested including no more than four to five participants in a case study, while Wolcott (2008) argued that including too many cases may prevent the researcher from focusing on the detailed reporting of findings. In other words, a researcher needs enough participants to have robust data but not too many to lose focus on detail.

Because participants must be able to answer the questions posed during the study, the method of purposeful selection was used (Creswell, 2002). As Light et al. (1990) explained, purposeful selection is essential when examining the experiences of educators who have participated in specific professional learning. The focus was on elementary educators'

experiences since, at that level, students typically spend the entire day with one teacher responsible for teaching social-emotional skills and all core content subjects. Teachers on the elementary level also tend to have more flexibility when planning and integrating subjects (LaJevic, 2013a). Therefore, participants are elementary educators who have attended professional learning with the same organization for arts integration prior to January 2022 and who planned to implement arts integrated practices in spring 2022. A diverse participant pool is ideal, but those who chose to volunteer and who met the criteria ultimately determined the demographics.

Recruitment began by contacting the director of a local program that provided arts integrated professional learning for educators to gauge interest in the feasibility of sharing information about the proposed study. A brief summary was shared to outline the purpose of the study (see Appendix A). After IRB approval, recruitment began. A recruitment flyer (see Appendix B) was sent to the director of the local program to share with elementary educators who meet the study's parameters. Those interested in volunteering were given the choice of contacting the researcher to pursue participation.

After verifying participant qualification through email, an information sheet to confirm commitment to participate in the study was sent to participants (see Appendix C). The participants included a pre-school teacher, a pre-school librarian, a third-grade site-based gifted teacher, and a K-5 Exploratory/STEAM teacher. The self-described demographics of participants is included in chapter four. All participants signed a release form to grant the researcher permission to use shared documents such as artifacts illustrating arts integration implementation for the purposes of the study. At the study's completion, each participant received a \$75 gift card as compensation.

## **Data Collection**

This qualitative case study involved conducting two focus groups, one individual interview, and the sharing of classroom artifacts. The use of qualitative methods allowed me to learn the reasons behind participants' perspectives and beliefs by accompanying a response with an explanation to build a more comprehensive understanding of the participant's experiences (Maxwell, 2013). Collecting data from multiple sources in a bounded format such as a case study also allowed me to focus on a specific area of arts integration in need of additional research-the implementation experience. Because the fall semester on the elementary level is a period of adjustment requiring teachers to spend more time on routines, procedures, and review, data collection was conducted during the spring semester. Additionally, conducting the study spring semester enabled focus on instruction and methods and less on the adjustment of returning to in-person teaching after the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Interviews**

As Brinkman and Kvale (2015) explain, the interview is a question and response interaction that creates knowledge, leading the interviewer to better grasp the participant's perspective. In this study, interviews occurred in a focus group format and an individual format to provide multiple opportunities for discussion and reflection to gain a more complete understanding of the participants' experiences of professional learning in practice and how implementation is navigated (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) further explain the importance of using "new and creative data collection methods" to gain access to an experience (p. 161). For example, according to Yin (2018), documents such as physical artifacts serve as evidence to provide insight into understanding an experience when conducting a case study. For that reason, participants selected and shared evidence of their implementation

experiences during the two focus groups and individual interviews to increase understanding of their responses and to better capture the implementation process.

A focus group is a small group discussion with participants in a study who share characteristics that can lead to a more complete understanding of an experience (Yin, 2018). Casey and Krueger (2000) argue that a focus group creates an organic discussion since participants react and respond to the responses of others as they would naturally. To promote discussion and create a level of familiarity and comfort, an initial focus group introduced the study and encouraged participants to revisit their shared professional learning for arts integration (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To establish participants' background, the protocol for the first focus group began by asking the current grade level assignment and number of years teaching. I then used an exhibit question which Stake (2010) explains as a technique helpful in interviews that can lead participants toward "sharper concentration by asking them to examine and respond to a specific statement, a story, an artifact" (p. 97). By inviting participants to share a self-selected artifact of how they used or adapted a concept, skill, or understanding from professional learning, I gained insight into the teacher's implementation in practice which informed interpretation of the collected data during analysis.

In contrast, an individual interview can provide participants with a one-on-one opportunity to share personal views without the direct influence of other participants (Yin, 2018). Thus, the initial focus group was followed with semi-structured interviews to promote sharing of personal opinions, feelings, and views, and so the researcher can tailor questions based on responses leading to a deeper explanation of the participant's experience (Bernard et al., 2017). The data from the first focus group informed the interview protocol for the individual interview. To better understand the teachers' individual experiences, participants shared an

artifact that illustrated what arts integration looks like in their classroom. Educators were not limited and could select documents or artifacts such as lesson plans, notes of reflection, inspirational resources, assessment, or student work to share. In addition, educators were encouraged to share items they have used or plan to use for integration since Yin (2014) suggests that using various forms of data leads to a deeper understanding to create a more complete picture of the case. Additional questions encouraged sharing on a more personal level to determine possible underlying influences on implementation. For example, “Describe your experiences when integrating the arts.”

Finally, the study concluded with a focus group providing an opportunity for me to share emerging patterns or themes found in the data encouraging participants to "build on each other's opinions and beliefs" while reflecting on the entire process (Ryan et al., 2014, p. 22). The second focus group protocol consisted of questions created in response to the data collected during the first focus group, the individual interview, and the sharing of a self-selected artifact. This final focus group also provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on how arts integration has influenced students' learning experiences and to discuss suggestions for future professional learning planning.

Participants provided consent to an audio recording and transcription of the group and individual discussions. The focus groups lasted about an hour, while each individual interview lasted between 45 minutes to an hour, or longer depending on the desire of the participant. See Appendix D for the focus group protocols and Appendix E for the interview protocol. The app VoiceRecorder was used to record the focus groups and interviews before the recordings were uploaded to Otter.ai for initial transcriptions. Interviews were transcribed and cleaned following each session to maintain accuracy and “to facilitate an iterative approach to the analysis and data

collection processes” (Antin et al., 2015, p. 5). The transcriptions were then transferred into secure files on the researcher’s password protected personal computer.

### **Timeline**

Data collection was held in the spring of 2022 during the month of May. After each session the transcript of the interview or focus group was read multiple times while concurrently creating memos to capture initial thoughts. Transcript analysis through memoing, then led to the adjustment of upcoming interview and focus group questions.

Following each focus group or interview, the method of inductive coding, was used to create initial codes. Each transcript with initial coding was dated and saved separately for comparison. Codebooks were also dated so I could easily evaluate the evolution of codes over the course of the study.

When data collection was complete at the end of May, I compiled the transcripts from both focus groups and the individual interviews into one document. After reading through the compiled transcript again while listening to the audio a final codebook was created. This codebook was then used to conduct a line-by-line coding of the compiled transcripts which led to the grouping of codes and theme development. In June, the themes were used to write about the findings from the study in chapter 4.

### **Data Analysis**

Analyzing data from multiple sources through a case study with different forms of data enables the researcher to create a complete picture of the study’s focus (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In addition, the combination of analyzing responses across participants and within-participant responses over time allows for a complete understanding of the phenomenon (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2013).



The use of an inductive coding process helped me fully understand how the responses during the focus groups and interviews relate to the research questions and the development of themes (Thomas, 2006). The codes used during analysis were derived from the words of the participants to authentically capture the intent of the response (Saldaña, 2021). Since Saldaña (2021) supports the value of designing a unique method of coding that best fits with the intent of the study, I began the development of codes for the codebook using descriptive codes to develop a list of topics discussed in the transcripts before creating in vivo codes to capture the views of the participants. By putting the descriptive and in vivo codes side by side I was able to combine the two approaches and develop unique codes that best illustrated the meaning of the data.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework guided data analysis. To ensure consistency throughout the process of data analysis I created a checklist to follow with each of the six steps broken down into sub steps. This checklist also helped clarify how data would be evaluated systematically throughout the study. First, I became familiar with the data by checking the transcripts for accuracy against the recordings while taking notes and creating memos to record any questions, thoughts, or connections. The data was cleaned to adjust incorrectly transcribed words or missed phrases, which helped maintain the interview integrity. As Saldaña (2021) explains, "for initial visual and discourse/materials analysis, interpreting and analytic memo writing are critical" (p. 80). For that reason, a separate memo for each artifact question increased focus on the evidence of what is transferred from professional learning to practice.

Second, the notes and memos were used in conjunction with the research questions to create codes for categorizing data into themes. The research questions were listed at the top of the data analysis checklist, for easy reference and so they remained in focus throughout analysis. To create codes, the meaning of the data was considered to develop an appropriate label to assign

for similar occurrences in the data and organized the data under the codes (Charmaz, 2001). Multiple cycles of coding were employed since Saldaña (2021) suggests using first cycle codes that are descriptive in nature to create “a detailed inventory” (p. 97) of the data content and the second cycle codes such as in vivo codes “using the direct language” from interviews and focus groups (p. 92) to better understand the perspectives of participants. It was helpful to use the memos during this stage of analysis to search for disconfirming data. For example, if I could not find at least two examples from the transcripts to support a code, I adjusted or deleted the code (Antin et al., 2015). Similarly, I looked for non-examples from the transcripts which also led me to question the fit of the code, and an appropriate definition for the examples. The definition of each code was recorded in a codebook, so labels and meanings were explicitly cataloged and consistently used to code the transcript (Barnard, 2017).

Third, the codes were grouped to look for themes and connections (see Table 2) during repeated listenings of the recordings and transcripts (Bernard, 2007; Maxwell, 2013). The objective of qualitative coding is to “fracture” the data to create a new perspective (Strauss, 1987). By identifying similarities among items through the grouping of codes, the researcher can establish a better conceptual understanding of an experience and identification of themes (Strauss, 1987, p. 29). After reviewing the themes for consistency throughout the data, the themes were operationalized to ensure clarity of the term’s intent (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data was organized in Microsoft Excel using a data matrix to group data by codes under themes to identify patterns. Identifying patterns in the data promoted understanding of the reasons behind reoccurring patterns (Bernard, 2018). Finally, the data analysis was presented in written format to explain the results of the thematic analysis using quotes from the data and visual examples of artifacts to illustrate implementation in practice.

**Table 2***Sample Codes, Themes, Categories, Definitions, and Examples*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Sub</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Non-Example</b>
SIM- SP- NOL	Shift in Mindset	Student Perspective	Needs of Learners	Experiencing professional learning as a student changed view on planning for instruction.	“You are a student within the program. Now when I plan, I think about what my children need as a student.” ~ Oliver	“That’s helped open my mind [when planning] to think this adult that I’m working with, is on a different mindset.” ~ Devon

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to test the format and content of questions. Using a pilot study allows the researcher to evaluate the language used in the planned interview questions, the organization of the questions, and whether the intent of the questions aligns with responses. In other words, a pilot study can “assume the role of a laboratory,” which can assist when adjusting protocols prior to the actual study (Yin, 2018, p. 107). Two teachers that have completed professional learning for arts integration participated in virtual interviews. During the interviews, I learned that certain questions could lead to brief responses, requiring additional prompts to tease out details behind teacher perspectives during implementation. That information was used to adjust the language in the questions to invite elaboration and add prompts to use as needed. After transcription of the interviews, repeated listening to the audio recordings multiple times helped increase the accuracy of the transcriptions. The questions and responses were organized to promote clarity prior to analysis. This process of conducting a pilot study led to my understanding of the importance for question revision and data organization prior to analysis.

To further test the Interview Protocol, additional practice interviews were conducted with colleagues that met the criteria of the study. This process helped me determine the need for certain broad questions to be broken into chunks and possibly guided by probes. It was helpful to learn that some participants may need clarification, the restating of a question, or an example due to the open-ended quality of certain questions. Throughout the pilot I moved certain questions in the interview protocols from their original position to maintain a logical flow to the conversation. Therefore, adjustments were made to the sequence of questions in the focus group and interview protocols.

### **Ethics and Trustworthiness**

To ensure the study is ethical, all procedures were approved by the Virginia Commonwealth University Institutional Review Board before participant recruitment and data collection began. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they may discontinue at any time. Those who decided to contribute received assurance that their responses remained confidential on my personal computer and were given an option to turn the video off and select a pseudonym for use during focus groups, interviews, and when sharing documents. It is important to note that two of the participants wanted to use their actual names throughout the study. The one-on-one conversation during the individual interview created several entry points for explaining the importance of using a pseudonym. For example, participants mentioned lack of building leadership support as a challenge to implementation. Additionally, confidentiality was protected by excluding participating district and school locations and names from the study records and publications. Artifacts such as photographs including students were turned into renderings using befunky.com to deidentify the students pictured. Since all participants attended the same professional learning for arts integration the program is referred to throughout the study

as the Arts Integration Organization. The program staff of the Arts Integration Organization was also assigned the following pseudonyms: Paul, the director of the organization; Marie, an arts integration professor; and Zulin, a teaching artist.

Multiple measures ensured that the data in this study accurately represented the participants' experiences and allowed for a robust understanding of the phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013). To ensure the dependability of the data, I used a thick description of the research methods, procedures, and context, so the study was fully understood, and potential replication was possible (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Employing a triangulation of data or an "overlap of methods" supports the data's credibility and dependability (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 378). I used this triangulation system to allow for the focus group, interview, and document data from artifacts to balance each other based on the strengths and weaknesses of each method while leading to a single conclusion (Maxwell, 2013).

During data analysis, multiple measures further supported the credibility of this study. For example, I used member checking to ask participants to explain the context of a shared artifact and clarify a focus group or interview response, so the intent was accurately captured and not misinterpreted during analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2013). In addition, after forming the initial categories during analysis, I searched for disconfirming evidence by examining the transcripts from multiple perspectives to determine the presence or absence of support for these categories (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Finally, I searched for evidence in the transcripts to dispute developing themes so that I fully understood the data instead of merely interpreting the data based on my positionality (Lareau, 2021).

I established trustworthiness in multiple ways throughout this study, using the previously stated methods such as protecting confidentiality with pseudonyms, member checking, searching

for disconfirming evidence, and gathering multiple data sources to gain a complete understanding (Eisner, 2017).

### **Positionality**

Positionality is essential for a researcher to consider prior to and throughout qualitative research; as Lareau (2021) explains, a researcher's background experiences, and identity influence all aspects of a study. Similarly, the unique positionality of a researcher frames how the study is organized, executed, and interpreted (Stake, 2010). Since the researcher is essentially a tool throughout the study, it is important to note that a researcher is human and ever-changing. For example, the understanding I held prior to the study shifted during my interactions with these participants in the first focus group.

As a child, extracurricular activities in the arts were always supported by my parents. I acknowledge the privilege of growing up as a female in a White, middle-class family with the opportunity to pursue my interests. My mother worked in the home and was available to take me to dance classes and pay for multiple costumes. I was able to play an instrument in the band, which included a rental fee for the year and additional costs for competition fees. Access to a car in high school made it possible for me to participate in theater productions that sometimes-held rehearsals after dismissal, requiring a return drive to school. Although the K-12 schools I attended were not under-resourced, arts integration was an anomaly, not a norm. I remember feeling excited and more interested in learning when aspects of the arts were incorporated into classroom learning, but I had low expectations for such in-class integrated experiences. Opportunities to design the art activities for my mom's Junior Church class (a program for young children during the adult service) and to work as a director of the Creative Arts at a summer

camp added to my background in the arts and understanding of their value. My parents' support continued when I wanted to major in studio art in college while minoring in education.

In later years, as an elementary classroom teacher with an arts background, my understanding and confidence in using the arts for instruction differed from most teachers. Although I was interested in including the arts in classroom learning, I had never heard of, or received, professional learning focused on the topic of arts integration. During my time as a classroom teacher, most of the professional development I attended was required, not selected. The required session that made the most significant impact on my instructional beliefs was focused on meeting the needs of gifted students in the general education classroom. However, the impact of the session was not made by the topic but by my realization during the experience. When the instructors explained multiple methods for engaging students in critical thinking, problem-solving, and cross-curricular learning, such as through the arts, I remember wondering why these ideas were presented as a way to support gifted learners when these methods could benefit all learners. That realization was when I changed my approach to teaching. That day I went home and started considering ways to incorporate the arts throughout my classroom instruction so all students could have access to this "gifted" learning.

During my 20 years as an elementary teacher, I did not know that professional learning for integrating the arts was available or that the Arts Integration Organization existed. Since I attended professional learning for arts integration after leaving the classroom, my perspective differs from the participants. I do, however, share with the participants in this study a love of the arts and interest in using the arts in the classroom to promote more meaningful learning. We also share the commonality of spending 15 years or more as an elementary teacher and working with colleagues that have different backgrounds related to the arts which may influence collaboration

possibilities. As an extern with the Arts Integration Organization mentioned in the study, I attended the same virtual summer institute that some of the participants attended. Unlike these participants who all had multiple experiences in professional learning for integrating the arts this summer institute experience was my only professional learning for integrating the arts. Working behind the scenes of the organization and learning about the factors informing the decision-making process when planning arts integration professional learning informed the design of my dissertation research.

My research interest stems from my experiences teaching through the arts without professional learning for integration methods. My interest also comes from the belief that learning through the arts provides students with different ways to engage with information and more choices about the representation of understanding. Given the influence the arts have had on my education and classroom experiences, I want to learn more about professional learning for the arts and transfer to practice to potentially increase student access to learning in the arts. Through this study, I also hope to understand the implementation experience better so I can build on the existing research in arts integration implementation and add a missing piece: the experience of elementary educators.

### **Limitations**

The nature of qualitative research presents limitations with generalizability. The intent of qualitative methods is to gather data to fully understand an experience through description of events and actions (Maxwell, 2013). However, an experience is situational and influenced by context, creating a challenge for generalizability outside of a similar setting. Additionally, interpretation of the data is dependent on the perspective and understandings of the researcher



(Lareau, 2021). As Eisner (2017) argues, explaining a participant's experience is not the same as the experience since a researcher's analysis - focuses on selected facts.

Limitations of this study also exist due to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because the professional learning instruction from spring 2020 until spring 2022 occurred in a virtual environment, teachers attending professional learning during that timeframe had different experiences than when professional learning occurred in person. All of these participants had in person professional learning experiences and three also had virtual experiences. Additional stressors on teachers when returning to in-person learning after teaching virtually, have also led school systems to limit research during this adjustment period, which minimized diversity in the pool of possible participants. As teachers adjusted to social distancing protocols challenges influenced implementation that did not exist before the pandemic regarding movement and sharing of materials in classrooms when teaching in person.

Since the focus of the study is on arts integration participants might have felt inclined toward responses that support integration especially if they work in a school or division that supports arts integration. As Maxwell (2013) explained, it is essential to anticipate concerns participants may have about specific focus group and individual interview questions and to use wording that invites an open response. Additionally, the findings of this study are not generalizable to educators beyond the elementary level or to those teachers who have not received formal arts integration professional learning but who have decided on their own to employ arts integration methods.

## Chapter 4: Findings

This study looks at how elementary teachers applied their professional learning to integrating arts in the classroom. In this chapter, I identify the main themes that emerged during the data analysis, revisit literature from earlier chapters, and use the lens of Knowles's (1978) Adult Learning Theory to connect findings to the conceptual framework. I organize this chapter in three parts. In the background section, I briefly explain the professional learning opportunities the Arts Integration Organization provided and introduce the four participants. Then, I share a thematic analysis to illustrate the key aspects of the participants' implementation experiences: a shift in instructional mindset, motivation for change, and support and potential obstacles during implementation. Finally, I present the findings, which are organized under two main themes: (a) teacher knowledge gained from professional learning and (b) teacher actions during implementation.

I began this study in the spring of 2022. I conducted focus groups and interviews to provide a balance between participants having an opportunity to build on one another's ideas and having a private space to share personal experiences. Because COVID restrictions eliminated the option to visit classrooms, I requested that each participant bring an artifact to each session to capture their implementation experience. I changed the directions for the type of artifact for each session to build a multifaceted understanding of each of these educator's implementation experience (Table 3).

**Table 3***Directions for Artifact Selection*

Method	Direction
Focus Group 1	Bring an example to share how you used or adapted a concept, skill, or understanding from professional learning, into your classroom.
Interview	Bring an example to share of what arts integration looks like in your classroom.
Focus Group 2	Bring an example to share that illustrates your current use of arts integration in practice.

**Background****The Arts Integration Organization**

Inservice teachers are taught how to integrate the arts across the curriculum by the Arts Integration Organization, a university-based organization. Participation in some form of professional learning through this organization was a requirement for enrolling in this study. The organization's staff includes: 1) the program director, Paul<sup>1</sup>, who works with community partners to provide professional learning in the arts to educators, 2) arts-based professors, such as Marie, 3) teaching artists, such as Zulin, a printmaker and writer, and 4) support staff.

The organization provides multiple opportunities for educators seeking professional learning. The most popular opportunity is a summer institute that uses a learning experience design. This instructional approach provides an educator the opportunity to take on the role of a student while immersed in learning (Lowenberg & Foranzi, 2009). Another opportunity is a team-driven project award, which requires teachers to apply for a grant. The project award

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<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms to preserve the anonymity of the participants and their colleagues.

includes the summer institute, school-based professional development, funding for materials, access to teaching artists, and collaboration with the Arts Integration Organization instructional staff. A variety of courses are offered to help educators focus on the experience of learning through the arts and assessment. Teachers may also attend workshops on various topics to learn how to make connections across the curriculum and to community resources. Some educators decide to pursue a certificate in arts integration, which includes participating in workshops, courses, and coaching from the Arts Integration Organization instructional staff. Paul shared my contact information and details about the study with elementary educators who had earned a certificate or been granted a project award. Interested educators then contacted me directly to volunteer their time for this study.

### **Participants**

The four elementary educators who participated in this project teach in the same region of a state located in the southeastern United States. Two teach in a small, urban school district (School District I), and two teach in an adjacent, larger school district (School District II). We first met as a group so I could introduce and explain the purpose of my study, and so the participants could become comfortable with sharing artifacts of classroom practice. To fully understand the context of the experiences to be shared, I asked the educators to introduce themselves and describe their demographics. Because these participants all engaged in professional learning through the same organization and could be easily identifiable if I paired the number of years teaching and self-described personal demographics with their current professional role, I aggregated these details to protect identity. The participants are all female, inservice, preK–5 educators with 15 to 35 years of teaching experience. One self-identified as African American and Black, one self-identified as White and Irish, one self-identified as

White/Caucasian, and one self-identified as White/Caucasian with no Hispanic descent. Table 4 lists the current professional role of each participant in this study next to her self-selected pseudonym to provide a frame for each educator’s teaching responsibility.

**Table 4**

*Current Professional Role*

Name	Grade Level	Subject	Responsibility
Devon	K–5	STEAM	Resource
Lucy	Third	All subjects, gifted	Classroom
Olivia	Preschool	Librarian	Resource
Teresa	Pre-K	All subjects	Classroom

***Devon***

Devon was the first to introduce herself. She explained that she spent the first half of her career as a middle school classroom teacher. She then moved to the role of an elementary exploratory resource teacher, but most people in her district refer to her class as STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math). She works with students at all grade levels, K–5, which she explained gives her a unique opportunity to “see students in a different light.” Devon believes in the importance of collaboration as a resource teacher but noted, “I’m able to sort of go off and be on my own island if I wanted to.” Devon has participated in the Arts Integration Organization’s summer institute twice. Her school has received three grants, but she considers herself “100% still in the learning phase.” Devon has attended professional development with teams but mentions that one of the teams “kinda disbanded,” leaving her alone for part of professional learning. She described her school as more diverse than in the past due to

recent redistricting but still consisting primarily of White students with a small percentage of students receiving free or reduced-priced lunch.

### *Lucy*

Lucy followed and was quick to explain that most of her career has included arts integration. She previously taught in a school focused on arts and democratic practice. In this school, teaching through the arts with consistent professional learning and resources, was the norm. Lucy mentioned seeking out the Arts Integration Organization before starting her job search when she moved to the southeast from “up North.” “My passion is arts integration,” she noted. Her current role is a third-grade center-based gifted teacher in a school that has received grants and professional development through the Arts Integration Organization. She mentioned working with grade-level and cross-grade-level teams, which were “both beneficial.” She recalled attending the summer institute and returning to school with the art teacher, whose excitement spread to other resource teachers leading to the collaborative planning for Project Based Learning across grade levels. Lucy described her current class as primarily White and less diverse than usual due to COVID. When I asked why, she explained that COVID impacted gifted identification last year since remote opportunities for screening and collection of work samples were not offered for families that opted to stay virtual.

### *Olivia*

Olivia was the next to introduce herself. She began by explaining that for most of her career, she taught elementary school, but this year moved to the preschool level, where she has five libraries. She has experience as a classroom teacher but has worked as a librarian for the past 8 or 9 years. “I’ve always been interested in art. And I always had this idea that I was integrating art.” She believes librarians have “a little bit more flexibility with integrating art.” Olivia also

explained that determining how to integrate the arts at the preschool level over the past year was “really important” since she had already learned how to do so at the elementary level. Olivia previously attended the Arts Integration Organization summer institute three times and earned her certificate. She mentioned signing up for professional development as an individual with other teachers joining briefly, “which was nice for the collaboration aspect,” but ultimately ending up on her own, which increased her focus on the program. Olivia also received arts integration professional learning through a program focused on preparing preschool educators. She explained that the schools she supports all provide free meals to students. She described the demographics of her schools as including African American, Hispanic American, and Caucasian American students and that some of her school communities serve a 100% African American population.

### *Teresa*

Teresa wrapped up the introductions by explaining that she began her teaching career working in the special education field, where she supported students with auditory challenges such as deafness. She had also spent time teaching kindergarten in China and has, for the previous 4 years, taught pre-K. She was drawn to the Arts Integration Organization because she wanted “to focus on some methods to enrich my instruction and just to make my teaching better.” Teresa participated as an individual, which she noted is often the case, but emphasized that she enjoys sharing what she learns with colleagues after professional learning. Teresa earned the certificate and attended the summer institute. She explained, “I love, love, love art.” Teresa worked with the same program that Olivia did, which provided arts integration professional learning tailored for educators of preschool-aged children. Teresa shared that she serves both Black and White students, though the majority of students are Black.

As an educator, I better understand the students in my class when I know their backgrounds. Similarly, establishing a background for the Arts Integration Organization and for the four participants who shared their experiences during this study allows the thematic analysis to be better understood.

### **Thematic Analysis**

It can be difficult to remember the connections made when listening to the participants' responses, reading over transcripts, or when beginning to make sense of what it all means. I wrote memos to capture my thoughts, so they were not lost (Maxwell, 2013). I used the memos as detailed personal interpretations of the data I collected. Triangulating them with participant responses and shared artifacts helped me form a more complete and "secure" understanding of the implementation experience (Maxwell, 2013, p. 102). The research on professional learning suggested that professional learning, support, and challenges influence the transfer of learning into practice. I was therefore not surprised when my analysis of data from individual interviews and focus groups resulted in the salient theme that professional learning for arts integration led to a shift in instructional mindset and motivation for change and that these four educators experienced both support and challenges during implementation.

#### **Theme 1: Shift in Instructional Mindset**

The first theme I discovered was the agreement that professional learning led to a shift in instructional mindset, which transferred to practice. These participants attributed this shift to being in the role of a student and gaining an understanding of how to make the arts part of the learning process. This theme is consistent with Kearsley's (2010) principle that adult learners need experience-based activities during professional learning.



### *Student Perspective*

Barnum (2017) and Best (2017) found that when teachers participate in activities similar to those they will plan for their students, they better understand how to transfer professional learning into their classroom. This idea is supported by the responses of the participants in this study, who shared that experiencing professional learning with the Arts Integration Organization in the role of a student shifted what they view as important when planning instruction. Olivia explained that now when planning she intends to not just cover concepts or skills but also to consider the needs of her students as learners. She said,

You learn how to plan activities for your students because you yourself are a student. I have to think about what my children will go through. What are obstacles that they're going to come across? How do I combat those obstacles?

For example, Olivia shared that even though the library is traditionally thought of as a quiet place, she includes a lot of singing and movement in her lessons “because they’re little, and they need to move.” Olivia provided the image in Figure 1 to illustrate how her use of music and hand gestures provides opportunities for students to move during a library lesson.

**Figure 1**

*Students Singing and Moving*

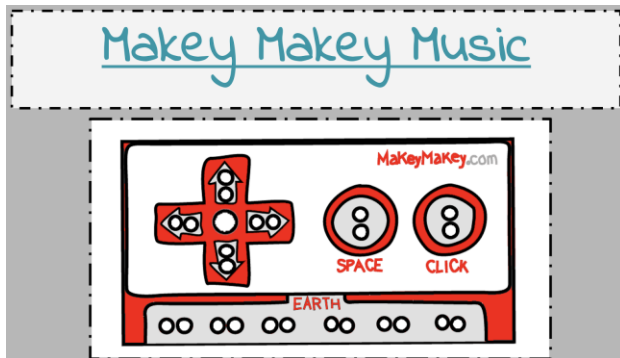


Like Olivia, Devon also recalled wearing her “learner hat” during professional learning. She said that using this memory as a reminder to consider the student’s point of view when planning helps her create engaging experiences that use a variety of modalities to make the curriculum accessible to all learners. As Deasy (2002) explained, since arts integration methods incorporate the use of multiple modalities, students have choices and learning is more accessible. For example, when Devon heard the music teacher at her school planned to use worksheets after struggling to teach fifth graders how to play the ukulele, she thought of incorporating arts integration to approach the problem differently. Devon clarified that she “typically wouldn’t have taken it this route;” however, she wondered if using multiple modalities would guide some students toward an understanding they might not have reached otherwise.

To help students change how they think about playing notes by providing multiple ways for students to access content knowledge, Devon integrated music, science, and technology. She shared an instructional slide (Figure 2) to illustrate how she used coding and Makey Makeys<sup>2</sup> which enabled students to play notes through the computer. These participants’ responses indicated that multi-modal experiences in the role of a learner during their own professional learning led to changes in their planning. Devon explained that her hope was also to increase student engagement and interest by providing multiple ways for students to gain access to the experience of playing the ukulele. When I asked if she was successful, Devon smiled and shared that some students who could easily play the ukulele were a bit frustrated, while others commented, “I get how to play this note or this chord. It is so much easier now.”

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<sup>2</sup> An invention kit that allows the user to connect an object to the computer, while turning the object into a keyboard. Copyright Makey Makey LLC© 2012-2022.

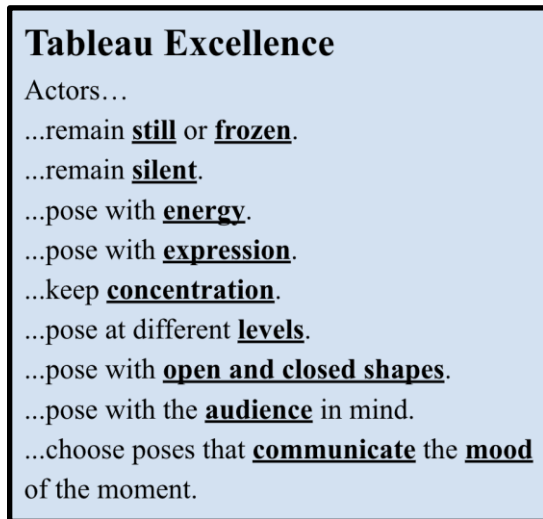
**Figure 2***Instructional Makey Makey Slide*

Teresa recalled lessons during professional learning made her think about planning activities that require “slowing down” to “pay attention to the world” while using the senses. For example, she remembers Zulin teaching her to use pencil lines of different thicknesses and textures to illustrate her observations in a sketchbook. Teresa explained that she translated this understanding into practice with pre-K students, by having them use the lines and dots in bark rubbings to discuss how trees feel and look different (Figure 3). These experiences led her to understand how careful observation using all the senses engages students in deeper learning.

**Figure 3***Bark Rubbing*

Teresa further described the importance she now places on “talking about lines and curves, and the real mechanics of being an artist.” She mentioned noticing entry points for connections in the curriculum she had not before seen, such as using the same terminology of lines and curves with students “when forming letters and numbers or writing their name.” Marshall (2019) contended that cross-disciplinary learning encourages such connections because knowledge becomes more accessible and meaningful when the whole child is engaged. Teresa’s incorporation of sensory observation in practice also led to insights into student understanding she believes may not have been gained otherwise.

Lucy shared that being in the student role helped her understand new dance techniques and vocabularies, such as the types of stances used when creating a tableau- a still life picture composed of people that portrays a story or idea. For example, she explained that there are many types of stances such as open, closed, and long. She also realized the importance of explaining to students the reasons behind pairing artistic techniques with core content. Lucy provided Figure 4 as an example of the expectations and goals of a tableau lesson. She further illustrates what a tableau lesson looks like in her classroom by sharing Figure 5 and explaining that students work together and pose their bodies to convey comprehension of the text’s main idea, a character’s feelings, or the story’s sequence.

**Figure 4***Tableau Expectations and Goals***Figure 5***Students Creating a Tableau*

Gaining a student perspective while being actively engaged during professional learning changed the way these participants approach planning and instruction. As Kearsley (2010) described, adults benefit from experience-based professional learning. These participants' responses indicated that such experiences in their own learning led to changes in their

instructional planning and pedagogy. For example, these four teachers claimed a heightened awareness of student needs, the importance of incorporating the senses and multiple modalities in lessons, and the value of explaining the reasons behind the alignment of the arts and core content.

### ***Learning Through the Arts***

When I asked these participants what they drew on from their arts integration professional learning while planning, all described drawing on the belief that the arts should be part of learning and not viewed as a product. Additionally, they agreed that interactions with Paul and instructional staff members such as Marie and Zulin helped support a shift in mindset to learning as a process. As Duma (2014) explains, adult learners need professional learning that is active and social with direct relevance to classroom practice. From the responses of these participants, I can infer that personal engagement in activities where the arts are an integral part of the process of learning and conversations with the instructional staff helped them understand how to shift to a process focus during implementation in their own classrooms.

Olivia explained that before participating in professional learning with the Arts Integration Organization, she thought a teacher should provide an example of the end product for students, which is a common practice in elementary classrooms. However, when Marie explained a lesson should not focus solely on the end product, Olivia's focus shifted from product to the process of learning. To further support this shift in thinking, Marie suggested Olivia ask herself, "Do they remember the story? Was there some element of art there? Were they able to express themselves? Did they enjoy themselves?"

To demonstrate how her understanding of learning as a process transferred to practice, Olivia shared photos of students participating in class activities. First, students used props during

dramatic play to retell the story *Stuck* by Oliver Jeffers (Figure 6). Olivia noted that after the *Stuck* lesson, a classroom teacher stopped by the library with a follow-up question since the students continued to discuss the story after leaving the library. Second, students participated in a “trashion show” while wearing clothing made out of recycled materials (Figure 7). This activity occurred after discussing curriculum concepts of clothing and recycling with an added focus on clothing choices as an artistic self-expression.

### Figure 6

*Student Using Props to Retell Stuck*



### Figure 7

*Students Participating in a Trashion Show*



Similarly, Devon explained that professional learning about the origins of shadow puppetry and the importance of focusing on the learning process helped her rethink a collaborative school traits project. For example, when Devon recalled learning from the Arts Integration Organization that shadow puppetry originated in China, she and her colleagues decided the project would be a more “organic” fit with third grade since they study Chinese inventions and could create shadow puppets. In addition, the engineering process and the telling of fables connected to the school traits “collaboration, perseverance, and commitment to quality” which linked all aspects of the learning experience together. As Devon shared the photograph of the third graders’ shadow puppetry performance for kindergartners (Figure 8), she explained that “this was a great opportunity for kids to have multiple times of sort of iterating and improving over and over again, as they were performing for different classrooms.” These planning decisions indicate Devon’s understanding that the focus of the learning experience should be about more than presenting a puppet show: All the pieces of the learning process should be cohesive and are essential to consider.

### **Figure 8**

#### *Third-Grade Shadow Puppetry Performance*



Teresa described how working with a wide range of artists through the Arts Integration Organization was "inspiring" and led to the discovery of new ways to approach the process of



teaching using "different artistic methods and methodologies." In Teresa's classroom, students move like trees "with their hands as the branches and their fingers as the leaves." They observe, discuss, and create trees throughout the year using "a different artistic method" each season. Teresa explains that she also provides opportunities for students to watch trees change and discuss connections to other things in the world that change, like their bodies. She believes that the Arts Integration Organization taught her ways to create ongoing connections between literacy and the arts by "eliciting conversation and language and expression" and "using the arts as a vehicle for learning." To illustrate the integrated learning process in her classroom, Teresa shared a student display of spring trees, suns, and a collaborative haiku created during a discussion about how the trees need the sun (Figure 9).

### Figure 9

*Student Display: How the Trees Need the Sun*



Throughout the study, Lucy pointed out that the arts should not be “just fluff” or an “add-on,” noting “it’s a way of delivering instruction.” However, as Lucy further clarified, “that is a really hard mindset to shift if you haven’t had the training and understanding of how it can be part of what you do.” To illustrate the arts being essential throughout the process in her classroom, Lucy showed artifacts from a month-long multidisciplinary and collaborative project. Lucy explained that the “Whose Ecosystem is it Anyway?” project was a game show about food

chains and adaptations. Students researched animals in the classroom, learned how to move like animals in P.E., mimicked animal sounds during music class, and created talking sticks (Figure 10) during art to help them remember facts about their animals. Finally, before performing the game show for other grade levels, a teaching artist from the Arts Integration Organization came to the school to teach drama techniques (Figure 11).

**Figure 10**

*Talking Sticks*



**Figure 11**

*Teaching Artist Working with Students*



Through conversations with these participants, I found that they gained a student perspective on learning through the arts, which led to a shift in their instructional mindset. This

shift helped them better understand the needs of learners, how to use skills and techniques from the arts during instruction, and how to make the arts part of the learning process.

## **Theme 2: Motivation for Change**

The assumption that as learners age, they become more intrinsically motivated to learn (Knowles, 1978) and the principle that adult learner's interest in content is connected to its relevance (Kearsley, 2010) were supported by the responses of the participants in this study. These four participants all reported feeling motivated to implement changes to traditional methods because they had witnessed the benefits to students when learning through the arts. Additionally, they reported gaining a positive professional outlook following professional learning and implementation.

### ***Benefit to Students***

Vitulli et al. (2013) found when teachers learn how to integrate the arts with core content, they create opportunities for students to make cross-disciplinary connections in new ways. For example, Olivia explained her new knowledge of different lines helped students pay closer attention to the details of the world around them. She also observed that drawing, discussing, and comparing can help preschoolers expand their thinking to connect concepts. For example, when creating a tree, "we talked about lines and squiggles, and we talked about round lines and straight lines" (Figure 12). Olivia expressed a belief that this approach helped preschoolers understand that objects can be the same and different. For example, "no tree is going to look like any other tree. Just like outside, no tree looks the same." Olivia shared an example of a student drawn tree which shows both straight lines and squiggle lines (Figure 12). To clarify, I asked Olivia whether she would have talked about lines and squiggles before working with the Arts Integration

Organization. Olivia responded, “Oh no, no, no, because a line is a line. It wasn’t something that I was even aware of to teach.”

### **Figure 12**

*Student Tree Drawing with Straight and Squiggle Lines*



Devon’s motivation for arts integration stems from a desire for continuous professional growth and believing the integrated experience provides opportunities for her students “to find out what their interests are” and “think toward the future.” In addition, she explained that her approach to teaching is not a “typical lecture kinda classroom.” When I met with Devon, the fourth-grade students leaving her room were “feverishly” putting finishing touches on a multi-stage project. Devon explained that students were working on a video featuring portraits of African Americans whose stories have been historically untold. Devon described how students were debating which music to play in the background of their video to evoke the mood they want the viewer to feel when looking at the portraits. To illustrate the beginning stages of the process, Devon shared an example of students conducting research and creating portraits prior to working on the video (Figure 13). Devon excitedly recalled students debating while working on the video, “But no, that doesn’t give the emotion we want them [the viewer] to feel.” Devon explained

comments such as these show that her students understand and are able to express the connection between the historical content, the significance of the person in the portrait, and the music selection for the video.

### **Figure 13**

#### *Students Researching and Creating Portraits*

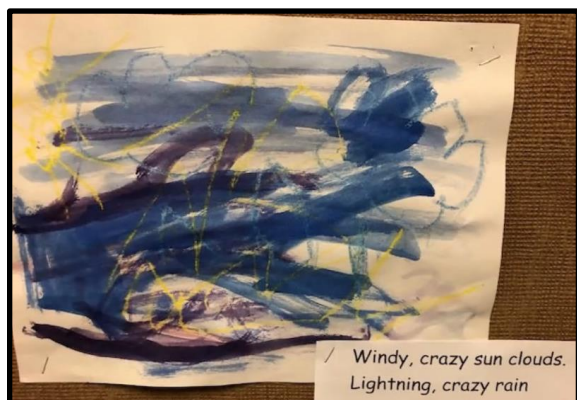


Teresa said she is motivated to integrate the arts because she believes the arts create multiple ways for students to express understanding. She also explained “teaching 4- and 5-year-olds how to be reflective and pay attention” differs from the typical expectation of following adult direction. Teresa was animated when explaining that adding a combination of movement, sound, visual art, and poetry helped her preschoolers demonstrate their own understanding of a storm’s complexity. She described how after watching a video of a storm, students explained their understanding of the concept while using their bodies to move like a storm, their voices to emulate the sounds of a storm, and crayons and watercolors to depict what a storm looks like to them. Teresa mentioned being surprised by the depth of responses when describing the storm, especially from one little girl who repeatedly said, “It’s just crazy, and some clouds, and then there’s crazy rain.” When retelling the classroom experience while sharing the student’s work (Figure 14), Teresa wildly waved her hands in the air and explained, “That’s what she depicted.

There was the sun first, and then lightning coming down, and then she did the crazy clouds and the rain.”

### **Figure 14**

#### *Student Painting Depicting a Storm*



Lucy shared that her motivation for teaching through the arts is multifaceted. “The kids are excited about what they’re doing. They see a purpose for it, it’s meaningful, and it’s interactive. You’re giving them the tools, but then they take it, and they have ownership.” She explained that even though many people think learning should be rigorous, she believes “learning should also be vigorous” and students should feel excited about what they are learning. To demonstrate the excitement Lucy sees in her students when learning through the arts, Lucy shared a photograph (Figure 15) of a student who created scat style poetry using the “Jazzy Gibberish” Emotion Poem template (Figure 16) and then performed with a jazz musician. Lucy exclaimed proudly, “Look at his face! He’s scatting, and he’s got a jazz saxophone player, and it’s not a test score, it’s not. But when you look at the face, it’s all connected with what we’re doing.”

**Figure 15***Student Scatting with a Jazz Musician***Figure 16***“Jazzy Gibberish” Emotion Poem Template*

**“Jazzy Gibberish” Emotion Poem!**

For this poem, choose ONE of these emotion words for your title:

Joyful	Sad	Mellow
Flated	Blue	Calm
Excited	Glum	Peaceful

---

Poetry line directions:

1) Sometimes I feel so \_\_\_\_\_  
(emotion word)

2) Write a “scatting” phrase that goes with your emotion word. (Just make one up!)

3) Write at least 3 similes that go with your emotion word.

I feel like \_\_\_\_\_

I feel like \_\_\_\_\_

I feel like \_\_\_\_\_

4) Repeat lines 1 & 2, and you’re done!

*Mellow*

Sometimes I feel so mellow.  
*Oh-ss-lo-ss-lee*  
I feel like a feathery cloud floating in a summer sky.  
I feel like a fuzzy gray cat curled up by a cozy fireplace.  
I feel like a carefree canoe drifting on a peaceful pond.  
Sometimes I feel so mellow.  
*Oh-ss-lo-ss-lee*

(By Leslie Johnson)

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To help you create your similes, try using these categories:

Nature	The Ocean	Animals	Transportation
Weather	Outer Space	Bugs or birds	Sports

### ***Professional Outlook***

Prior research argues that learning to employ arts-integrated methods expands a teacher’s ability to teach beyond the required standards, make learning more inclusive, and more authentically assess student understanding (Best, 2017; Greene, 2013; Reck & Wald, 2018).

These participants’ responses pointed out that professional learning motivated a change in their teaching practice during implementation. Participating in the Arts Integration Organization led to

opportunities for collaboration and growth and, as Olivia and Teresa shared, a renewed love for teaching.

When I asked these participants to explain how implementation of arts integration has shifted their identity as an educator, responses ranged from how they are viewed by colleagues to how they view themselves. Lucy began by explaining that she is passionate about guiding students toward self-discovery of “what their passions might be through arts integration.” She also shared how exciting it is that her colleagues come to her for arts integration advice. Lucy believes teachers are aware of her passion for teaching through the arts since they see parts of the process of integrated teaching on display, such as student work, and because they want to see similar outcomes with their students.

Olivia followed by referring to Lucy as “the go-to girl” for arts integration support. Olivia then shared that implementing arts integrated practices has “given [her] a little bit more confidence in trying new things.” As Strand (2006) described, educators who value integrated learning are open to change and unafraid to take risks. This belief is demonstrated in the following responses of the participants that experienced professional learning for the arts and then is shared through their mindset when transferring that learning into practice. As she further explained,

It kind of gives you this piece of confidence and you’re doing things that people want to do. Kids want to create and want to dance. They want to sing, you know. It just opens you up more. It hasn’t changed my role, but it’s changed how I see what I do.

Following Olivia, Devon said, “I couldn’t agree with that more.” She added, “It makes me feel more open to things and trying things out. Accepting, like, the failure if it does happen, as that’s okay and then trying again.”



Additionally, Olivia shared that she has gained a “renewed love of teaching” and that teaching through the arts has “opened a doorway where SOLs were kind of blocking things.”

Similarly, Teresa explained “how easy it can be to get bogged down with additional responsibilities” and feel unheard and disrespected in the teaching profession. Fortunately, as she shared, her implementation experience “has been the reminder of why I [she] was passionate about teaching to begin with.” She again recalled how excited her students were walking by their storm depictions and remembering the process involved in creating the work. Finally, she explained how “meaningful” arts integration is for students when it is part of daily instruction. She further explained that integrating the arts in her classroom is like “that water at the well” reminding her “why [she] wanted to be a teacher in the first place.”

Observing the student benefits and gaining a positive, professional outlook keeps these teachers motivated to integrate the arts. Previous research suggests when teachers witness positive student outcomes when learning in the arts, they want to learn more and are often interested in continued professional learning for arts integration (Hipp & Sulentic Dowell, 2019; Saraniero et al., 2014; Snyder et al., 2014).

### **Theme 3: Support and Potential Obstacles During Implementation**

These participants’ responses indicated that the support and challenges faced during implementation vary. However, all four teachers in this study viewed professional learning through the Arts Integration Organization as the primary support. The other supports mentioned varied among participants. Instead of grouping supports into categories, I chose to weave them into the obstacles sections to illustrate the contrast. The challenges these participants indicated facing during implementation, such as COVID, an adjustment period, curriculum mandates and building leadership, and resource limitations, did not appear to stop implementation; I refer to

them instead as potential obstacles. According to Knowles's (1978) assumptions and Kearsley's (2010) principles, adult learning is not just knowledge acquisition it is more connected to an immediate purpose. The responses of these participants reveal that their experiences during professional learning supported the purpose of attending professional learning in the first place—to learn arts integration methods and then transfer those methods into practice, so students have opportunities to learn through the arts.

### ***Primary Support***

From the beginning of the first focus group, it was apparent that professional learning through the Arts Integration Organization served as support for all four of these participants. They recalled their experiences with the program as positive and integral to their ability to maintain their instructional mindset and motivation to integrate the arts. This data is consistent with previous research that professional learning can increase the comfort level of teachers to use arts integration methods (Burnaford, 2010; Leysath & Bronowski, 2016; Scripp, 2012) and lead to change in practice resulting in benefits to learners (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Teresa mentioned the importance of interacting with teachers of different grade levels, content areas, and backgrounds and a variety of artists who introduced her to new techniques and mediums as helping her continue to integrate the arts in innovative ways. Similarly, Lucy mentioned the value of “going through training with people who are just as excited as you are,” motivating her to transfer professional learning into classroom practice. She mentioned how helpful it is to be able to reach out to the Arts Integration Organization and receive suggestions when looking for a teaching artist. Teachers also shared additional support based on their current professional role, building leadership, and or colleague interest in collaboration.

### ***Potential Obstacles to Implementation***

These four educators agreed that teachers face challenges implementing the content, skills, and understandings gained. Although professional learning can significantly influence implementation, other influences include COVID, confidence, knowledge, structural challenges, and the perceived value of learning in the arts (Hipp & Sulentic Dowell, 2019; LaJevic, 2013a).

**COVID.** The pandemic created an interruption to learning for teachers and students. When students returned to classrooms, added safety protocols and a need to catch up on missed opportunities for learning were considerations during planning. Teresa explained that even though the Arts Integration Organization tried to keep professional learning similar there were challenges when moving to a virtual platform. She felt that attending professional learning on a college campus with educators and artists created a learning experience superior to virtual professional learning. The synchronous learning and online course design made it tough for Teresa “to meet deadlines” because professional learning “wasn’t quite as linear.” Elaborating, she said, “Instead of meeting for a week, we might meet in the afternoon for two or three days and then have a break and then meet again.” She also found it difficult to understand the more technical lessons, such as Soundscapes--a process of using technology to capture the essence of an area through sound. Teresa further explained that when professional learning occurred in person, the teaching artist or Paul could provide one-on-one support by showing her exactly what to do step by step. But on her own if Teresa could not for example get an app to work, she was unable to hand her phone over to watch a member of the instructional staff troubleshoot and demonstrate in real time what to do. Teresa also shared that due to the extended time spent at home, her current students came to pre-K needing more support in language development and background knowledge than in a typical year.

Olivia was finishing her certificate when professional learning moved online. She admitted that unless completing a required assignment, after “COVID hit, it [arts integration] was in the back of my mind.” She reported spending so much time doing tasks as part of a class or professional learning that until this study came up, she had not realized she was automatically integrating the arts into her daily lessons. Teresa also mentioned the study leading her to realize that she was integrating the arts “and not realizing [she was] doing it in a seamless way.”

Lucy explained that at the beginning of the year, mask mandates and the prohibited sharing of materials and singing limited student opportunities for arts-integrated learning. These restrictions led to more end-of-the-year integration that she would not typically include. She also shared that her school was in the third year of sending different teams of teachers to train with the Arts Integration Organization to move toward a more widespread and sustainable arts integration approach, which “all fell apart when COVID hit.” Her implementation experience included Paul bringing teachers into her classroom to observe integration “in action” with students, which unfortunately had to stop due to COVID.

Devon similarly shared that her students were in the middle of a project funded by an Arts Integration Organization award when COVID shut down schools. She explained that, although the grant was extended, safety protocols in place when schools reopened prohibited field trips and visitors such as teaching artists, which made it impossible to follow the original plan of the grant. So, instead of interviewing local musicians and visiting the “Harlem of the South,” they researched untold stories using primary sources on the computer.

**Adaptation Period.** Devon explained that teachers go through an adjustment period when they first start integrating the arts into practice. As Darling-Hammond (2017) describes, this adaptation period is when an educator translates professional learning into practice in their

classroom. Teresa elaborated, stating it can be tough to move from working with the support of a program to independently “integrating skill sets on your own” while figuring out how “disparate threads” of professional learning “translates” into the classroom. Devon suggested that during this time, teachers remind themselves they “don’t have to be an artist” and it is okay to make gradual changes because adjusting to the shift in the mindset takes a while. Similarly, Olivia explained the importance of teachers’ “giving [themselves] a little bit of grace because it takes some time to fully understand what art integration is and do it in a way that it’s not a burden.” She also explained the importance of “being flexible and understanding that this may be new, but it’s something that’s going to help your kids.” Finally, Lucy added the importance of “having courage” to do something different.

**Curriculum Mandates and Building Leadership.** Another potential obstacle during implementation is the variation across school buildings and leadership decisions regarding curriculum policy and practice. Devon acknowledged her role as a resource teacher provides a different perspective, stating she has experience as a classroom teacher and understands that trying a new approach can be challenging. She also reported wondering if some teachers at her school “might not see the importance and impactfulness that it has on a student’s learning since they have not had a basic training.” Having moved from another state, Lucy has found there is a “focus on scores here” and surmised that some teachers might feel trepidation about arts integration. She explained that teachers may worry about student outcomes when learning in the arts and the impact on test scores. Devon and Lucy, who both work in School District II, admitted that their building administration is supportive of practices that are in the best interest of students. This trust allows Devon and Lucy to feel comfortable trying new approaches and committing to the process of integrating the arts.

Because they teach preschool, Olivia and Teresa do not have state learning objectives connected to standardized testing. Olivia explained that she instead uses the state learning and development standards for early childhood and the GOLD® system which incorporates assessment into the daily observation of students. These standards encompass strategies that allow her to make choices; however, as a former classroom teacher, she understands the constraints state learning objectives can create. She remembers adhering to state learning objective requirements but is quick to explain that now having so much choice can also be challenging. Teresa adds how it is tough not to feel overwhelmed by responsibilities such as additional assessments and a required curriculum planning template.

Both Olivia and Teresa described the support they receive for integrating the arts as non-existent. Olivia said, “I don’t want to say very little support. It was just zero support” or awareness of integration efforts. Olivia expressed frustration with the building administration for not understanding why she teaches the way she does. Teresa wondered if the amount of support depends on the teacher’s professional role and the mindset of the specific principal. She also said she would be “very surprised if there is a public-school setting where a classroom teacher has... full autonomy.”

**Resource Limitations.** These participants mentioned facing resource limitations related to collaboration, time, space, and funding. Collaboration was mentioned by three of the four participants. Teresa noted how the opportunities to plan collaboratively are influenced by changes in staffing and the interest of current colleagues to try new approaches. After Devon expressed frustration that a new resource teacher at her school was not interested in working collaboratively, she suggested, “maybe they haven’t experienced any kind of lesson like that before.” She added that teachers may need to “get comfortable with the people [they] are

working with, the daily routine, and the curriculum” before considering “how [they] can delve a little bit more into curriculum.” Coming from an arts and democratic-based school where the entire staff would receive similar professional learning each year, Lucy’s perspective is a bit different. She described her current teaching context as, “snippets of teachers learning different things.”

Planning time is also a challenge for three of these participants. Although the fourth participant, Olivia, did not mention planning time, she did say she had requested her library lessons be lengthened to 40 minutes. She felt that only 30 minutes limited her ability to fully integrate the arts as she hoped. Devon and Lucy both mentioned needing more time to carefully examine the range of arts integration possibilities when planning. Lucy also explained that when teachers view arts integration as an “add-on” or “one more thing to do,” having enough class time to integrate becomes a concern. Viewing the arts as an addition to instruction is consistent with previous studies that found teachers’ perceptions of the time and flexibility needed for integration as a barrier to integrated teaching (Hipp & Sulentic Dowell, 2019; LaJevic, 2013b; Miller & Bogatova, 2018). Teresa explained that the Arts Integration Organization presented a way of planning called a learning story “that was really digging deep, and a really wonderful way to focus on teaching and developing lessons.” However, she wondered how a teacher would have time to do that type of plan each week, especially if they are required to use a curriculum template for planning.

Olivia pointed out that space can pose a challenge during implementation. She described how one of her libraries has stairs instead of carpet, which limits student movement:

Because they're on the stairs, and they're so shallow, [and] they're three [year olds]. And they get very excited about doing any kind of jumping and movement. So, we tried it, and it did not work out with the stairs. It was a whole ordeal.

She also mentioned feeling limited by the traditional view of a library being a "clean place." She expressed a desire to do more art, "maybe collaging or putting things together," but explained having multiple libraries and only 30 minutes for a lesson led to many art activities being prepared ahead of time and therefore limiting student choice. Olivia discussed needing "to figure out the best way to travel with all those materials where [she's] not bogging [her]self down with so much to do." Space is also a concern for Lucy, who has always wanted to do drum circles when the students study the ancient Mali Empire but due to noise concerns, "there's some limitation because of the classrooms near us to be able to do that."

Finally, Devon and Lucy mentioned funding as a challenge. It is important to note that the teachers who did not mention funding, Olivia and Teresa, both worked in School District I, which offered teachers funding due to a DOE grant. Devon and Lucy, however, worked in School District II, where teachers had to apply for funding to attend professional learning or receive school-based support. Devon explained how the loss of funding can influence ability to bring in programs and opportunities for students. Lucy shared that it can be tough to put in a grant and said, "If we want to go to the Arts Integration Organization's summer institute and we don't have a grant, I had to pay for it myself." These four educators had challenges and support during implementation. Although resource availability varied, these participants agreed that professional learning has expanded their personal knowledge and skills and thus their available personal resources (Alter et al., 2009). Regardless of the obstacles they faced, they all continued to some degree, to teach through the arts.



## Conclusion

The overall mission of the Arts Integration Organization is to train and support educators to teach through the arts. While I anticipated learning more about the integration experiences of these educators after professional learning, I did not expect their appreciation and excitement for the opportunity to share their experiences. I also observed this response during the pilot and throughout the study, prompting me to revisit why these teachers were motivated to integrate the arts and how those reasons promoted the sustainability of using arts integration methods in their classrooms. Through conversations with these participants, two prominent themes emerged: 1) teacher knowledge gained from professional learning and 2) teacher actions during implementation.

Although my research began and ended in May of 2022, I gained insight into how the four educators who participated in the study transferred professional learning to practice and navigated the implementation experience. I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework throughout the study to examine how professional learning led to a shift in instructional mindset and motivation for change for these educators, which promoted transfer regardless of the support and obstacles during implementation. Analyzing the data throughout the collection process helped me "gather more reliable and valid data" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 236) and stay focused on the message in the data. Using a matrix for organization helped me "hear" the data during the coding process to identify patterns (Lareau, 2021, p. 213), and analytic memos enabled me to capture emerging themes such as "professional learning support" and "motivation support," which after further analysis evolved into the "shift in instructional mindset" and "motivation for change." Finally, using Knowles's (1978) adult learning theory as a lens helped me understand how professional learning met the needs of these educators by supporting the

transfer of concepts, understandings, and skills from professional learning to practice. During the final focus group, I shared patterns that emerged throughout the course of the study such as shifts in practice, teacher identity, supporting the diverse needs of students, as well as the supports and obstacles described during implementation. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the findings in greater depth as I respond to the research questions.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Learning is potentially more accessible when using an arts-integrated teaching approach because it employs multiple modalities and provides learners with a choice of expression (Deasy, 2002). As successful implementation of integrated teaching and learning often requires that teachers attend specific professional development to gain multidisciplinary pedagogical skills (Parsons, 2004), the purpose of this study was to examine elementary educators' arts integration implementation experiences after professional learning. The research questions that guided this study focused on what educators transferred from professional learning for arts integration and how the transfer appeared in their classroom practice: (1) What content, skills, and understandings do teachers transfer from professional learning to practice? (2) How do teachers navigate the implementation of arts integration? This research built on previous literature regarding professional learning for arts integration and the influences on the transfer of learning to practice. To fully understand the experiences of the participants, I employed a case study design with two online focus groups, a one-on-one interview, and the sharing of artifacts. I conducted a qualitative analysis of the data which included coding and grouping codes by themes to identify common patterns across the data. This study reached saturation of no new data points surfacing toward the end of the second focus group when I noticed the similarity of participant responses to previous responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In this chapter, I share my key findings as they relate to the research questions organized under the two prominent themes: (a) teacher knowledge gained from professional learning and (b) teacher actions during implementation. Next, I explicitly respond to the two research questions and share implications for the field regarding classroom practice, professional learning,

teacher education, and policy. Then, I discuss the limitations of this study and implications for future research. I conclude the dissertation by sharing my reflection on the overall study.

### **Key Findings**

Through conversations with the participants in this study and their sharing of artifacts from practice, two prominent themes emerged: teacher knowledge gained from professional learning and teacher actions during implementation. In the following sections, I relate the two prominent themes to the literature and present the findings organized under the two themes.

#### **Teacher Knowledge Gained from Professional Learning**

Best (2017) explains that actively participating in professional learning promotes knowledge transfer to practice. Thinking back to my time as a classroom teacher, the professional learning experiences that resonated with me were activity based. I rotated through stations, touched materials, made choices, and actively engaged in learning experiences. The participants in this study shared similar feelings. Through their responses, participants claimed a deeper understanding of student needs and arts knowledge, after being in the role of a student. In addition, participants explained that gaining a conceptual understanding of learning as a process in which the arts can provide entry points to connect concepts across the curriculum shifted their approach when planning for instruction.

#### ***Finding 1: Using a Student Perspective When Planning Promotes More Inclusive Instruction***

- Students have diverse learning needs that should be considered when planning.
- Potential challenges during arts integrated learning should be anticipated.
- Plans should eliminate barriers or support students' ability to overcome challenges.

***Finding 2: Artistic Skills, Techniques, and Vocabulary Can Support the Use of Arts***

***Integration Methods and Lead to More Meaningful Student Learning***

- Teacher growth in artistic knowledge increases the ability to align the arts and core content when planning.
- Planning lessons that use the senses guides students to make observations and connect background knowledge with cross-disciplinary content.
- An awareness of integration possibilities and student benefits, leads to a desire to expand arts knowledge to sustain the use of arts integration methods.

***Finding 3: Learning is a Process, and the Arts Can Serve a Valuable Role***

- The arts can increase opportunities for students to express understanding.
- When learning is viewed as a process the focus of planning and teaching changes.
- The process of learning is more important than the production of a final product.

***Finding 4: The Arts Can Provide Entry Points to Connect Concepts Across the Curriculum***

- The arts can create entry points to connect learning across disciplines.
- The ability of a teacher to align core content and the arts promotes deeper, more meaningful learning.

***Finding 5: Learning Should Be Multimodal, Multisensory, and Memorable***

- Students need a variety of options for how to access learning and show understanding.
- Learning experiences should be relevant and aligned with student interests.

Participating in arts integrated activities during professional learning deepened these participants' understanding of implementing such methods. Similarly, previous research shows that engagement in the same integrated activities before use in the classroom helps teachers understand the activity's purpose and logistics, leading to a more successful implementation of

those methods (Boy, 2013; Conradt & Bogner, 2020). These participants also learned to view learning as a process that promotes cross-curricular and personal connections. As Eisner (1998) contended, this approach of connecting learning in the arts to other subjects can guide students to deeper conceptual understandings. From the participants' responses in this study, I inferred that the knowledge gained during professional learning for arts integration influenced the actions of participants during implementation.

### **Teacher Actions During Implementation**

LaJevic (2013a) explained, that a better understanding of the personal and structural challenges educators face during implementation of arts integration could help promote transfer of professional learning. However, the challenges these participants faced, such as limited resources, did not prevent transfer of professional learning to practice. Similarly, when using art integration methods in my own classroom I remember challenges causing me to pause and reflect on the purpose of a learning experience, the alignment of core content and the arts, and the specific needs of the students I was supporting. Like these participants shared, this brief pause did not prevent the use of arts integration methods it merely required an adjustment to the original plan. Conversations with the participants led me to infer that integrating the arts regardless of obstacles stems from teacher observation of myriad of benefits to students. As Bordelon (2010) and Marshall (2019) explain, learning through the arts provides opportunities for students to create meaningful connections and according to Reif and Grant (2010) in turn, inserts joy into learning.

### ***Finding 1: Planning Arts Integrated Learning Experiences***

- Teachers determine which instructional learning objectives in the core content areas need to be covered.

- Teachers evaluate the availability of school resources and arts resources.
- Teachers align the instructional learning objectives in the core content areas with the available and appropriate arts resources and arts learning objectives.
- Teachers collaborate with colleagues who are aware of the possibilities when teaching through the arts and interested in working together to plan and employ arts integrated methods.

***Finding 2: Teaching/Facilitating Arts Integrated Learning Experiences***

- Teachers present lessons using a combination of an artistic process and core content to help students gain a deeper understanding of both.
- Teachers observe and encourage student connections between background knowledge and new content knowledge formed through the arts.
- Teachers collect evidence of conceptual understandings through student artistic expression.
- Teachers encourage students to take ownership of learning through the arts and become experts in an area of the arts they would like to pursue.
- Teachers reflect during and after the learning experience and make adjustments to promote student success.
- Teachers appreciate support from building administration regarding their use of arts integrated methods.
- Teachers feel frustrated and a bit defeated when employing non-traditional teaching practices such as arts integrated learning without building administration support but continue to persevere.

***Finding 3: Continued Professional Learning***

- Teachers receive professional learning for arts integration from multiple sources.
- Teachers continue professional learning through organizations that have fees and tuition costs when funding is available.
- Teachers research art techniques and skills on their own to expand their knowledge.
- Teachers are driven to engage in continued professional learning for arts integration after observing the benefits to students when learning in the arts.

The participants in this study taught through the arts regardless of the support provided or obstacles they faced. Alter et al., (2009) explains, professional learning expands educators' personal knowledge and skills—and thus their available personal resources—so that regardless of the obstacles faced, they can teach through the arts. Participants mentioned experiencing a realization that although using arts integration methods was mainly intentional immediately following professional learning, integration is now automatic and part of how they teach. Some noted there were times when they did not realize they were integrating the arts until reflecting on their practice during this study. Instead of stopping integration, these participants found ways to adjust regardless of the still present challenge of a reoccurring lack of support for arts integrated teaching (Purnell, 2004). Teachers in this study and the literature both mentioned misconceptions of the purpose of arts integration and the time needed to implement it as factors contributing to limited teacher interest in collaboration (Hipp & Sulentic Dowell, 2019; LaJevic, 2013b; Miller & Bogatova, 2018).

**Discussion**

Reading the literature brought back the same frustration I felt as a classroom teacher when I knew the benefits of integration but rarely saw it in practice. So, I was not surprised that



the two main topics I found in the literature were benefits to students when learning in the arts and challenges to implementation. That led me to wonder if by conducting an implementation study I could build on the current literature in the field and help promote transfer to practice. Based on my own experiences, I knew that to understand the implementation experience I would need to start by finding out what knowledge was gained and transferred to the classroom.

Therefore, my first research question asked what content, skills, and understandings teachers transferred from professional learning to practice. The data I collected revealed that the content transferred included knowledge of arts objectives, alignment of core subjects with arts objectives, and finding entry points for natural connections across disciplines. Teachers transferred skills such as the ability to create and discuss different types of lines, physical poses, and sounds. They also transferred the skill of close observation and the ability to utilize different types of materials, methods, techniques, and tools in lessons to facilitate the communication observations and connections. Additionally, teachers reported gaining the understanding that the arts are integral and relevant to the learning process.

The literature and my findings from this study suggest that experience-based professional learning is necessary to support implementation since arts integration requires a shift away from traditional teaching methods (Hardiman, 2019; Hartle et al., 2015; Kulasegaram & Rangachari, 2018; National Education Association, 2002-2019; Reif & Grant, 2010). However, Kearsley's (2010) explanation that adult learners need to have learning activities that are experience-based led me to wonder. Are the content, skills and understandings these participants shared that transferred to practice due to the nature of experienced-based professional learning, the participants' interest in the subject matter of the professional learning, or a combination of both?

Through analysis of the data and the literature I also found that an integral part of professional learning for arts integration that promotes transfer to practice included interaction and collaboration with stakeholders. Wenger (2011) suggests that this interaction and collaboration is intentional to move forward in the development of ideas to support a shared purpose. This same idea was also supported in the 2011 report by the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities arguing the importance of advancing the field of arts integration by establishing Communities of Practice (CoPs). Similarly, Diaz and McKenna (2017) explain that this type of work must be done collectively, including experts from different fields with a variety of experiences and perspectives since "preparing educators for arts integration cannot be an effort carried out by one person or in isolation" (p. 189).

This idea of a collective purpose supporting transfer and implementation was shared by Teresa during my study. Teresa attributed her transfer of artistic skills and a knowledge of various mediums to practice as a result of experiencing innovative techniques during professional learning while interacting with various artists and teachers. Lucy also gained an understanding of the importance of a network of support and specifically explained how helpful it is to reach out to the Arts Integration Organization and receive suggestions when looking for a teaching artist to bring to her school. It is important to note that although these participants reported experiences with collaboration at some point during professional learning and or implementation, opportunities were not consistent.

After examining what teachers transferred from professional learning to practice it was a natural progression to use the second research question to ask how teachers navigated implementation. These four educators named their primary support during implementation as the content, skills, and understandings they gained from their work with the Art Integration

Organization. Even though they all shared positive collaboration experiences with the instructional staff of the Arts Integration Organization during professional learning, opportunities for collaboration when returning to school were varied. For some teacher turnover, lack of trained colleagues, and limited time for planning served as a barrier to collaboration which may have influenced implementation considerations during team planning. Other context specific obstacles such as physical space, scheduling, testing, COVID, and building administration influenced the degree to which implementation occurred.

Devon shared that teacher turnover, and COVID restrictions led to a change in focus for a fourth-grade arts integrated project. The arrival of a new hire uninterested in collaboration at that time, required a shift away from the music focus of the project leaving the project up to the librarian, the art teacher, and Devon the STEAM teacher. Devon notes that arts integration falling on the shoulders of the resource teachers is an obstacle itself. She further explains that one of her big takeaways from working with the Arts Integration Organization is learning that integrating the arts should not only occur during resource classes. This was an interesting concept for Devon to grapple with since she was previously a classroom teacher, but she attributes her own shift in mindset as a support but mentions that some colleagues are open to new ideas while others are set in their ways and that “change is hard.” She also wonders if a school with a unified focus for integrating the arts would ensure that classroom and resource teachers understand the value to students and ways to constantly integrate instead of using a one and done checklist approach. While Devon admits the building administration is supportive of however she sees fit to meet the required standards there are colleagues at her school who have not been trained in the arts hindering the potential for collaboration.

COVID limited the access to field trips and visiting artists that could deepen student understanding during the project. While Devon was mindful that state tests do need to be passed, she is still able to provide meaningful learning experiences for her students around topics they care about. She explains that during the pandemic the lack of access to teaching artists and experts due to a policy of no visitors in the building was a particularly hard challenge for her and the remaining collaborating resource colleagues. Devon explains how the continued support of the Arts Integration Program during this time to extend the grant helped to keep the project moving forward regardless of obstacles. She also explained the importance of flexibility. So, toward the end of the project when schools visits were again permitted, an author worked with students about how to share untold stories and hook a reader in the first line of a video script. The original plan was to focus on local jazz musicians but instead of stopping the project she changed focus and expanded the possibilities to overcome obstacles. She also explained that this is an ongoing project that will continue to evolve each year.

Lucy explains that when the pandemic hit, her school was in the third year of using a grant to sustain arts integration practices by sending multiple teachers to professional development with the Arts Integration Organization. Although the pandemic derailed the professional learning process, Lucy pointed out that part of navigating implementation is knowing that professional learning does not stop. For example, when Lucy wants to employ new integrated methods with her students, she will conduct research to learn unfamiliar vocabulary or suggest that the students conduct research to become experts. Pointing out that she puts a lot of the onus on her students. Lucy believes sharing responsibility develops student creativity, exposes them to ideas and careers they had never considered and gives them ownership of their learning. She explains this was a challenge for her and the students at first, requiring a shift in

mindset to change the teacher's role to "the guide on the side, not the sage on the stage." Lucy readily acknowledges that part of her ability to trust the process of arts integration and give more ownership to the students comes partly from the support of building leadership.

Although Lucy feels supported by building leadership, she explains that there is limited interest in collaboration for integrated teaching during grade-level planning. Lucy shared that when she and her colleagues had a grant, Paul would attend weekly planning meetings to support intentional arts integration. Without the grant, weekly team planning still occurs, and Lucy serves as a resource to share ideas for arts integration. However, not all teachers continue to integrate the arts, limiting Lucy's opportunities for collaboration. Lucy wonders if limited interest is due to a lack of professional learning or experience with arts integration or not having a school-wide expectation for arts integration. She also wonders if a lack of understanding that integrating the arts is an approach to teaching, not something extra, influences teacher interest in using arts integration methods. Lucy admits that it is a challenge to align arts and core content standards with appropriate ideas that are purposeful but navigates her practice using the belief that integration is not just about what the teacher knows. Instead, integrating the arts is about how a teacher guides students through purposeful experiences to build knowledge, take responsibility for their learning, make connections, and learn the techniques used by arts professionals to expand their understanding of future possibilities while uncovering their passion.

Olivia explained that as a librarian, she mainly plans on her own but feels supported by her colleagues who remind students of the purpose of library visits and ask questions about the learning that occurred following each lesson. As the librarian for five schools, when planning, Olivia has specific challenges to consider, such as the transport of materials, the physical space in each library, and the constraints of only seeing a class once every three weeks for a 30-

minutes. Olivia explains that she uses lots of singing, drama, movement, and real and imaginary props but does not use puppets since the library time is so short. Olivia explained that she would like to incorporate more art creation activities but faces the obstacle of traveling to five libraries and having such a short amount of instructional time. Because of this, Olivia uses pre-cut items and drawing activities but hopes her request for a 40-minute library block will be approved moving forward. The extra time would provide her with the scheduling support to incorporate more activities for creating art.

Teresa shared that integrating the arts has been more of a challenge this year due to the addition of new testing requirements and the aftereffects of COVID. For example, Teresa explains that the added testing requirements for pre-K take away instructional time and limit the learning activities she can provide for her students. In addition, Teresa describes feeling frustrated when building leadership requires her to cover classes on other grade levels instead of supporting her own students' learning during state-required testing. She further explained that testing weeks are a barrier to planning for outside learning opportunities due to a zero outdoor noise policy. Finally, Teresa shared that COVID influenced the degree of arts integration at the beginning of the year since she needed to spend more time building background knowledge than in previous years. Teresa explained that when students returned to in-person learning, more support was needed to develop language and fine motor skills, such as how to hold a pencil, due to limited social interactions and experiences in school settings.

I have attended professional learning on various topics and implemented that learning in practice. However, my arts integration experience was different from the participants' experiences. I did not attend arts integration professional learning as a classroom teacher but instead used my background in the arts to guide integration. Additionally, when I integrated the

arts for two of the years, the principal's children were in my class. This makes me wonder if the lack of pushback and questioning of my instructional methods from building leadership was due to the principal observing the benefits to her children when learning through the arts. Thus, the implementation experiences of these participants helped me better understand the realities faced during transfer which could inform future implementation experiences.

The participants' responses during focus groups and interviews demonstrated that when obstacles are faced, teachers make adjustments or pursued change which may inform implementation. Devon believes that the key to implementation is sharing the responsibility of integrating the arts between the classroom and resource teachers. She explained the importance of flexibility and openness to change when obstacles appear during planning or in the middle of a project. Lucy also believes in the importance of shared responsibility when implementing the arts. She explained the importance of putting the onus on the kids and letting them research how to be experts. Which she adds can be a tough adjustment at first and requires a shift in the role of the teacher. While collaboration opportunities for intentional planning for arts integration seem to depend on whether a grant is providing the structure of intentional planning, Lucy serves as a resource for other teachers in the area of arts integration. For example, Olivia advocated for additional instructional time after noticing that 30 minutes was not enough time to plan opportunities for students to create to promote deeper learning. She also explained that when she wants to implement something new such as using fewer precut art activities, she makes minor adjustments to help her not feel overwhelmed. Teresa shared that integrating the arts is just like any other type of learning, that you first need to know your students and their needs to evaluate where to start. She explained that this year some of her students needed extra support in understanding the concept of a line before they could be expected to draw a straight line.

Additionally, Teresa spent more time at the beginning of the year strengthening background knowledge and supporting student communication and comprehension.

### **Implications for Practice and Building-Level Professional Learning**

The results of this study indicate that these four educators gained content, skills, and understandings from professional learning which led to changes in practice and student benefits. Varying degrees of support and obstacles such as limited resources did not influence whether implementation occurred, only to what degree, and what adjustments were needed to sustain implementation. These participants expressed their own concerns regarding required testing and learning standards however, prior research argues that learning to employ arts-integrated methods expands a teacher's ability to teach beyond the required standards, make learning more inclusive, and more authentically assess student understanding (Best, 2017; Greene, 2013; Reck & Wald, 2018). These findings suggest several implications for practice and building-level professional learning.

The participants in this study indicated the importance of building leadership support. While some of the participants gratefully received this desired support others felt frustrated in the lack of support and interest in their professional learning goals. Olivia and Teresa both work in School District I and reported little to no support from building administration for employing arts integrated methods. Since School District I received funding for teachers to attend professional learning it appears essential that to promote transfer and sustainability of such methods building administration should also attend professional learning. As such, the participants and the research suggested the need for administrators to receive professional learning in the arts. As Diaz and McKenna, (2017) explains, while many administrators understand the value of the arts in learning they are unsure how to support the arts as part of daily instruction while still meeting



district and state requirements. For example, the Principals Arts Leadership program (PAL) approach follows an implementation progression beginning with principal buy in, then the creation of a school arts team, followed by the development of an action plan, and the consideration of financial resources and support networks such as a Community of practice comprised of other administrators and arts coaches (ArtsEd Washington, 2010; Diaz & McKenna, 2017). Using an approach that outlines key steps for increased support from building leadership such as the PAL approach could successfully implement the arts.

Research also indicates that administrative support can lead to a scheduled collaborative planning time and schedule changes that enable teachers to collaborate fully, plan, implement, assess, and reflect (Bellisario & Donovan, 2012; Purnell, 2004; van Eman et al., 2008). As Riordan et al. (2019) explains, to provide equitable learning experiences, educators must understand that each student, classroom, and school has unique needs. Considering time adjustments to schedules such as Olivia's request for a longer library block or the scheduling of collaborative planning could help the resource and classroom teachers work as a team. When colleagues are able to work together instead of siloed there are more opportunities to evaluate the emotional and academic needs of learners and plan for integrated cross curricular learning experiences. This way, the planning of arts-integrated lessons can be specific to the school's needs, tried in classrooms, and discussed school-wide on building-professional learning days.

To promote cross-curricular planning and integration of the arts throughout a school, teachers and building administration first need to understand the relevance. As Kearsley (2010) explains an adult learner's interest in content is connected to understanding its relevance. These four participants all reported feeling motivated to implement changes to traditional methods because they had witnessed the benefits to their students when learning through the arts.

Similarly, Vitulli et al. (2013) found when teachers learn how to integrate the arts with core content, they create opportunities for students to make cross-disciplinary connections in new ways. For example, Olivia explained her new knowledge of different lines helped students pay closer attention to the details of the world around them. Building wide professional learning for arts integration over the course of multiple sessions could increase the comfort level of teachers to use arts integration methods (Burnaford, 2010; Leysath & Bronowski, 2016; Scripp, 2012) and lead to change in practice resulting in benefits to learners (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

The creation of a school arts team as suggested by the PAL approach could create opportunities for interested resource and classroom teachers to take on leadership roles for designing interdisciplinary curricula that specifically addresses the needs of students at their school (ArtsEd Washington, 2010). The created curricula could then be implemented throughout the school and the effects of learning and achievement with this group of students shared during planned professional learning to promote understanding of the potential effects of learning in the arts more clearly. Easton (2008) recommends considering how time is spent during professional learning. For example, to support student growth through change to practice, teachers need time during professional learning to focus on context specific goals, students' needs, and data from implementation (Easton, 2008). Intentional time spent with other teachers discussing and critically reflecting on the student outcomes of learning in the arts could offer new perspectives, insights, and the formation of next steps (Sandholtz, 2002).

Funding opportunities may be obtained through grants, building funds, and possibly the school's Parent Teacher Association. In my experience some schools host an Art Night to celebrate National Art Month in March. This might also be an opportunity to raise awareness among parents about the value of arts integrated learning through the use of grade level displays

and student performances of cross-curricular arts integrated learning. Accompanying displays and performances with information about the benefits to students and learning objectives could put the value of learning through the arts on the radar of building administration, faculty, students, and parents and potentially increase the impact and support for sustainability.

### **Implications for Professional Learning**

Educators require professional learning in culturally responsive practices such as arts integration, so methods translate into practice (Gay, 2018). Therefore, building- and state-level leadership might evaluate the potential outcomes of requiring some form of arts integration professional learning to guide teachers toward more culturally responsive practices in the classroom. These participants also suggested more opportunities to interact with teachers from other schools, such as during professional learning with the Arts Integration Organization. Devon explained that hearing varied perspectives, gathering advice, and sharing ideas with teachers who serve different populations could lead to a deeper understanding of how to meet the diverse needs of learners. According to Garrett (2010), a teacher's ability to reach diverse learners may also be promoted by establishing an ongoing mentoring relationship with a teaching artist. Schools should consider establishing partnerships with local teaching artists that reflect the population in the community and who are interested in volunteering.

Professional learning should address the potential obstacles students and teachers might face during implementation. As Lucy explained, teachers need to be aware that sometimes activities do not work, requiring an immediate change during a lesson. Additionally, suggestions for removing or overcoming the obstacles to arts integration could help promote student learning and implementation. Olivia suggested that professional learning organizations should consider creating age-appropriate resources that align arts-based practices with different subject areas to

compliment the transfer of content, skills, and understandings from professional learning and to support planning during implementation.

It was apparent throughout the study that the design of the professional learning provided by the Arts Integration Organization supported the needs of the four participants as adult learners. Placing teachers in the role of a student and providing professional learning through a learning experience design supported the adult learning research that activities should be experience-based, to meet the needs of teachers as adult learners and transfer professional learning to practice (Best, 2017; Kearsley, 2010; Knowles, 1984; Sandholtz, 2002). This finding could help all professional organizations when designing professional learning for teachers as adult learners. Additionally, based on the desire for sustainability and interest in helping more educators transfer professional learning in the arts to practice, the participants suggested involving building leadership in professional learning, so they fully understand the purpose, methods, and needed supports for employing arts integrated methods, such as time for collaborative planning. Kaimal et al.'s (2016) study revealed that when principals participate in the arts, they understand the value the arts have for learners and are more likely to support teachers who employ innovative practices. Olivia specifically mentioned that administrator involvement should include more than receiving an emailed explanation of the arts integration professional learning that their teachers are attending. Instead, they need to experience professional learning as a student. Teresa also mentioned that the Department of Education's leadership should be involved in professional learning to understand the purpose of arts integrated learning which may influence certain policy decisions.

### **Implications for Teacher Education**

Educators interested in integrating the arts often report feeling unprepared for purposeful integration, making it challenging to align standards and meet goals across disciplines (Brophy & Alleman, 1991; Carpenter & Gandara, 2018; Mackin et al., 2017; May & Robinson, 2016).

Therefore, I suggest that teacher preparation more intentionally include cross-department collaboration across teacher programs. For example, elementary preservice teachers and elementary music or arts preservice teachers might work together to plan a lesson or unit. This idea is supported by previous literature that suggests when non-arts teachers and arts experts work together, teachers better understand the purpose behind the arts integration methods, which promotes transfer to practice (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Dwyer, 2011; Vitulli et al., 2013).

I also suggest that arts integration methods be introduced throughout teacher education programs instead of being siloed in one course. As McKenna (2017) explained, teachers need time to develop the capacity to identify and align conceptual understandings across disciplines to fully understand the potential for the deep connections created when learning through the arts. Preservice teachers also need time to gain a knowledge of arts concepts, skills, and understandings to prevent the fear of veering from traditional practice (LaJevic, 2013a) and to be able to understand the relevancy of the arts in classroom practice (Best, 2017).

### **Implications for Policy and Policy Recommendations**

This study explored the implementation experiences of four educators from neighboring districts in the southeast. To suggest policy recommendations based on the findings from this study, I first examined the licensure renewal policies for three southeastern states: Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia. While all three states require documentation of professional learning, what counts toward license renewal depends on the state, type of certificate, and year of

expiration. For example, Georgia allows teachers to select professional learning connected to personal growth that aligns with students' needs, while North Carolina and Virginia include more parameters around licensure renewal recertification. North Carolina requires 80 clock hours over 5 years in subject area, literacy, and digital learning to be selected from approved options such as college courses and inservice workshops. Virginia, which recently moved to a 10-year renewal, requires 270 hours of professional learning that aligns with the educator's endorsement area and fits into one or more of the six domains of professional competency in education with eight categories of renewal options requiring prior advisor approval. Georgia has a 5-year renewal process requiring 100 hours of training selected from a state approved list, 10 professional learning units, or six semester hours of college courses that require job-embedded professional learning to promote collaboration with colleagues.

In my own experience when discussing licensure renewal with colleagues I found that professional learning is viewed as one more thing to do instead of an opportunity. Based on the responses from these participants I inferred that professional learning for arts integration has been the most beneficial professional learning they have received. If professional learning for arts integration has the potential to make such an impact that a teacher's knowledge of methods could meet the diverse learning needs of students while also promoting positivity toward the teaching profession, more emphasis should be placed on arts integration related opportunities during licensure renewal. I noticed in the Virginia Licensure Renewal Manual (January 2022) for educators with a five-year renewable license, that examples were listed for renewal options. For example under option three Curriculum Development, "Integration of Standards of Learning objectives with basal series objectives and curriculum guides" was listed (Virginia Department of Education, p.14). Therefore, an example such as, "Integration of Standards of Learning

content objectives with grade level arts objectives to promote learning through the arts,” should also be included.

As Marshall (2019) explains, learning through the arts provides opportunities for students to work through complex social issues, gain mathematical and scientific understandings through observation, make connections across disciplines, while using images, movement, and music to support language and vocabulary development. The literature and the responses from these participants show a need for state or local policies that promote more than passing standardized tests. As Olivia and Teresa suggest maybe the folks who make the decisions on the federal, state, and local level need to attend arts integration professional learning to fully understand what it is and how meaningful learning through the arts can be.

Communities of practice have the potential to influence state and local policy regarding initiatives that promote learning through the arts. For example, Maryland, Kansas, and Oklahoma have a state-wide collaboration of stakeholders that share in the purpose of promoting arts integration in schools (Diaz & McKenna, 2017). The Arts Education in Maryland Schools Alliance (AEMS, 2014) works to create changes in areas such as policy, teacher professional learning and funding to achieve the shared goal of, “assuring equity and access to high-quality arts and arts integrated education for all students in Maryland” (Diaz & McKenna, 2017, p. 65). According to Diaz and McKenna (2017), Arts Impact an inservice professional learning program also suggests that building and district policy funding allocations be considered since integrated learning in the classroom deepens learning that occurs with resource teachers, improves teacher practice, and develops confidence and competency. As such, teachers need 1) time for professional learning and collaboration in the arts and 2) job imbedded coaching so professional learning can extend into practice (Diaz & McKenna, 2017).

### **Positionality**

I considered my positionality throughout the study to question how the views and beliefs I hold might have influenced my ability to understand the experiences of the participants (Lareau, 2021). As Stake (2010) explains humans constantly change since their daily experiences in the world shifts their understanding and reality. My lived experiences, interactions with these participants, and deep analysis of the transcripts and memos led me to question my assumptions. Most of the data seemingly confirmed that these participants believed in the value of the arts and their place in classroom learning. I grew up with the privilege of exploring extracurricular opportunities in the arts but had limited opportunities to learn through the arts in the classroom. Because of this, I used memos to record my thoughts on how different my learning experiences could have been if provided with the arts-integrated opportunities the participants described. I made sure to express these feelings in my memos and question the data I collected regarding observations of student benefits when learning in the arts.

As a former classroom teacher, I assumed that the colleagues of these participants may not have received the same professional learning and therefore, not know how to integrate the arts, limiting opportunities for collaboration. I questioned whether my solitary experiences when integrating the arts influenced my formation of questions and interpretation of the data. Since I did not have professional learning experiences for arts integration when I was in the classroom, I did not know what opportunities for collaboration existed during or after professional learning. Based on responses during the first focus group, it seemed that these participants also had a solitary experience when integrating the arts at some point. To add credibility to my initial interpretation of this finding, I intentionally searched for disconfirming evidence by asking about opportunities for collaboration during the individual interview (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lareau,



2021). I found that while collaboration when planning for arts integration instruction is appreciated and valued, it does not consistently occur, which may serve as an obstacle that influences the degree of implementation.

The teachers I interviewed during this study appreciated the opportunity to be heard and share their experiences. As Strand (2006) explains, this may be because educators who believe in the value of creative integrated learning are often more willing to take risks, embrace change, and try new approaches to teaching. However, it is essential to note that while the participants in this study were excited to share their experiences and artifacts of practice, the recruitment flyer went out to 13 educators, and only four responded. This disconfirming evidence makes me wonder why these four participants were interested in sharing multiple artifacts. Was it due to their desire to take risks and try new methods, as Strand (2006) explains or because this group of educators has a specific desire to share their implementation experiences after observing the benefits to students when learning in the arts?

I initially assumed that since working with the Arts Integration Organization was a choice and not a requirement for these teachers, self-selection of the topic drove implementation. I searched for disconfirming evidence in two ways. I started by considering the participant responses that mentioned an interest in the arts and reasons for pursuing professional learning. I noticed that all participants mentioned at least three reasons for wanting to pursue professional learning for arts integration. However, I felt there was more to uncover. As I dove deeper into the data, I realized that the experience-based instructional approach used during professional learning also played a prominent role since the design supported the acquisition and transfer of new knowledge to practice. Being in the role of a learner while immersed in the arts helped these

teachers acquire and transfer specific arts concepts, skills, and understandings to practice, which drove implementation.

I was mindful to consider my positionality throughout the study. In memos following the individual interviews, I paid close attention to how each educator responded to the artifact question. As a former classroom teacher, sharing evidence of practice can be stressful if you worry about judgment and if what is shared shows evidence of a student's conceptual understanding. Because of this, I assumed that the teachers would select only one artifact to share during the interview based on the directions and maybe be nervous about sharing. Instead, most of the participants shared multiple artifacts, and some also chose to share additional artifacts after their interviews. I noted in my following memo that instead of feeling trepidation about judgment these educators appreciated having the opportunity to share evidence of arts integration in practice.

During individual interviews, when asked, "What should be added to professional learning for arts integration that could increase your ability to plan lessons that are culturally responsive?" the response was time. Time to know the students you support, their backgrounds, their cultures, the foods they eat, and possibly their families. I anticipated a response connected to what actions the organization providing professional learning could take. When instead, the responses pointed to the need for more time, which previous research supports as the most common challenge to integrating the arts (Hipp & Sulentic Dowell, 2019; May, 2013; McBee, 2000). I also searched for disconfirming evidence that time was the key to promoting more culturally responsive teaching. I found that Olivia specifically mentioned an action that professional learning could take. She suggested that arts-integration professional learning organizations provide examples of connecting arts-integrated learning with specific cultures to

give teachers a starting point to see what culturally responsive teaching through the arts looks like in practice.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

Due to research limitations resulting from COVID, data collection lasted only one month rather than five. Although participants discussed experiences prior to spring 2022, which enabled me to gather an in-depth understanding of implementation in their classroom, a longitudinal study could address changes to practice over time and better inform our understanding of implementation. A more extended timeframe without restrictions would also allow the researcher to develop an increased understanding of implementation by visiting classrooms and observing arts integration in practice. Although I gained insight into implementation through shared artifacts and responses during interviews and focus groups, the study occurred at the end of the second full school year of the COVID pandemic, when some aspects of regular instruction and professional learning were slightly changed. A researcher could gain a different perspective by conducting this study outside of the aftereffects of COVID when classroom practices and professional learning were consistently back in-person for a period of time prior to the study.

Yin (2014) recommends four or five participants for a case; however, increasing the sample size for a future study could increase the depth of understanding of experiences. It is important to note that this study's small sample size of four participants resulted after the recruitment opportunity was sent to 13 educators in the hopes of receiving five responses. This study examined the implementation experiences of participants from adjacent School Districts I and II, and the data showed differences in the support given and obstacles faced. However, considering implementation experiences in other adjacent districts after receiving the same

professional learning with the Arts Integration Organization would increase the perspective of the data collected.

Another limitation is that all four participants had arts integration experiences in addition to the professional learning they received from the Arts Integration Organization. Although the participants may have followed similar opportunities through the Arts Integration Organization, such as the Summer Institute, they did not all attend during the same timeframe. Data collection from teachers who only received arts integration professional learning through the same organization and during the same timeframe might yield informative results. This group of teachers had a range of teaching experience from 15 to 35 years, which led to an understanding of implementation outside of an adjustment period of a novice teacher. It could be informative in future studies to examine the implementation experiences of teachers with similar years or levels of classroom experience.

Because arts integration research typically focuses on benefits to students or challenges during implementation, my qualitative case study examined the transfer of professional learning to practice. Additional studies are needed, however, to add to the knowledge base of implementation studies. While the responsibilities of the four participants varied from classroom teacher to resource teacher and from preschool to K–5 teacher, future studies should explore each grade level PreK–5 and all types of resource teachers (ex. languages, art, music, library, and gym) to fully examine the differences and similarities between grade level and teaching responsibility. It might also be helpful to examine classroom teachers' perceptions of the flexibility resource teachers have regarding time and planning.

Finally, the research and data from this study support the claim that time is the main challenge to arts integration (LaJevic, 2013a). Data suggests future research explore teachers

having the time to identify and discuss the needs and backgrounds of their students. As Devon explained, teachers first need to know “who their students are before they can begin integrating arts into the lessons to be culturally responsive.” Devon further explained how helpful it would be during professional learning to hear the perspectives of teachers who support different populations and learn what they are doing so she can weave those ideas into her practice.

### **Conclusion**

This study could inform implementation studies since it illustrates how four elementary teachers used the content, skills, and understandings gained from professional learning to implement varying degrees of arts integration implementation in the classroom. I found that: (a) professional learning for arts integration led to a shift in practice, (b) observing the benefit to learners due to the shift in practice and renewed love of teaching led to motivation for implementation, and (c) pursued sustainability of implementation practices led to a desire for more professional learning.

I would be remiss to not mention the regret I felt when writing this dissertation. I did not realize when I was in the classroom that the arts integration approach I was using is one that requires professional learning. I assumed that I was able to figure out how to integrate the arts since I had a background in the arts. I knew parents appreciated and supported the arts integrated learning experiences provided and that the students benefited socially, emotionally and academically from the experiences. However, I never officially explained the benefits or shared research to support the reasons behind my methods. It did not even cross my mind to suggest the idea of making professional learning for arts integration part of a school-wide expectation. After listening to the implementation experiences of the four educators who participated in this study, I

now understand the impact professional learning for arts integration can make on classroom practice. In hindsight, I blame my own lack of professional learning for the neglect.

This study points to the importance of professional learning for arts integration since the arts make learning more accessible and meaningful for students (Bordelon, 2010; Marshall, 2019) and not all educators know how to implement arts-integrated methods. Using a qualitative approach throughout data collection and analysis allowed me to explore how these four teachers applied their professional learning to integrating arts in the classroom. The four educators in this study named the content, skills, and understandings they gained from their work with the Arts Integration Organization as their primary support during implementation. This support may be due to 1) the learning experience design of the Arts Integration Organization's professional development opportunities and 2) the interaction and collaboration with colleagues and instructional staff during professional learning experiences. I found that for these teachers being in the role of a student during professional learning and gaining a conceptual understanding of learning through the arts as a process shifted their approach when planning and influenced their actions during implementation.

The data I collected revealed that these teachers acquired and transferred specific skills, and abilities from professional learning enabling them to align core subjects with arts objectives, find entry points across disciplines, utilize different types of materials, methods, techniques, and tools to facilitate student connections and expression of understanding. The variation in the support these participants received, and the obstacles they faced did not influence whether implementation occurred, only to what degree. I inferred that this might be due to the expansion of personal teacher resources after professional learning (Alter et al., 2009) or that integrating the arts regardless of obstacles stems from their reported observation of benefits to students when

learning in the arts. In conclusion, the literature and my findings from this study both suggest that experience-based professional learning is necessary to support implementation since arts integration requires a shift away from traditional teaching methods (Hardiman, 2019; Hartle et al., 2015; Kulasegaram & Rangachari, 2018; National Education Association, 2002-2019; Reif & Grant, 2010).

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### **Appendix A: Study Information Sheet**

This study explores the experiences of elementary educators implementing arts integration after engaging in professional learning. The study specifically asks, (1) What content, skills, and understandings do educators transfer from professional learning to practice? and (2) How do teachers navigate the implementation of arts integration? Participants included elementary educators who have attended professional learning for arts integration prior to January 2022 and who planned to implement arts integrated practices in Spring 2022. We aim to recruit five participants. Participants agree to participate in two virtual focus groups and one virtual interview. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss their experiences with other teachers, inform the professional learning design offered by Partners in the Arts, and receive a gift card for their participation.

## **Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer**

My name is Amy Jefferson, and I am a Ph.D. student in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. As part of my dissertation, I would like to invite you to participate in a research study during the Spring Semester of 2022.

The purpose of this study is to understand the implementation experiences of PreK-5 educators (classroom teachers, librarians, physical education teachers, etc.) who have participated in professional learning for arts integration. Examining the implementation experience will help inform program planning for arts integration professional learning and preservice coursework, which ultimately may increase student access to integrated learning.

The research design is intentionally mindful of possible COVID-19 limitations so all data collection will occur virtually.

Participation will include:

1. Two focus groups
2. One interview
3. Sharing classroom artifacts and other examples of your arts integration practices

Participation is voluntary and can be rescinded at any point during the study. All identifiable participant information will be kept confidential.

To participate, you must meet the following requirements:

- Be a current PreK-5 educator
- Be trained through Partners in the Arts for arts integration
- Be planning to implement arts integration during Spring semester 2022
- Be willing to participate in data collection during Spring semester 2022

Please respond through email to [aejefferson@vcu.edu](mailto:aejefferson@vcu.edu), to let me know if you are interested in participating or if I can answer any questions. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Amy Jefferson  
Co-principal Investigator

## **Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet**

**STUDY TITLE:** Arts Integration Implementation Experiences of Elementary Educators

**VCU INVESTIGATOR:** Dr. Adria Hoffman (PI), Amy Jefferson (Co-PI)

You are invited to participate in a research study about the implementation experiences of elementary teachers after professional learning for arts integration.

The purpose of this study is to understand the implementation experiences of PreK-5 educators (classroom teachers, librarians, physical education teachers, etc.) who have participated in professional learning for arts integration. Examining the implementation experience will help inform program planning for arts integration professional learning and preservice coursework, which ultimately may increase student access to integrated learning. Your participation is voluntary.

In this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

1. Participate in two virtual focus groups to discuss your implementation experiences.
2. Participate in one individual interview to discuss your implementation experiences.
3. Share documents to evidence integration in practice.

An email will be sent in March to schedule the first focus group.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study now or in the future, please contact:

Amy Jefferson (804) 931-3442, aejefferson@vcu.edu

Adria Hoffman (804) 828-1305, hoffmanar2@vcu.edu

## **Appendix D: Focus Group Protocols**

### **Focus Group Protocol 1**

#### **I. Introduction:**

Hello and welcome to our first focus group session scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you for taking the time to participate today. My name is Amy Jefferson, and I am a doctoral candidate at VCU working to learn more about the implementation experiences of educators when employing arts integration after professional learning. What I learn from our discussion today and over the course of this study could be used to inform literature in the field of arts integration and to influence program decisions for inservice and preservice arts integration programming. Since this is our first meeting, I want to provide an overview of what the study will entail. The study will occur during Spring semester 2022. We will begin with a focus group followed by an individual interview and conclude with another focus group. During our meetings, I invite you to share documentation with me of your implementation experience so that I can better understand what arts integration looks like in your classroom. This could include pictures of student projects, teacher reflection after a lesson, lesson plans, or any type of artifacts that you think captures your implementation experience. Since this is the first meeting you will just be asked to show an example of what you have used or adapted from PL. Our session today will last about 1 hour.

#### **II. Focus Group Session 1:**

I am interested in hearing about your training for arts integration and the influence of classroom implementation. Before we begin, I will review some guidelines that will help the session run smoothly. I will be recording the session to accurately capture your comments; it is helpful if you silence and put away your cell phones and speak one at a time. Also, to assure you of complete confidentiality, please only use your first name or a pseudonym during today's session. In the written summaries of the session no names will be attached to specific comments. I would also ask that you refrain from sharing the information discussed in this session to maintain the confidentiality of your peers.

1. In what grade do you currently teach and how many years have you been an elementary educator?
2. Describe what led to your decision to participate in professional learning for arts integration.
3. Tell me about your experience during professional learning for arts integration. Did you participate with a group from your school or as an individual?
4. Please tell the group about the example you brought to share of how you used or adapted a concept, skill, or understanding from PL in your classroom.
5. What has been working for you as you integrate the arts? To what do you attribute the success?

6. Are there any arts integrated practices you would like to employ but have not been able to?

Probe: 1) Please explain why.

7. How has your professional learning helped you to plan lessons that meet the diverse needs of students?

Probe: 1) What has PL helped you understand that has influenced your planning?

### **III. Closing:**

I want to be mindful of your time so I will now conclude today's discussion. Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study by sharing your implementation experiences. I will reach out soon to schedule an individual interview and explain artifact selection for the interview. Until then take care and thank you again.

## **Focus Group Protocol 2**

### **I. Introduction:**

Hello and welcome to our second focus group session and wrap-up to the arts integration study. Thank you for taking the time to participate today and telling me about your training for arts integration and its influence on classroom implementation. To assure you of complete confidentiality, please use the pseudonym that you selected at the beginning of the study to rename yourself on the Zoom screen. Just as a reminder, please make sure that no identifiable information such as student names is included on any of the artifacts or in any reflections. Our session today will last about 1 hour.

### **II. Focus Group Session 2:**

Before we begin, I will review some guidelines that will help the session run smoothly. I will be recording the session to accurately capture your comments; it is helpful if you silence your cell phones, speak one at a time and be mindful of giving everyone an opportunity to share their thoughts. In the written summaries of the session pseudonyms will be attached to specific comments. I would also ask that you refrain from sharing the information discussed in this session to maintain the confidentiality of your peers.

Since this is the last meeting, emerging patterns from the first focus group and the individual interviews were used to form the questions. For example, questions about change or shifts in practice, teacher identity, supporting the diverse needs of students, and the realities of supports and challenges during implementation will be included.

#### Let's Begin:

1. Describe changes, if any, to the integration methods you used at the beginning of the year to those you are using now. What led you to make those changes?

Probe: Tell me more. Can you say more about that?

2. Please show us the artifact you brought and briefly explain how it illustrates your current use of arts integration in practice.

Probe: Tell me more about that.

3. Explain how your implementation of arts integration has shifted your identity as an educator.

4. Do you think that using arts integration has enabled you to better meet the diverse needs of learners and if so, how?

5. You all mentioned the importance of understanding and remembering that arts integration should focus on the process, what else do you think is important for resource and classroom teachers to understand when implementing integrated learning in the arts?

6. What is one thing (or two things) in your professional learning for arts integration that supported your implementation? What is one thing (or two things) that were a challenge or, perhaps, absent from professional learning?

### **III. Closing:**

I want to be mindful of your time so I will now conclude today's discussion. I might also need to do some member checking before the end of the school year, so I can make sure that I am capturing the intent of your comments. That would just look like an email with certain comments that were maybe unable to be transcribed from the audio or something I need to double check. Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study by sharing your implementation experiences and please reach out if you have any questions.

## **Appendix E: Interview Protocol**

Prompts may be adjusted after Focus Group 1 and based on the documentation of integration participants choose to share prior to the individual interview.

### **I. Introduction:**

Hello and welcome to our interview scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you for taking the time to participate today. My name is Amy Jefferson, and I am a doctoral candidate at VCU working to learn more about the implementation experiences of educators when employing arts integration after professional learning. What I learn from our discussion today and over the course of this study could be used to inform literature in the field of arts integration and to influence program decisions for inservice and preservice arts integration programming. I want to invite you again to share any documentation with me to help me better understand your implementation experience. This could include pictures of student projects, teacher reflection after a lesson, lesson plans, or any type of artifacts that you think captures your implementation experience and illustrates what arts integration looks like in your classroom. Our session today will last about 30-40 minutes.

### **II. Individual Interview:**

I am interested in hearing about your personal experiences during implementation. Before we begin, I will review some guidelines that will help the session run smoothly. I will be recording the session to accurately capture your comments; it is helpful if you silence and put away your cell phone. To assure you of complete confidentiality, your name will not be attached to your comments in the transcription of the interview.

1. To capture the demographics of the participants in this study I invite you to describe your race, ethnicity, and gender and to briefly describe the demographic make-up of the students you support. If there is any information you prefer to not share you can omit that part.
2. What do you draw on from your arts professional learning when you plan?  
 Probe: 1) Please explain the content, skills, or understandings you learned from PL that guide your planning.
3. Please show the artifact you brought and explain how it illustrates what arts integration looks like in your classroom.  
 Probe: 1) Explain the influence of PL that led to the development of the artifact you shared.  
 2) What does the artifact reflect about your students' understanding arts integrated learning?  
 3) What does the artifact reflect about your implementation of arts integrated teaching?
3. Describe your experiences when integrating the arts.
4. Please explain your planning process for arts-integrated learning.
5. Do you have opportunities for collaboration when planning for arts integration?



6. What challenges have you faced integrating the arts? What supports your work?
7. What should be added to professional learning for arts integration that could promote transfer?
8. What should be added to professional learning for arts integration that could increase your ability to plan lessons that are culturally responsive?
9. Is there anything else regarding the implementation experience that you have not had the opportunity to share that you would like to discuss?

### **III. Closing:**

I want to be mindful of your time, so I will now conclude today's discussion. As a reminder, please share with me any documentation that will help me better understand the implementation experience as you integrate the arts in your classroom. Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study by sharing your implementation experiences.

### **Vita**

Amy Elizabeth Jefferson was born on September 30, 1974, in Fredericksburg, Virginia, to Betty and Larry Witter. She was raised in Stafford County, Virginia and graduated from Stafford Senior High School in 1992. She earned a Bachelor in Arts from the University of Richmond, in Richmond, Virginia, in 1996. Amy then earned her Master of Early Childhood Education in 1997 from the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. After graduation from the University of Georgia, Amy taught elementary school for 20 years in Richmond City, Henrico County, and the Plano Independent School District in Texas. She earned her National Board Certification for Early Childhood in 2014 and she completed her Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Curriculum, Culture, and Change track at Virginia Commonwealth University in December 2022. Amy is a clinical faculty member at Virginia Commonwealth University, where she supports student teacher interns and teaches as an adjunct faculty member for the Department of Teaching and Learning.