

Laughter Filled the Classroom: Outcomes of Professional Development in Arts Integration for Elementary Teachers in Inclusion Settings

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This qualitative study examined teachers' experiences with an arts integration curriculum. This study considered the teachers' perceptions of arts integrations before and after being introduced to the concepts of arts integration. The teachers were provided with knowledge and tools to integrate the arts into general education curriculum and inclusion classrooms with children with learning disabilities. This study provided insight into the value of arts integration. It validated the advantages of arts integration professional development and noted that even on smaller scales it can be beneficial for students and teachers. Through examination of the literature, it was probable that arts integration curriculum could improve the academic achievement for diverse students. Not evident in literature was the direct perspectives of teachers involved in an arts integrated lesson. This study was an attempt to provide the teachers' voices. The major means of collecting data were pre- and post-course survey. This study offers strategies to enhance educational practices for educators, arts advocates, and parents.

Keywords: *arts integration, professional development, pedagogy, differentiation, learning disabilities*

The utilization of the arts for the purpose of education, as well as survival, can be traced to the beginning of mankind. Stories, song, and dances were performed in ancient civilizations in order to teach survival skills, to explain the weather, and share beliefs. A child usually learns his/her ABCs through song. Arts integration is using what is already an innate process of learning for humans (The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 2011).

Decades of studies have demonstrated the benefits of arts integration (AI) on academic achievement. Recently, The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH) released the results of an independent study that indicated significant gains in student achievement (The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 2015). This study, the "Turnaround Arts" initiative, was implemented with eight schools identified as low performing, which were provided with resources to implement arts integrated and fine art courses. Between 2011 and 2014, the PCAH discovered that the majority of students at these schools demonstrated significant progress in their overall reading proficiency rates, math proficiency rates, and improvement in attendance rates. More than half of the schools dramatically reduced suspensions (The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 2015).

The Turnaround Arts initiative has been so successful they announced an expansion to 35 schools in 25 districts within 10 states and the District of Columbia. The findings of the research demonstrated that AI curricula have major benefits to the educational process for students. The method of teaching through the arts is nothing new and has been established through research as being effective for all grade levels, genders, social and economic backgrounds (Burnaford, Aprill & Weiss, 2001). With the importance of the arts to academic achievement clearly supported, there is now a need for professional development for educators.

The purpose of this study is to consider the impact of an AI workshop on teacher attitudes towards the incorporation and subsequent implementation of AI to improve differentiated instruction including students with learning disabilities.

How Can Arts Integration Benefit Teachers?

While the benefits of AI for students are well-documented, there is limited research on the benefits of AI for the enhancement of teaching and learning for educators.

The development of the cognitive process is achieved through active process of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). This

would imply that sitting and completing a worksheet would not be the best method for the acquisition of knowledge. Many theorists throughout history have argued this point but there was limited empirical support. Most notably, Horace Mann and John Dewey both advocated for more arts-based teaching throughout curricula. Dewey stated, “Art is the most effective mode of communication that exists” (1934, p. 5). When AI instruction is implemented effectively by teachers who are engaged and invested, students receive high-quality instruction in the arts as well as in core subject matter instruction (The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 2011, p. 39).

Education must enable young people to engage with themselves (Burnaford, Aprill, & Weiss, 2001). Research considers effective teachers as those who are facilitators of knowledge, not dictators (Catterall, 1998). To align with the standards of effective teaching, AI creates classroom environments that are engaging. This process of reciprocal engagement enhances higher levels of thinking for the teacher through the planning of the lesson as well as the student who is a participant (Appel, 2006). If the instructor is invested in creating a lesson that has multi-sensory approaches to teaching and learning (which is especially important for students with learning disabilities) the students are more likely to be engaged and be active learners (Deasy, 2002). Teaching and learning has just as much to do with emotional stimulations as it does with academics.

Through examination of the literature, it is possible to conclude that AI improves teaching and learning practices because it constructs meaning of content related materials. This can be measured by the analysis of students’ achievement, teachers’ personal assessments, and standardized test scores. The research details the improvement of teacher attitudes, teacher and students’ behavior, classroom observations, and teacher assessments (The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 2011). Being an effective educator takes work, time, support, and sometimes even money.

Challenges to Arts Integration

Teaching, while fulfilling, is not without challenges. The benefits of AI have been documented through research and related studies. However, the studies related to the professional challenges of incorporating AI into teachers’ already existing curriculum are limited. Therefore, there is value in identifying some of the challenges that teachers face when planning and implementing AI programs.

PCAH reported that overwhelming inequities to access of resources to arts education. PCAH concluded, “...a lack of information and structure in the profession, and inconsistent training and certification...” (p. 24) when

discussing AI and arts education. AI is intellectually and pedagogically demanding so researchers believe that ongoing professional development is needed to maintain successful educational growth (Oreck, 2004), but that can be a challenge to plan, schedule, and maintain. There is no easy access to expert advice, lesson plans, tools, and most importantly noted in the PCAH report, networking with colleagues who share the same interest in AI (The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 2011). Another issue noted was “limit on space and time” (Oreck, 2004, p. 3) especially with the pressures of standardized testing. Though many teacher education programs require courses in AI, supporters believe that state and federal level certification requirements need to include training in AI during pre-service education (The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 2011). When AI is appropriately implemented the research indicates that teachers’ attitudes are positive toward AI in lessons.

The PCAH (2011) report provides evidence of the importance of support for teachers using AI. “Almost all teachers (79%) agreed that they had totally changed their teaching and (94%) that they had gained additional ways of teaching critical thinking skills.” (The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 2011, p. 86). Though there are challenges, many of them can be resolved with increased understanding of the importance of AI to educating the whole child. Teachers can become better practitioners if they are provided with the tools and collaborations with experts in AI.

Arts Integration and Students with Learning

Disabilities

Although arts integration and its benefits to students have been in the literature for at least 40 years (Wenner, 1976), the recent empirical research is more limited when looking specifically at the benefits of arts integration for students with learning disabilities. What is available, primarily discussion papers, rather than applied research, is either supportive of its implementation as a way to support and enrich the educational experience of all students (Brouillette, 2012; Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2008; Robinson, 2013; Stickley, Crosbie, & Hui, 2011) and by extension, those with a variety of disabilities, or is instructive in nature, providing suggestions for teachers on ways to work with students with disabilities in the arts (Abramo, 2012; Coleman & Cramer, 2015; Hourigan & Hourigan, 2009).

Robinson (2013), in her review of the research, considered the role of arts integration with “disadvantaged” students, which included not only students with disabilities but also English language learners and those who are economically disadvantaged. She located and reviewed 14

studies between 1995–2011 that looked at the role of the arts in the education of students with disabilities (the studies often combined them with other purported disadvantages of low SES and/or ESL). She reported “potentially positive effects” (p. 201) from the integration of dance and visual arts integration with students with disabilities, including an increase in self-efficacy, self-regulating behaviors, and the use of learning strategies. Robinson (2013) also describes how when students are provided with “multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple means of engagement” (p. 202) through the use of the arts, they are more likely to experience feelings of value, improved academic motivation, and positive recognition from their academic community.

Another review of the research (Brouillette, 2012), looking at the benefits of arts integration with English language learners, does not specifically address students with disabilities, but many of the noted benefits such as improvement of oral language skills through the use of theater, clearer understanding of words and word parts through the rhythm of song, and alternative means of idea expression through dance, can easily be applied not only to students with language differences but also to those with language and other learning difficulties.

Arts integration can support students with learning disabilities via a two-pronged approach. First, it can be used to support academics by helping them capitalize on their strengths in other areas such as creativity, while addressing areas in which they struggle and allowing them to demonstrate knowledge in ways other than reading and writing. Arts integration can also improve skills in non-academic areas such as facilitating communication between peers and adults, strengthening social skills, allowing for appropriate emotional outlets, and providing opportunities to work on fine and gross motor skills.

Perhaps one of the most important things the arts can give to students with disabilities is the opportunity for choice. Much of the education of a student with learning and other disabilities is dictated by the IEP, telling them what, when, where, and how they will learn. Incorporating art into academics, as well as encouraging artistic activities for their own sake, allows for the students to exert some control over their learning through choice of design, medium, and execution (Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2008; Stickley, Crosbie, & Hui, 2011).

The arts can also reduce, or even erase, barriers between students with learning disabilities and those without (Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2008). A student with dyslexia may not be able to read grade-level text but they may be able to draw, sing, or dance without difficulty, and in those areas be no different from their peers. Students who may be on very different academic levels, or even in

different classroom placements, can come together in the art room, on the stage, or in the performance space to be creative together. A 2006 (Whitehurst & Howells) study looked at the relationships between students with and without disabilities after participation in a joint theater project. Prior to the project, students without disabilities were unsure how to interact with peers with significant disabilities, describing them as less than equal and with uncertainty in how to interact. After the project, where they produced a musical stage performance, the students without disabilities reported increased understanding about people with disabilities and an improved confidence in interacting with them. Knowledge shifted their fear of the unknown to an ability to form working relationships and friendships with people with whom they had not previously interacted.

The arts can also have a positive impact on adults with disabilities. A 2014 study (Schlosnagle et al.) considered the self-reports on satisfaction and quality of life of eight adults (ages 27–63 years) with varying disabilities (autism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability) after participating in a fine arts program designed to “enhance community inclusion, socialization, and employment...by improving access to and participation in the arts” (p. 110) for people with disabilities. Participants reported improvements in their quality of life since they began participating in the fine arts program, including increased independence, a new sense of value as a human being, an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem and an improved sense of purpose and self-worth. This supported the findings of a 2011 study (Stickley, et al.) that reported improved confidence, self-esteem, and personal enjoyment in adult individuals with disabilities, coupled with improved relationships between people with disabilities and those without, increased social participation in the community and reduced isolation after participating in an extended (two years) music and drama workshop.

Combining arts with academics, along with encouraging art for art’s sake, can be an important part of the educational experience for individuals with disabilities, promoting increased academic engagement as well as fostering and facilitating social interactions, self-confidence, self-esteem, and relationships. This incorporation and integration of art, however, will not happen without thought and planning on the part of the teachers. Professional development and course work can inform and support both pre-service and in-service teachers as they prepare to integrate the arts (Bain & Hasio, 2011). Fine arts teachers understand the role of music, media, and creativity, but may struggle with how to connect their constructs to the curriculum. General education teachers understand the curriculum but may be unsure how to

include students with learning and other disabilities. Special education teachers understand disabilities and how to accommodate for individual differences but may struggle with how the arts can positively impact the lives of their students. Appropriate professional development can help teachers in all fields work together to the benefit of their students. If the students benefit from the experience, then this will, in turn, improve the teachers' experiences. Improving teachers' experiences in working with students with disabilities will benefit students.

Professional Development in Arts Integration

Professional development is a critical component of ongoing teacher education and is linked to positive academic outcomes in students (Foster, Toma, & Troske, 2013; Martin et al., 2010; Shaha, Glassett, & Ellsworth, 2015). It is no different when arts integration is added to the mix. In fact, all three, art learning, professional development, and academic outcomes, are inseparable when considering the impact of arts integration on an academic program (Scripp & Paradis, 2014). Professional development that is specific to arts integration can help to improve teachers' confidence, knowledge, knowledge and implementation in the classroom (Saraniero, Goldberg, & Hall, 2014). Teachers in Saraniero and colleagues' study (2014) who received professional development in arts integration reported they felt more creative and engaged in their teaching, were more focused in their lesson planning, and found that arts integration was an effective reading strategy.

Teachers report feeling uncomfortable in integrating the arts into daily instruction (LaJevic, 2013) despite the benefits. But, research (Richard & Treichel, 2013) supports that professional development can positively impact how teachers integrate art into the curriculum. Richard and Treichel's 2014 case study discussed how a secondary art teacher paired with a secondary science teacher to develop and teach an arts integrated science lesson after participating in a professional development course, meeting quarterly over a two-year period. While this collaboration included co-teaching, which has its own benefits and challenges to consider, teachers reported an increase in knowledge, both in academic and art content, a better understanding of arts integration in general, improved assessment and reflection on student work, and improved colleague collaboration. This study had the added component of co-teaching which, while not special education focused, could have implications in that area for teacher preparation and subsequent student achievement. The participating teachers noted that the co-teaching aspect of this arts integration activity allowed them to learn more about another discipline, act as positive models for student

with regard to conflict management, respect, and working together, and experience multiple perspectives. These can easily be applied to co-teachers in a general education/special education model during arts integration.

General education teachers report not feeling prepared to meet the needs of their students with disabilities and there is little ongoing professional development for general education teachers regarding special education issues (Leko & Brownell, 2009). As previously noted, arts integration can be an effective option in meeting the needs of students with disabilities but teachers need support in learning how to integrate the arts into instruction for all students.

Ideally, professional development in arts integration should be ongoing, with opportunities for reflection, feedback, and reinforcement (Appel, 2006) but this is not always possible due to course availability, teacher schedules, and the constraints of daily teaching. This research looked at the impact of a four day arts integration workshop on teachers' attitudes and feelings towards arts integration and its impact on their teaching practices, especially when considering children with learning disabilities.

The questions that guided this research are:

- What do teachers believe are the benefits and challenges to arts integration?
- What do teachers believe they need, personally, to be successful with arts integration?
- How do teachers incorporate the inclusion of children with learning disabilities into arts integrated lessons?

Methodology

Participant Recruitment

The study's participants were obtained via a sample of convenience from participants in a professional development course taught by the primary investigators. The course, approved by the state department of education for two continuing education credits toward license recertification, was titled, "Arts Integration: Strategies for Inclusion" and described as follows:

This course explores the role and value of the arts in children's learning and development with a basis in current theory and research. This course emphasizes understanding and integrating the arts in teaching and learning with children, and examines strategies, materials, and experiences in visual arts, music, drama, dance, and play for children with or without special needs from Kindergarten through grade 5. Literacy learning, connections to technology,

and relationships to standards and assessments are essential components.

The course was made available, at no cost, to teachers in a rural, mid-Atlantic school system for four half-days during the summer break. Teachers learned of and registered for the course through the school district's website.

Participants

Twenty teachers participated in the course, 17 elementary school teachers and, although the course was advertised as designed for elementary teachers, three high school inclusion teachers. Eighteen teachers were female, two were male.

Intervention Design

The course was designed to give participants a workshop-style experience in AI. The goal for the course was for participants to learn and participate in AI model lessons, exposing them to the philosophy of AI how can enhance student engagement in the classroom, how AI can facilitate the implementation of state standards and assessment, and how the arts can be a teaching tool across the curriculum, addressing a range of learning styles, intelligences, interests, experiences, and abilities. An additional aspect was a threaded discussion of how AI can address the needs of a wide-spectrum of learner styles including special education students.

The activities presented in the four-day workshop were designed to address the specific objectives. The participants also had the opportunity to share and extend on the AI lessons. Time was allotted each day for participants' sharing of ideas on what would work best in their classrooms, as well as creating new activities and/or extending on existing concepts.

Day one was spent with introduction activities, lecture, and discussion. On arrival, participants created a nametag that represented who they are as individuals. The participants then designed a "roadmap" that gave insight into their personal life using just illustrations. There was an overview of the course, introduction of facilitators, and introduction of participants. The rest of the first half of the session was spent with lecture and discussion of the theory that AI produces positive student results. The second session of the day was an arts integrated lesson introducing the concept of interpersonal relationships as well as the use of curriculum standards for language arts. The lesson and activities were centered on the book, *The Sneetches and Other Stories* by Dr. Seuss, integrating art activities with the text.

Day two started with icebreakers and a creativity "test." There was discussion and examples of first week of school

AI activities. Participants were then given the task of a national arts standards (<http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/>) scavenger hunt to allow them to explore the arts standards and to understand how the arts standards can be connected to content curriculum. The second session of day two was focused on the concepts of what is an idea?, how can we develop students' growth in creating new ideas?, and how can educators develop new ideas in their classrooms? To start the process of understanding the importance of developing ideas, the course facilitators read the book "What do you do with an idea?" by Kobi Yamada. Then the participants were led through a sample AI lesson, using the Yamada book, that could be modified for all ages.

Day three started with participants being led through a series of movement activities they could use to support academic subject areas, develop community within their classrooms, foster creativity, and/or just for fun. The second part of the day was spent with participants developing the AI lesson they would use in their classroom. The participants worked with the course facilitators, as well as each other, to develop a lesson that used all four fine arts (visual art, music, theatre, dance/movement) areas tailored to one subject area.

Day four was spent with the participants presenting part of their intended lesson. Each participant shared what he or she was planning to teach. Then, they had the group participate in one of the activities from one of the four AI sections.

As part of course completion, participants were required to design and teach an AI unit to their students that used four fine arts (visual art, music, theatre, dance/movement) areas tailored to one subject area and also incorporated considerations for students with learning disabilities. Participants were asked to reflect, in writing, on the process of designing and teaching the lesson(s).

Data Collection and Analysis

One week prior to the start of the course, participants were emailed a link to a Google form that had a description of the research, an online consent form, and pre-course survey questions. All 20 participants completed the pre-course survey anonymously by the end of the first day of the course.

Participants were given 11 weeks following the completion of the didactic portion of the course to teach the lesson to their students and complete course assignments. Once the assignments were completed the participants were emailed the post-course survey.

Of the 20 teachers who completed the didactic portion of the course, 14 completed the assignments required to obtain continuing education credits toward state recertification of their teaching license. Those same

14 participants also completed the post-course survey questions.

The answers to the survey questions were analyzed to look for themes, relationships, and ideas regarding the teachers' views on arts integration prior to the course and their experiences in designing and teaching an arts integrated unit after participating in the workshop. The data were read repeatedly, looking for comments by the teachers that seemed to capture the essence of the experience.

Findings

Pre-Intervention Views

The pre-course survey asked participants about their confidence, skill, understanding, and application of AI in the classroom. The majority described themselves as having moderate confidence and knowledge in implementing AI in the classroom, but wanted more of both, either overall or in a specific arts area (eg. dance, music, etc.). Others described themselves as “*not very confident or skilled*,” “*not very creative*,” and comments such as “*music and art are not my forte*,” “*haven't mustered the courage*,” and “*wouldn't even know where to start*” were frequent. Several of the participants had some experience already and wanted to expand and enhance their confidence and knowledge, and some had no experience at all, but were eager to learn and try. Participants who were currently implementing AI into the classroom used a variety of techniques, with the most frequently described as movement breaks, reader's theatre, and singing, primarily in the reading/language arts area. There was no mention of using AI in other academic areas, such as math, science, and social studies.

The participants were generally positive when asked about the benefits of AI for students with learning disabilities and challenges. They described the benefits as improving engagement, memory, and learning, as providing an alternate avenue for expression, as a way to vary the teaching of different learning skills and strategies, and stimulating creativity. They also had ideas on how to assess student progress and learning across content and arts standards, even if they were not currently integrating the arts, describing assessment tools such as rubrics, observations of performance, products, participation, and engagement.

Overall, the participants had a positive view of AI even if they had little-to-no experience. That was not surprising, however, as this was an optional course offering that the participants chose to take, rather than a required course. It would be expected that participants would have a positive view of the content given their choice to enroll in the course.

Post-Intervention Findings

Of the 20 initial participants, 14 completed the course requirements and post-course survey. When asked to describe their knowledge, confidence, and skill in integrating art into their daily lessons, the teachers described improved confidence and engagement not only with integrating the arts into their daily lessons, but also in facilitating AI within their building. They cited the four-day workshop as instrumental in increasing their confidence.

I honestly enjoyed it, and even felt more like an artist by the end.

I feel more confident after this class and I feel like I'm doing it more often.

After taking this class I feel very confident in integrating art into my daily lessons and helping other teachers in my building to integrate art.

They also spoke of improved understanding of the process, saying, “*I have a better idea of what is out there and where the possibilities begin*” compared to “*I wouldn't even know where to start*” at the beginning of the course, and a renewed belief in the importance of using arts in the classroom: “*...watching how quickly my first graders responded to adding the theatre piece to lessons has made me a believer for integration of the arts.*”

The teachers were asked how they intend to use AI in future lessons and if they felt like they now had the knowledge and skills needed to continue with regular implementation of AI. Again, citing the workshop and subsequent requirement to apply what they learned in their own classrooms, the teachers described, not only the intent to use more AI in their classrooms, but several stated they were already doing so, outside the course requirement.

I plan on doing a lot more arts integration in future lessons.

I am excited to incorporate the arts into my lessons. It truly is a win-win situation for me and my students.

I have already realized I am incorporating [more art] this year and feel more comfortable doing so.

It definitely changed the way I plan and implement lessons!

One teacher was already able to teach her colleagues strategies she learned in the class, thereby widening the circle beyond her classroom and students.

I have already implemented arts integrated lessons early in this school year. I also am co-

teaching and integrating arts in other classrooms while collaborating with other teachers.

The teachers also noted that they were “*more comfortable and more willing than...in the past*” in implementing art media that were initially outside their comfort zone, such as music, movement, and theatre. The teachers generally agreed that they would continue to explore how they would integrate the arts.

I definitely plan to use a wider variety of activities in my lessons drawing on a wider range of disciplines. I feel like in some ways this is the tip of the iceberg and will lead to future study and learning to improve implementation.

I will continue to find music that best fits the lesson, explore how to add a theatrical piece and movement.

When compared to the pre-course survey, where the teachers were positive about the potential academic benefits, they appeared to have developed a stronger understanding of the various and broad academic benefits of AI.

Knowing that I will always have a diverse group of learning styles in my classroom, integration of the arts will only help to enhance my students’ learning, provide differentiation, and bring new learning opportunities.

I will strive to use music to help kids remember information, drama to help their comprehension and to show understanding.

I think arts integration is a great way to expand formative assessments for students...

Despite the benefits, the teachers acknowledged a range of learning challenges in creating an arts integrated lesson. The common challenge was time. They felt that their already intense schedules did not allow for enough planning time. Also, there was the challenge of finding time to complete activities with all the required content lessons and assessments.

The biggest challenge for me, which is the common challenge for teachers in general, is finding the time to plan the perfect integrated lesson.

I feel that sometimes finding the time can be challenging. There are so many required content activities and assessments.

The amount of time it took to complete a lesson with all of the arts integrated.

The requirements for course completion included designing and teaching a lesson that had all the art forms (visual, movement, theatre, music) included. Many of the teachers’ challenges were due to the expectations of the required lesson. They felt it was hard to incorporate all of the art forms into one lesson/unit. This challenge would not necessarily convey to AI without the confines of the course assignments. Depending on the teachers’ experiences and comfort level with AI, they responded as having no real challenges other than time.

When reflecting on the students’ cognitive/academic benefits when engaged in an AI lesson all the teachers observed benefits to their students and to their instruction. Many of the benefits were in direct relation to differentiation of instruction with expansion of comprehension.

Their level of comprehension was beyond what I had hoped for. I would have never dreamed of teaching the way that I did, now I am not looking back.

I like using art as an assessment...[S]pecial education students...do not always do well in formative testing. Art gives these students a chance to do well and express themselves.

The students had time to ‘digest’ what was being taught. They could experience the content in a variety of different ways, which gave them more exposure to what was being taught.

They were able to grasp the concepts better due to the various ways we practiced.

The teachers also expressed how their students were more collaborative with peers in the learning process with AI and valued it as a benefit.

I think that students were inspired, learned, and worked collaboratively.

They worked on learning to collaborate with their peers on reaching a goal and working creatively.

They had to work together forcing them to get to know each other’s strengths and weaknesses.

The other common experience was the overall enjoyment expressed by students in the learning process with AI.

The students are very motivated when arts are integrated into the classroom.

Students...show enthusiasm with their products.

They really have enjoyed it and it has supported and reinforced what they have learned.

Some teachers noted changes in their own behaviors after integrating the arts. One teacher stated, “*I’m more playful and imaginative in my dramatic play.*” Others expressed changes in their students. The teachers saw improved engagement, interest and confidence.

They could really be their creative selves and let loose.

Kids were visibly excited and motivated to participate.

When we first started using movement, they were uncomfortable and guarded with their moves. Now they are relaxed. It is like a bonding experience.

They were so comfortable with the lesson and wanted to talk about it, and repeat the experience. I would say they benefitted socially and emotionally in that they felt free to take risks and share their opinions.

The teachers even wrote about how AI created a social/emotional environment that reinforced academic learning, which is especially important for students with learning disabilities.

Laughter filled the classroom. When there is laughter you know that the students are gaining meaning of what is being taught.

It helped alleviate some tensions of a new school year.

It has reinforced lessons on social/emotional skills.

All the teachers expressed that the physical elements of AI were a benefit. There were several teachers who viewed the physical movement as a way to improve motor skills

Using the creativity of movement forced students to consider physical space and time in a different way.

The teachers also reflected on how the movement improved engagement. Some of the participants felt the physical component reinforced the objectives of the academic lesson.

This movement helped to bring a different understanding of the content ...

They were able to dispense some energy and create movements that would help them remember the necessary parts of a sentence.

Helped them to remember the material. The body to mind connection.

The physical act of moving around was good, and helped some of the kids better visualize what they were trying to retain.

The teachers were asked to consider if and how they made accommodations and modifications for students with learning disabilities, social/emotional challenges, or physical limitations. All teachers commented that they made some adjustments for children who had learning disabilities, but no-one required significant adjustments to the AI lessons, in part, due to the differentiated nature of the lessons themselves. They described only minor adjustments, such as providing choice in assessment or carefully constructed small groups to capitalize on the individual strengths of the students, but no teacher indicated that any student, especially those with learning disabilities, was unable to participate or complete any of the arts integrated activities.

This was already incorporated given the nature of the class.

A variety of tools were provided to offer choice.

Students were given choices on how to show their understanding.

The teachers reported that the AI lessons were beneficial for students with emotional difficulties and did not require many special accommodations or modifications due to the nature of the activities.

There truly was no need ...

This was built in due to the nature of the class.

This was mostly through...setting the tone that there were no wrong answers, and that everyone could participate/interpret in the way that best suited them.

While some accommodations were necessary, however, they were things that were already being implemented for students, either as part of their IEP or as part of natural differentiation put in place by the teacher as part of their everyday instruction.

The accommodations included thoughtful pairings of students, careful selection of groups, and listening to students’ comfort levels.

I let them choose and do what makes them comfortable.

Providing extra space for those students who needed more space when we were moving and dancing.

None of these accommodations or lesson adjustments were anything different from what the teachers would have done with traditional instruction.

There were fewer children with physical disabilities who participated in the AI lessons, but, as with academic and emotional considerations, the accommodations implemented did not detract from the AI nature of the lesson and still allowed all children to participate.

Marching while sitting was one modification.

The class discussed what movement would be appropriate.

Movements were changed from whole body to upper body/arms, only, less emphasis on moving around outside of the starting point.

Ensured that the space was safe for movement and that the different learning styles/needs were met.

When compared to the teachers' pre-course views of AI in the inclusion classroom, the teachers demonstrated stronger positive attitudes toward the implementation of AI, its benefits to students, and most importantly for the purposes of this study, its benefits to their instruction and interactions with their students.

Conclusion

Past research provides information supporting that AI works but there has to be support in the instructional tools (Catterall, 2009). The goal of this study was to understand the individual experiences of teachers when given AI strategies. These recommendations were made from the standpoint of how to improve educational practices for teachers, especially when working with students with learning disabilities. The recommendations are separated in two themes that arose from the findings.

Minimal Arts Integration Professional Development is Needed to Positively Impact Instruction

For this study, the process of implementing some simple strategies of arts integration in the participants' already existing curriculum was completed within four days of instruction. The participants expressed the increase in confidence and willingness to incorporate arts integration in their daily teaching. The participants also reported that the small amount of instruction and guidance in arts integration improved their overall instruction, class engagement, cooperative learning, and brought a new excitement to their students learning process. The participants also expressed the increase in confidence and willingness to incorporate arts integration in their

daily teaching. This small amount of instruction could be a reoccurring professional development for educators to improve teaching practices.

Lev Vygotsky theorized that learning development happens at the social level with social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). There needs to be more opportunities for educators to receive small amounts of professional development in arts integration with their colleagues. Through the process of the four days of instruction, participants were able to gain new ideas, receive guidance, and collaborate with other educators. The social interaction with colleagues created an environment for participants to practice new arts integration strategies before implementing with their students. Intensive instruction in arts integration is not needed to improve instruction. Arts integration strategies could be provided during professional development days, during planning periods, weekend retreats, and even during faculty meetings. As this study demonstrates the need for arts integration is important to improve the instruction of the whole child. By providing educators with opportunities to learn arts integration strategies in small amounts they could improve instruction.

Differentiation is Naturally Built into Arts Integration Strategies

Due to the nature of the arts integrated curriculum the style of instruction provides different methods for a broad range of learning styles. Including students with learning differences and learning difficulties in a traditional lesson can be a challenge for teachers. Through research and this study, the incorporation of arts integration strategies can provide variety of tools for differentiation of instruction. The different art forms allow students who may be struggling (academically, socially, and emotionally) another method to foster learning and demonstrate their understanding. The arts integration model also allows for more opportunity for inclusion for all students. Arts integration allows for "development of social competencies, including collaboration and teamwork skills, social tolerance, and self-confidence." (The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 2011, p. 15) Arts integration provides the instructor with another means to create long-term learners in several different models. Providing professional development even in small amounts increases educators' tools for teaching every type of learner.

Elements of the arts as a means to educate is seen throughout the history of human existence. Arts integration in the classroom is used consciously and unconsciously by teachers in education but exposure and support could improve instructional practices, benefiting both teacher and student.

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