Integrated Curriculum and Service Learning:
A Platform for Social Transformation

When students are given the opportunity to examine the relationship between local and global communities and to discover their ability to impact society and affect social transformation they, too, come to realize they are empowered to initiate change.

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Abstract

In this article, integrated curriculum practices combined with service-learning pedagogy is examined. The goal of these teaching practices is to empower students and to provide a platform for social transformation. A brief overview of the following theoretical frameworks is presented: integrated curriculum, service learning pedagogy, learning communities, and authentic instruction. An integrated pedagogical model is then illustrated through a case study of a suburban elementary school. Three community-based projects developed collaboratively with students, parents, teachers, and community members are described. The purpose of the case study and the school community's involvement in the projects was to examine if the outcome included the creation of authentic products as well as school-community transformation. Additionally, an examination of student participation in the projects was undertaken to assess how project involvement may have contributed to the development of life-long learners and to the acquisition of creative, critical thinking and communication skills.

Keywords: integrated curriculum, Service-Learning, Learning Communities, Collaboration, Arts-Based, Authentic Products

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Curriculum integration using a strong arts component aligns with current theory calling for 21st century skills development within PreK-12 education. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009) adopted a framework of skills to help prepare students for success in a diverse global society. The framework includes the arts as a core subject and as a highly important component in preparing students to meet the demands and challenges they will encounter. In order to promote understanding of academic content at much higher levels the partnership suggests weaving the following 21st century interdisciplinary themes into core subjects: 1) global awareness; 2) financial economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy; and 3) civic literacy and health literacy (Partnership for the 21st Century Framework, 2009). Competencies within the framework include: learning and innovation skills; information, media and technology skills; and life and career skills. It is recommended these skills be developed and strengthened by deftly merging them with a highly integrated curriculum.

Learning and innovation skills increasingly are being recognized as those that separate students who are prepared for a more and more complex life and work environments in the 21st century, and those who are not. A focus on creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration is essential to prepare students for the future. (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009)

Pink (2005) described the need to change our educational focus in preparing students for success from an outdated notion of a "Knowledge Age" to a 21st century "Conceptual Age" in order to prepare students with creative and innovative communication skills. Although Pink (2005) and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009) did not recommend a prescribed delivery of curriculum, the skills they emphasized place great importance on developing (1) the student's capacity for life-long learning and (2) effective communication skills that enable collaboration with others. These skills have more importance than the actual knowledge being learned.

I have conceptualized a model (see Figure 1) that illustrates how learning communities using an integrated curriculum and immersed in service-learning pedagogy, provide a platform for students to have voice and to effect social change in their communities through the creation of authentic products. The priority of this curriculum model is the development of life-long learners who are able to collaborate with numerous learning communities in order to solve authentic problems.
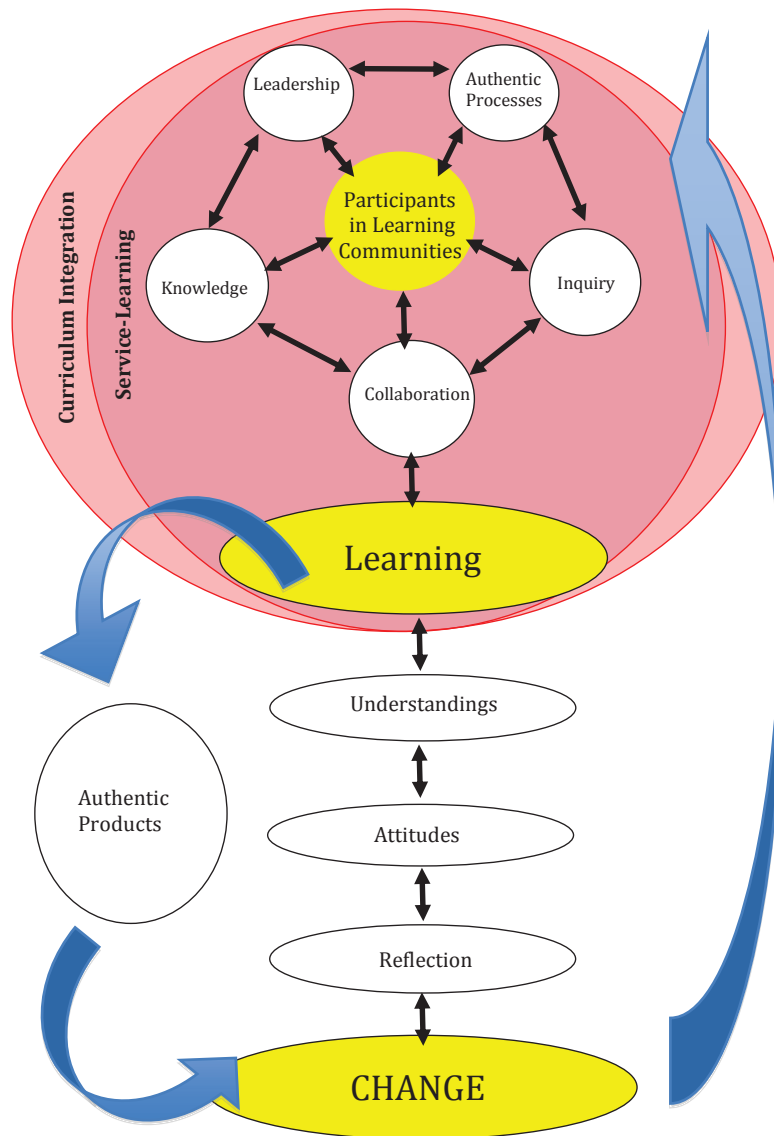
Figure 1. Author's conceptual model illustrating how learning communities using an integrated curriculum and immersed in service-learning pedagogy, provide a platform for students to have voice and to effect social change in their communities through the creation of authentic products.

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Integrated Curriculum

The concept of curriculum integration, or integrated studies, combines programs of study from two or more disciplines, allowing students to see how ideas are connected. Teaching in a contextual manner promotes collaboration, critical thinking, and knowledge retention. As Gibbons (1979) stated, "To integrate logically speaking, is to unify parts so that the result is more than the sum of these parts" (p. 321). At the same time knowledge bound to a discipline maintains an important role in the learning process. Crawford (1995) viewed curriculum integration as a holistic method that "builds bridges instead of boundaries between specific bodies of knowledge" (p. 10). This is not a new concept in education and is widely associated with the progressive education movement (Beane, 1997; Crawford, 1995; Dewey, 1938/1997; Jacobs, 1997; Oberholser, 1937; Vars, 1991). In fact as early as 1956, Bloom advocated for an inquiry-based approach to curriculum integration.

Curriculum integration is a concept that can be viewed as a spectrum. It can range from utilizing parallel teaching (in which a related theme is taught by different teachers in two or more disciplines) to transdisciplinary units taught over an extended period of time. In the latter case, the curriculum is built on concepts from several disciplines and where concepts in one content area provide a foundation for extending the learning in other content areas. Crawford (1995) built upon the work of Drake (1993) and Beane (1993) in constructing a curriculum integration

spectrum that includes five levels of integration. Each level increases in complexity while escalating the depth of the integrations: 1) parallel disciplines, 2) multidisciplinary, 3) interdisciplinary, 4) integrated disciplines, and 5) transdisciplinary. Sustaining quality integration at a transdisciplinary level requires commitment from teachers, administrators, parents, and community partnerships geared to support student driven inquiry and thus providing a scaffold to guide student learning.

Teachers and community members facilitate learning experiences that allow students to work with authentic tools, materials and processes alongside experts while aligning sequences that allow students to construct meaning. "Learning takes place in real life or cultural context, and life skills, such as change management, perseverance and confidence are paramount. Content is determined by the students' interests and the instructional themes are usually selected jointly by students and teacher" (Drake, 1993, p.4).

Over the last several decades, art educators have implemented arts-based integrated curriculum at various levels. For example, the Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge (TETAC), a national project designed to establish a model of arts-based integrated curriculum, was intended for use across the country.

Although the goal was not realized, many lessons on interdisciplinary inquiry-based and arts-based instruction were learned. Daniel, Stuhr and Ballengee-Morris (2006) reported that the Ohio State TETAC mentors constructed units around

"Big Ideas" such as community, environment, and measurement while applying key concepts and framing essential questions to develop the curricula. To develop key concepts and crucial questions, the TETAC group involved students in the brainstorming process. Through the TETAC approach, mentors pushed students and teachers towards a conceptual level that would guide their investigation. The inquiry-based process led them to identify skills and concepts that needed development.

Daniel et al. (2006) found it necessary to connect academic subjects in meaningful ways, yet not require every subject to connect to an overarching school-wide Big Idea. "Eliminating boundaries between the schools and communities and making connections across subjects develops a nurturing and relevant learning environment" (p. 9). A profound educational experience is developed when curriculum is designed in a way that requires critical thinking, formulating solutions and creating artwork. "When teachers in other disciplines get involved, students can begin to see how art need not be separate from other areas of study, or from our daily lives" (Congdon, 2004, p. 58).

Service-Learning

Service-learning is an ideology founded on the educational theories of John Dewey and Paulo Freire. According to Dewey (1916) quality education serves a purpose both for the individual student and global society. A curriculum that includes service-learning prepares students for further contributions to society. Friere (1968) advocated the use of dialectics as a mechanism to overcome societal problems, to assist in realizing the possibility of personal and political transformation, and to purport a "problem posing education" (p. 56). A number of schools and organizations which embrace service-learning use Freire's notions of critical consciousness and emancipatory outcomes as their foundation.

Service-learning curriculum offers an approach requiring student to utilize diverse skills from a variety of disciplines thereby viewing situations from multiple perspectives while at the same time finding solutions to the problems and issues of our changing social and economic climate (Connors & Seifer, 2005/2008). More recently other authors underscore the meaning and purpose of service-learning. Sigmon (1979) characterized service-learning as an approach that combines critical education and reciprocal education. Honnett and Poulseon (1989) suggested that "service, when combined with learning, adds value to each and transforms both" (p. 1).

Service-learning has gained acceptance across disciplines and educational levels from Pre-kindergarten through higher education. Working within an effective service-learning curriculum requires students to examine personal issues related to working effectively with a variety of learning communities and a diversity of members within those communities.

When conceptualizing the classroom as a community of learners, acknowledging the roles and voices of the individuals within the classroom is necessary (Brown,

1997). Learning is supported through both written and spoken reflection. Reflection is an integral aspect of creating a classroom learning community and is used in the creation of meaning. Students gain insights through reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses. Thus reflection contributes to the learning process (Brown, 1994).

It is important to recognize that during the last decade service-learning pedagogy and strategies have effectively enhanced curriculum and student engagement in art education from pre-Kindergarten though higher education (Cho, 2007; Daniel, 2003; Hultzel, 2007; Alexenberg & Benjamin, 2004; Jeffers, 2005; Taylor 2002a, 2002b, 2004; Taylor & Ballengee-Morris, 2004). Service-learning in art education is multidisciplinary, evokes changes in behavior, improves understanding of academic content, and involves students in their community. Understanding contemporary art and artists who address social issues and advocate for change is enhanced by service-learning.

Three art education programs illustrate the integration of service learning with art education. First, Taylor and Ballengee-Morris (2004) refer to the language of "We" in analysis of their experience with the Beans and Rice project, a program for impoverished Appalachian students. The language they selected to describe experiences (we plan, we learn, we reflect, we trust, we hope, we care, and we imagine; pp. 6-12), illustrates the emphasis placed on the collaboration between the students and families being served, the university students and pro-

fessors, and the Beans and Rice program staff. The authors not only emphasized the need for ongoing communication, reflection and reprioritizing, but included the need for flexibility and openness to learn from each other in the process. In my experience, challenging university students to understand the attitudes and behaviors of impoverished Appalachian children is one means of enlightening them to their purpose as educa as educators.

Next, Hutzel (2007) illustrated collaborative learning between a university pre-service preparation class and sixth grade students where both sets of students learned Photoshop in order to create collaborative artwork. Through the process, the sixth graders were able to envision becoming university students and the university students gained valuable teaching experience and learned how to identify the interests and needs of their younger counterparts.

Finally, Alexenberg and Benjamin (2004) utilized intergenerational collaboration among African-American elders, Hispanic elders, and Jewish elders while working with art students to create "Legacy Thrones" representing cultural groups of this community. Using art, both the art students and the elders learned about the cultural differences in their community. All participants appreciated what the cultural groups had to offer individually and collaboratively. "Working next to each other in one large studio, the three ethnic groups of elders engaged in continual dialogue, an opportunity that rarely exists for them outside of the studio" (p. 16). These

three studies effectively demonstrated the power of the arts, when combined with service-learning, to unite diverse groups. In addition, these projects enhance the participant's ability to foster reciprocal understanding among participant groups.

Critical analysis, critical inquiry and critical evaluation are terms that educators, including art educators (Efland, 2002; Dorn, 1999; Eisner, 2002; Freedman, 2003; Stuhr, 1994; Parsons, 2004; Tavin, 2005) use with increased frequency to raise awareness and engage in reflection on the ideology of criticalness. Kuster (2006) stated that critical thinking and critical pedagogy are philosophies that make use of criticalness as a valued educational goal and "desire students to be active participants in their education, recognizing the importance of cooperative thinking and learning" (p.1). Critical thinking is a process of consuming ideas, finding meaning in their complexity, uncovering faulty arguments, and dealing with these ideas in a rational way (Stout, 1997). Self-sufficiency is the primary objective of critical thinking (Burbules & Beck, 1999).

Students who learn to think independently, critically evaluating multiple sources are better able to make rational decisions. Therefore, the object of critical thinking should replace the goal of learning or memorizing specific content. McLearen (2000) viewed critical pedagogy as expansion beyond thinking and negotiating, as a vehicle for transforming relationships among teaching, constructing knowledge and

intuitions, as well as, include the social and material relationships to society.

Learning Communities

Learning communities are defined and used in diverse and flexible ways across 21st Century educational literature. Hopefully, they will continue to evolve in response to the needs of the communities employing these methods. Learning communities are used at every educational level from pre-school to the research community. A community of learners is a term commonly applied to learning communities from preschool through high school. In undergraduate programs they

Figure 2. *Using a democratic process students present ideas and make collaborative decisions about mural content and layout with visiting artist.*

often are referenced as learning communities while teachers most commonly utilize the term professional learning community when addressing their own collaborative learning. In some institutions of higher education, the preferred term preferred is communities of practice. Online learning communities utilize information and

Figure 3. *Fifth grade students working with artist in residence Amy Yaich, beginning sixteen 8' mural panels which will show native American representations and the Scioto River.*

communication technologies that connect learners from across the globe.

In recognition of the social nature of all human learning, the philosophical foundation of learning communities is most commonly credited to Dewey (1938). Additionally, the growing influence of Vygotsky's (1978, 1980) theory of social constructivism identifies the contributions of others to every individual's learning. Kilpatrick, Barret and Jones (2003) offered a working definition of learning communities as:

> Learning communities are made up of people who share a common purpose. They collaborate and draw on the individual strengths, respect a variety of perspectives, and actively promote learning opportunities. The outcomes are the creation of a vibrant, synergistic environment, enhanced potential for all members, and the possibility that new knowledge will be created. (p. 11)

Yarnit (2000) added, "learning communities explicitly use learning as a way of promoting social cohesion, regeneration and economic development which involves all parts of the community" (p. 11). Individual learning is the foundation for the type of learning involved within a learning community. At its core is the sharing of knowledge and individual skills through collaboration. A proverb "two heads are better than one" embodies the beneficial nature of knowledge when socially distributed, instead of being the sole the proprietor of the intellect (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989).

Authentic Instruction, Learning Experiences and Products

Authentic learning has implications beyond knowledge for a test or a grade. Renzulli, Gentry, and Reis (2003) emphasized the cultivation of a real audience for student work, which is turn provides an identifiable goal and purpose for the students. Assisting students to address problem-solving through, "authentic methods that applies advanced content--that is, by employing the methodology, knowledge and materials typically used by investigators and creative producers in various disciplines" (Renzulli et el. 2003, p. 11) is the goal of authentic instruction.

Authentic learning produces knowledge in the form of discourse, production, performances, events or public demonstrations. Additionally, authentic work involves in-depth knowledge resulting from disciplined inquiry. Perkins (1993) elaborated on the term, understanding performances and used it when students' understanding of a concept is illustrated through an activity, event or situation; and when they thoughtfully and thoroughly applied knowledge to produce new products.

Art education using curricular integration and service-learning pedagogies can provide authentic learning for students. When guided by art teachers, parents, community members and professionals, students can actively participate in the construction of curricular content and engage in collaborative learning. There is emerging evidence that students exposed to these pedagogies may excel beyond students involved in traditional teaching methods. For example, Smilan, and Marzilli (2009) discussed authentic arts integration where "Students engage in real and tangible work involving critical thinking, art-based, and problem-based methodologies that are developed in collaborative efforts among teachers . . . responsive to students' situations, replacing discrete, predetermined curricula" (p. 40).

A Case Study

During a 30-month project in a suburban elementary school, I (2009) documented a case study involving the entire school community, including 585 students, 47 teachers and support staff, families, community partners, businesses, organizations, artists, scientists, play writes, and others identified as experts. These groups engaged in extended investigations examining the balance among people, their community, and nature. This inquiry-driven curriculum project named People, H20, Nature and Diversity (P.O.N.D.) was integrated across numerous disciplines. Embedded in the project were included professional development modules for the participating teachers. These modules provided participants with knowledge and skills in areas of environmental education, curriculum integration, experiential hands-on learning

Figure 4a. Fourth grade history of Ohio murals for pedestrian tunnel include concepts related to travel, contributions from Ohio on aviation, farming, ecology, pollution, and civic responsibility.

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methods and authentic assessment.

The project required funding beyond the school district's curriculum allocations and grants from local and state organizations as well as in-kind donations, commitments from teachers, administrators, professionals, and the support of the city's Parks and Open Spaces teams were needed. During the planning stage of the P.O.N.D. project, a pedestrian tunnel project previously approved by the city was discovered. Linking the two projects was proposed and adopted.

When students learned of the city's plan for a pedestrian tunnel behind the school many students expressed negative feelings. Fear was a common concern and was based on prior experiences with other community tunnels.

Once the tunnel was completed, students were encouraged to re-envision the structure. They decided to call the tunnel the "Intergenerational Bridge" and invited community members to create clay tiles to enhance the structure. The theme of the tiles was "demonstrating diversity and unique contributions to the community."

During the first year of the project, the community focused on an intensive study of the community's past to better understand the factors affecting the natural environment as experienced today. This study included a focus on the community's history and curriculum directly related to state social studies content standards: city history (third grade), state history (fourth grade) and Native American impact on the community (fifth grade).

Students in grades K-6 conducted the first documented scientific study of the pond behind their school. Working with experts, they identified the species of wildlife discovered in and around the pond. Students recorded findings in journals that included drawings and detailed descriptions documenting size, approximate age, sex, location within the pond, temperatures of air and water, and current weather conditions while examining evidence of the interdependence among species in their findings. Each class documented their findings through use of digital cameras, video recording and digital sound recording.
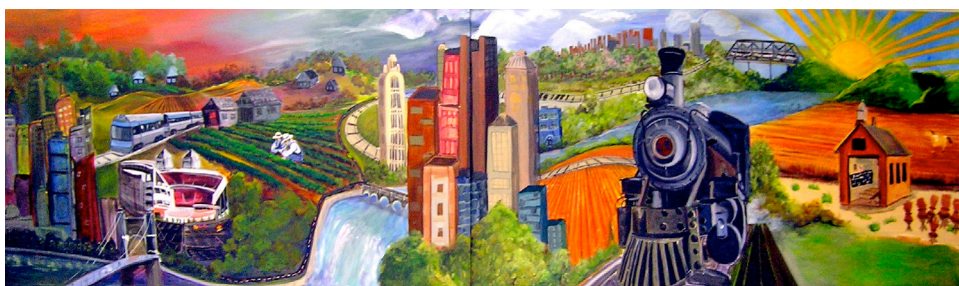
Students posted their photographs in

Figure 4b. Fourth grade history of Ohio murals for pedestrian tunnel include concepts related to travel, contributions from Ohio on aviation, farming, ecology, pollution, and civic responsibility.

the commons area. They documented the results of their screening and checking of traps baited with various colored salmon eggs. The fourth and fifth grade students created videos that illustrated what was learned. Students generated ideas for murals with an exploration of their community. Their work incorporated cultural journaling and videotaped interviews with local residents. They took historical tours with the local historical society and engaged in mapmaking. Each of the third grade classes worked with a local playwright to write a short play about the history of their community. Each group examined a specific issue for changes over time: heating, cooking, educational practices and favorite pass times.

Figure 5. *Families and community members installing clay tiles in the pedestrian tunnel.*

With the guidance of a local muralist (see Figures 2 & 3), students in grades 3 through 5 created 32 eight-foot mural panels depicting imagery that documented the students' understandings of their community history (see Figure 4a and Figure 4b.). The murals were installed with the assis-

tance from the city. Family and community members added clay tiles representing both historical information and the life-cycles of local species (see Figure 5). The new pedestrian tunnel was transformed from a place of fear into a welcoming gallery and was visited by community members, many simply to enjoy the art work.

While studying the pond, students voiced a concern for a classmate in a reclining wheelchair. They were troubled by her limited access to the pond and her "missing out on the excitement." The identification of limited access led students to seek a resolution. Several interest-based student cluster groups researched how to build a path that would stretch from the existing concrete loop around the pond to the edge of the pond and which would include an observation area. Students developed proposals and exercised the democratic process by voting on a design for the path (see Figure 6). Using cement and glass the students completed over 300 stepping stones. The mosaic images created with the glass on the surface of the stepping stones was represented by a ratio of 40% of images that depicted community development with built constructions while 60% contained environmental images, representing a large ratio of green space to community development within their community. By partnering with the city, which provided bricks to supplement the stepping-stones, the path was completed as students worked side by side with city workers (see Figure 7).

A third-student driven project was inspired by Journey Passengers,

a project implemented, researched, and illustrated by first and second grade students who the flow of water from the pond through a stream and then into a nearby river. The project began as a large textile mural to be adorned with approximately 60 small doll-like figures. With nearly 180 created, the students wanted to find a purpose for the remaining figures.

As a result of conversations concerning the final destination of the pond water after it reaches the river, students realized the journey did not end when the water reached the river. They would send their Journey Passengers down the river all the way to the Gulf of Mexico to inspire others. The passengers were mailed in river tins to schools all along the water's journey. Students in a nearby school helped with the river tin preparations and contents. The boxes that carried the Journey Passengers represented the students' findings from their pond study. They were painted on the outside to show the "ripple effect" students observed after tossing rocks into the pond. The inside of the boxes illustrated

Figure 6. *First three-dimensional plan for wheelchair access to the pond.*

the fall leaves that landed in the pond.

Each Journey Passenger was nestled in one of painted boxes, each adorned with a clay fish glued to the lid and a circle book clutched into the passenger's hand. The circle books displayed the path of the water from the pond to the Gulf of Mexico. Also included in the tins were journals created by the third and fourth grades students and a DVD

Figure 7. *Students work side-by-side with city workers to place tiles for handicap access to the pond located in the city park located behind the school.*

created by fifth grade students illustrating the pond and stream studies. An enclosed letter asked the recipients to send something back to the school community about the water located near their homes and school. Students' messages in the journals encouraged peers to study and care for the water as in their area.

Students made significant improvements to the health of the pond behind their school and continued to study the water. The pedestrian tunnel behind the school became an environment friendly to the students and to the community. They tracked the locations of the schools receiving river tins and documented the impact of their project on other communities.

Through these project, students integrated knowledge across disciplines. Designing and implementing transdisciplinary curriculum, which included service-learning pedagogy, made the P.O.N.D. and related projects different from other integrated curriculum projects in this school community. By working collaboratively, solutions to community problems and authentic products were created by students, teachers, and community members working collaboratively. Service-learning pedagogy fueled the learning communities and sustained cycles of inquiry, planning, action, reflection, and revision over time. It was this sustained learning that led the constituent groups to create new knowledge, alter attitudes and values, and reflect, resulting in change.

Conclusion

The notion I once held of teaching art through using a Discipline-Based Art Education approach leads to a disconnect between art and its function in contemporary society. Art education as personal expression creates a limited vision of the potential of art education. I advocate for moving towards a more integrated approach to art education where students learn to reflect on social issues and the associated relationships. Through transdisciplinary integration of curriculum combined with service-learning pedagogy, students and community members were provided opportunities to explore community issues.

The leadership of highly committed teachers was necessary to facilitate and organize meaningful sequences of learning that spanned disciplines and provided access to experts who guided the learning communities in collaborative experiences. The end result was the development of life-long learners. Teaching students to work effectively in a variety of learning communities while focusing on creativity, critical thinking and effective communication is necessary to prepare students for future success. When students are given the opportunity to examine the relationship between local and global communities and to discover their ability to impact society and affect social transformation they, too, come to realize they are empowered to initiate change.

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