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The Balancing Act: Arts Integration and High-Stakes Testing

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Within the last several decades anecdotal and empirically-based evidence has shown how integrating the arts into core curriculum uniquely contributes to a child's emotional, social, and academic growth toward educating the whole child (Campbell, 2005; Sikes, 1995). Numerous studies have established arts integration as a powerful tool to help students engage in learning (Bresler, 1995; Brewer, 2002; Brown, 2001; Stecher, Hamilton, & Naftel, 2005) with depth of understanding, (Eisner, 1998) and in ways that directly connect and transfer to a child's lived experience (Luftig, 2000). Furthermore, arts integration is foundational to sound pedagogical practice "because it: (a) is congruent with...how we think and learn; (b) highlights and promotes...learning for understanding and transfer; and (c) catalyzes creativity" (Marshall, 2005, p. 227).

Arts integration promotes transfer of knowledge across contexts, enabling learners to take ideas from one discipline and creatively apply them to other disciplines (Brown, 2001; Conti, Amabile, & Pollak, 1995; Martindale, 1995) utilizing "motivation, interest, effort, and opportunity" (Jalongo, 2003, p. 218). The major objectives of arts integration programs are to provide equity of opportunity to students, while positively affecting academic performance. Several arts integration programs have demonstrated student academic achievement through the arts (Brown, 2001; Catterall, 1995; Gunzenhauser, Montgomery, Barry, & Dell, 2004; Luftig, 1994, 2000; Montgomery, Otto, & Hull, 2007). Several studies of arts infusion delivered to high-risk elementary students support the notion that arts integration produces positive effects for not only for student achievement, but also for motivation, engagement in learning, and positive changes in classroom practices (Catterall, 1995; Gunzenhauser et al., 2004). Students who participate in pedagogically-innovative arts-integrated classrooms demonstrate positive

attitudes, greater personal satisfaction in their classroom experiences (Psilos, 2002), and commitment to the value of personal effort toward academic achievement manifested by gains in test scores. Students experience success exemplified by improved student and teacher attendance, lower instances of referrals for students' discipline, and an increase in parental involvement (Gunzenhauser et al., 2004). SPECTRA+, a well-established arts integration program, reports an increase in academic achievement, creativity, and affective behaviors associated to self-esteem and self-expression, which not only strengthens student engagement with school (Luftig, 1994; Torff, 1995), but also engages and encourages a holistic approach to education toward meeting the needs of the child. Understanding that arts integration not only improves academic achievement, A+ schools regard arts integration as essential to meeting the needs of the whole child. They therefore believe that it is important to enlist the participation of all faculty and staff members in whole school reform (Gunzenhauser et al., 2004).

Both educators and legislators have become increasingly concerned and dissatisfied with what they perceive as the declining quality of education (Rossides, 2004), generally based on reductions in high-stakes test scores, yet each has responded to the public's concern in very different ways. Although constructivist learning theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, (Smith, Dockrell, & Tomlinson, 1997) and von Glasersfeld (1995), and educational models such as Waldorf (Easton, 1997) and Montessori (Rathunde, 2003) encourage educators to assess teaching and learning based on the student's "capacity for solving problems and fashioning products in context-rich and naturalistic settings" (Stanford, 2003, p. 81), experienced, innovative educators find themselves in opposition to the politically-charged research that drives policy makers to

maintain the traditional view that intelligence is something that can be objectively measured and quantified through achievement-based testing (Thomas, 2005). By way of addressing the perceived crisis in education and in an effort to increase students' academic performance, several national-level policy initiatives have been implemented that not only value assessing student learning through high-stakes testing, but insist upon the connection between test scores and students' academic success. These include the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (Johnson, 1966), *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (Paris, 1994), and the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (107th Congress, 2002). Such initiatives emphasize accountability for classroom teachers and administrators with poor performance on test scores resulting in sanctioning school districts. Standards for academic improvement are the basis for understanding the different ways teachers choose to integrate the arts in an environment of high-stakes testing.

Paradoxically, "little evidence supports the idea that the model of standards, testing, and rewards and punishment for achievement is the cure for public schooling's ailments" (Guisbond & Neill, 2004, p. 14). On the contrary, states with high-stakes testing programs show a decline in achievement compared to those states without high-stakes testing (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Hamilton & Stecher, 2004; Stecher, Hamilton, & Naftel, S., 2005; Thomas, 2005). Additionally, independent analysis of several school districts indicates that high-stakes tests do not measure the objectives that are most important to educators, like diagnosing strengths and weaknesses of the individual learner as opposed to groups of learners (Thomas, 2005). Thus, educational quality suffers as high-stakes testing models encourage teaching to the test and limits are applied to the

scope of curricula (Guisbond & Neill, 2004). The emphasis on high-stakes testing came at a time when educational research (Gokhale, 1995; Jonassen, 2000; Sternberg & Lubart, 1996) demonstrated that meaningful learning encompasses understanding, utilizes what is learned, and influences the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Subsequently, educational researchers and pedagogical practitioners have responded to the theory that learning occurs through the process of connecting ideas and knowledge across subject areas by focusing on ways in which to integrate curriculum across disciplines (Giles & Frego, 2004).

### **Schools in the Spotlight**

Do to the threat of sanctions, school districts respond to federal mandates by requiring teachers to place greater emphasis on assessed content areas. Some districts have responded by adopting commercialized, tightly-scripted programs like *TargetTeach* (Gorin, & Blanchard, 2007), which uses skill drills and rote memorization (called “drill and kill” by experienced pedagogues) to prepare students for testing. For example, assessments mandated in Texas strongly encourage exemplary schools to adopt basic skills batteries. Even schools achieving the label “outstanding” fear the scrutiny of being placed under a microscope, since resulting scores determine a school’s accountability ratings, state and federal funding, and allocation of teaching jobs. Also feared is the undermining of student progress, since a student could be denied promotion from his or her entire third grade year simply by failing the reading subtest of the TAKS (Bussert-Webb, 2005).

While educational research continues to enthusiastically support the benefits of arts integration (Brown, 2001; Giles & Frego, 2004; Gunzenhauser et al., 2004), the

federal government continues to undermine large-scale, constructivist-based reform by requiring students to excel only in subject-specific achievement tests. This contradiction places experienced, innovative teachers in a difficult position, as they must work to find a balance between what they know to be best practice and what school districts mandate in response to the high-stakes accountability movement. As a result, teachers are forced to devote most classroom time to the subjects legislated to be most important and often have to neglect or ignore untested subjects. Recognizing that test-preparation activities limit the scope of teaching and learning, teachers who implement arts-integrated curricula are, in effect, registering their resistance to the pressures of federal policy initiatives in numerous ways (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003; Giles & Frego, 2004; Weiss, 2004).

The purpose of this study was to describe the responses of three teachers as they were introduced and invited to implement an arts integration model and to explore their experience and ideas on the intersection of arts-integration reform and the high-stakes accountability movement. Through analyzing these teachers' responses, we have created a metaphor to describe how their different responses are distinct, yet integrally related. The metaphor recasts art-integration reform teachers as performers in a circus, drawing from this metaphor to examine their teaching practices within schools participating in Project CREATES (Montgomery et al., 2007), an arts-integration research project. Through the theoretical lens of Self Determination Theory (SDT), we use our metaphor to uncover a circus whose three rings are guided by three ringmasters (administrators) who have different management styles and expectations for achieving high-stakes testing mandates. SDT provides the lens through which to observe each teacher's choice to initiate and regulate integration of the arts using self-regulatory styles ranging from

controlled self-regulation to autonomous self-regulation. This portion of the larger research project draws from qualitative research methods including interviews, observations, and teachers' self-reflections specifically detailed in the three case studies.

### **Research Methods**

Stories emerge from the data and were used to create metaphors illustrating how the three teachers balance an arts-integrated curriculum with testing expectations and district mandates. We conducted observations and interviews with teachers from three elementary schools over a period of three years. Extensive field notes were used by staff working in schools. Observations included classroom visits, monthly Saturday professional development opportunities, and occasional social functions for teachers participating in the project. Data are presented here by the date of the event and the code initials of the researcher. Arts resource coaches were part of the research team and worked with teachers to assist with the details on integrating the arts in curricula. Based upon formative analysis of the Project's qualitative data, we identify three cases representative of differing approaches in which Project CREATES teachers practice arts integration amidst the pressures of high-stakes testing mandates. While these cases do not define all of the ways in which teachers integrate the arts and testing, over time they emerge as synecdoche, those cases that best illustrate the continuum reflecting the teachers' dedication to high-stakes testing or to arts integration. Their actions were revealed through accounts of individual curricular philosophies and pedagogical practices. Individual teacher's formulas for such a balance as reflected in their practice were dependent upon their commitment to the arts and, importantly, their perception of the arts either as an add-on to mandated curriculum, as just another *value-added* teaching

strategy when time allows, or as the central catalyst in transformational teaching and learning. Through extensive and intensive observation and analysis, we reveal that participation in arts integration by elementary teachers is not merely dependent on their content-area knowledge of the arts and their practical and theoretical skills for using the arts, but that characteristics associated with self-determination such as feeling a sense of autonomy and the courage to express one's own creativity also influence teacher practices.

### **Theoretical Frame**

According to self-determination theory, the self-regulatory style of an individual ranges from controlled self-regulation to autonomous self-regulation at various levels (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When one's regulatory style is controlled, he or she is "behaving because one feels one has to and not because one wants to, and this regulation is accompanied by the experience of pressure and tension" (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994, p. 121). On the contrary, when one exhibits autonomous regulation, his or her behavior is derived entirely from the self, because he or she recognizes the importance and value of the activity (Assor, Kaplan, Kanat-Maymom, & Roth, 2005; Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). According to SDT, self-regulation is situated on a continuum ranging from controlled, externally-regulated motivation to autonomous, self-determined, value-driven motivation (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Specifically the four types of extrinsic motivation are:



- 1) Controlled, externally regulated motivation in which the individual performs a behavior or a task for external reasons, such as, to receive a reward, to avoid a punishment, or to alleviate guilt;
- 2) introjected regulation, in which the individual regulates his or her own behavior, but performance of the action is primarily ego driven;
- 3) self-regulation through identification, which refers to an individual's engagement in a behavior or activity because the individual values the behavior or activity and recognizes that it has importance to them;
- 4) and integrated regulation, which refers to behaviors and regulations that “are fully assimilated to the self...they have been evaluated and brought into congruence with one's other values and needs” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 73). Behaviors “are self-determined to the extent that they are engaged in wholly volitionally...when a behavior is self-determined, the regulatory process is choice.” (pp. 326-327)

Social and environmental context play a significant role in the development of an individual's regulatory and motivational style (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Heckhausen & Dweck, 1998; Miserandino, 1996; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004). Controlled school environments often result in externally-regulated teacher behaviors; whereas, teachers in autonomy-supportive environments tend to demonstrate higher levels of self-regulation. The motivational style of the school administrator often dictates whether the school environment is controlled or supports teachers' autonomy. Administrators who allow teachers to participate in decision-making and permit flexibility in the teachers' curricular

and classroom management practices encourage teacher self-determination, which leads to increased teacher initiative (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989). Self-determining behavior arises from experiencing “a sense of choice in initiating and regulating one’s own actions” (p. 580). The three teachers, each from a different school, demonstrate varying levels of autonomy; hence SDT provides a valuable lens for analysis of project data and a justification for the balancing metaphor we propose. It is not our intent to categorize and label the motivational styles of the teachers, but rather to use the constructs of self-determination theory to help understand the teachers’ choices and struggles.

### **Teacher Cases**

The teachers’ struggle to practice arts integration amidst a school district culture in which high-stakes testing is prioritized can be described by way of a circus metaphor. In our example, the school district was named *Cirque du District* to represent a circus with each of three rings denoting one of the Project CREATES schools within the district. The principals are thought to be the ringmasters of the three schools and the circus performers are the teachers themselves, working under the direction of each of the principals. When examining the data, we found that the way in which each school responds to the high-stakes testing demands seems to have a direct relationship to the level of teacher self-regulation. Teachers from schools who have adopted structured programs and lessons designed to help raise student test scores seem to display and provide descriptions of self-regulation that is more externally controlled than those teachers from schools in which autonomy was encouraged.

The administrators from the schools represented in this study have distinctive leadership styles. The principal represented in the first case study, Mrs. Ringling,

demonstrates the greatest level of control in the management of her school and enforces the use of structured, pre-scripted programs and tests designed to increase test scores. Consequently, the teacher under her supervision, Susie who cracks the whip, exhibits controlled externally-regulated motivation. The administrative style of the principal described in the second case, Mr. Barnum, falls between controlling and autonomy supportive; he encourages a certain degree of teacher autonomy, while maintaining a moderate level of control over classroom management. Thus, the teacher discussed under his supervision, Mary, who walks the tightrope, represents self-regulation through identification. The third case study is a teacher who works with the principal, Mrs. Bailey, who encourages independence in the way that teachers run their classrooms; the teacher under her supervision Fiona, flies the trapeze artist and displays an integrated self-regulatory style.

### **Susie**

Mrs. Ringling is a principal who is strict in the administration of her school, considered a ring in the metaphor. Susie, one of the teachers in Mrs. Ringling's school, admits that the staff is in "survival mode" (11-15-04, MR) as the principal tries to motivate and encourage them within the forced adoption of the entire population of a low-enrollment, low-performing school that was closed by *Cirque du District*. Prior to the forced adoption, both schools were cited for low scores on state tests, thus increasing the pressure to raise scores on state-mandated tests. In response, the principal has become more concerned with the regulation of the curricula and teacher classroom management styles. Susie indicates that this regulation has served to create a controlling environment

in which she experiences very little autonomy. As a new teacher, she does what she is told in an effort to avoid confrontation and experience success.

Susie copes with the situation by choosing to crack the whip at work, worrying that she will be “bitten” if she does not follow her script exactly. Carefully following the parameters established by the principal provides her comfort. Although responding as one who sticks to the directives takes a great deal of skill and is not for everyone, Susie enjoys the security of a structured routine and realizes to stay safe she cracks the whip on her performance, her teaching goals and strategies must consequently be the same as the stated requirements. Susie fears spontaneity, so she rarely veers from script that Mrs. Ringling believes will insure optimally performance.

Target Teach is a program that’s for third, fourth, and fifth grade here at this school and some of the other schools... they [school administration] are going in and taking a look at what’s been tested, what the kids will be tested on, and if the curriculum is actually covering the objectives, and the benchmarks. If not, what do we have to do to get those benchmarks covered since it’s needed for the test.  
... (2-18-05, LM)

Susie represents teachers who seem most comfortable when sticking to their routine. They prioritize those disciplines warranted by testing mandates, using the arts as an additional teaching strategy without seriously integrating them into the curriculum. Teachers like Susie acknowledge the importance of integrating the arts but are more focused on meeting *Cirque du District* expectations in order to avoid punishment resulting from failure to meet those expectations. They may view a better solution; however, they first comply with the directives, such as demonstrated in this comment.

I like [Target Teach] in that I want to know what is not being covered in the curriculum that will be covered on the test. But, it's a lot of extra work right now you know, we would have been better off if we could have changed it in the summer and then started next year instead of in the middle of the year. (2-18-05, LM)

I've been spending a lot more free time trying to get material ready, you know, lesson plans, and all that kind of stuff to meet *their* curriculum desires. Now that we have changed, going over to Target Teach, it's a lot of time that, you know, that I won't get paid for. (2-18-05, LM)

Susie's choice to not integrate the arts demonstrates controlled, externally-regulated motivation, as teachers cracking the whip on their performance seem to readily implement and rigidly follow the test preparation programs instituted by the *District*, as they fear repercussions. Teachers who prioritize the mandates do not implement arts into the core curriculum, because they feel pressured to teach using traditional teaching methods or the methods outlined in the packaged test preparation programs. Through observations and interviews we have surmised that these teachers see the arts as an add-on (Bresler, 1995) when there is time rather than an overarching curricular integration strategy.

The demographic composition for Susie's school is unique from the other two teachers' schools. Although the majority of the students attending all three schools come from low-income households, Susie's school population and community are geographically isolated from the rest of the city. Susie, as well as the principal, and the 22 teachers are predominantly Caucasian. However, of the 252 students enrolled, 96% are

African American, 2% are Native American, 1% are Hispanic, and 1% are Caucasian. The non-teaching staff members are exclusively African-American.

In addition to the normal situations schools deal with regularly, Susie has indicated that this year has been especially difficult due to the forced adoption of the smaller elementary school. A month into the school year, we observed Susie looking very tired, her expression strained, and her early optimism sagging. Students' insolent behavior (9-22-04-JT; 9-24-04-R-MR; 10-13-04-JT; 10-18-04-LB) and the pressures of the testing mandates complicated Susie's efforts to implement the arts. One of the Arts coaches observed that Susie uses the arts as classroom management.

[Susie] explains that her students have been throwing erasers and being mean to each other. She points to a chair, next to along table, in the back of the room.

"Have fun" she says. They are beginning to take a spelling test. The teacher is trying to give her class instructions for taking this test. Only half of the class is listening. The others are talking and adjusting their "notebook walls." Several students have created a wall on the top of their desks with folders; I assume it is for privacy. [Susie] uses my connection to the arts as a tool for getting them to calm down. "We will not have artists in our classroom if you can't settle down."

(8-31-05, LB).

She admits that she and other teachers feel that they are between a "rock and hard place." Susie indicates that with testing mandates and the expectations of the principal, there are "not enough hours in the day to incorporate the arts in lessons...time is always limited" (6-13-05 LM). A colleague of Susie's excitedly explains that the school hired

another 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and states that hopefully smaller class sizes will improve her ability to teach the materials for the upcoming tests (9-22-04-JT).

Susie expresses frustration with the instituted mandates she is working hard to follow. Susie remarks that the administration seems to believe that too much time is spent on “fun” activities such as art, or using alternative teaching and learning strategies; it’s a “lose-lose situation” (6-01-05-MR). Trying to adhere to the testing expectations, Susie attempts to integrate the arts where she can, but has been reluctant to have artists or the Arts coaches in her room because of student behavior problems (11-11-04-MR), for she didn’t want her students to look bad in the eyes of the ringmaster or the *District*. Though Susie states that it would be difficult to integrate the arts on her own because of the testing mandates and the time necessary to prepare the lessons, she has had several successful experiences (one unit on insects and another on science) by collaborating with the arts coaches (5-20-05-LB) and was amazed at how well the students participated.

She confides that it is hard to teach the material that is required for the upcoming tests and has discovered that she must implement many behaviorally-based rules to keep order (10-13-04-JT). Susie has great affection for her students and would rather not have so many rules, but she feels the weight of district expectations. So in order to meet administrative demands, Susie conforms to the rules placed upon her (9-22-04-JT).

### **Mary**

Mr. Barnum, another principal and ringmaster, takes pride in doing well on the *Cirque du District*’s assessment. He is not a firm believer in curricular scripting and gives his teachers more freedom in their performance than Mrs. Ringling. However, he still runs a tight ring and concerns himself with what has been mandated by the *Cirque du*

*District.* Mary is a teacher in Mr. Barnum's school. She believes in the value of the arts and all that she learned in school about performing, but she also feels inhibited by the *Cirque du District* assessments. She responded by walking the tightrope. The rope holds her to a narrow path and she uses a pole to act as her ballast. Yet, within the limited pathway she must walk to avoid falling, she enjoys quite a range of movement. Sometimes she walks a conservative, upright, straight and narrow; other times she exercises her discretion, dancing and twirling. Regardless of the posture she chooses, Mary knows that as long as she remains focused and does not fall from the rope, Mr. Barnum will be pleased. Under Mr. Barnum's direction, Mary has learned to use her pedagogical discretion as ballast to balance what she values with what Mr. Barnum and the *Cirque du District* expect.

Like Susie, our second case represents teachers who practice a balancing act. These teachers struggle to practice arts integration while focusing on district testing mandates. They describe teaching with the arts in terms of student enjoyment and curriculum enhancement. Project CREATES' theoretical and pedagogical orientation to arts integration reform focuses on an holistic model, but these teachers see arts integration as one of many effective teaching techniques. The choice of teachers, such as Mary, to practice arts integration as an additive to the curriculum seems to be most closely associated with the motivational style self-regulation through identification. We have observed that these teachers value the arts and recognize the importance of arts integration in their teaching, but allow administrative obstacles and testing mandates to limit their use of arts in the classroom.



Mary, a nationally-board-certified third grade teacher in her mid-30s, works to balance testing expectations with arts integration to enhance her teaching.

I guess maybe this is the way I have to say it. I don't think of myself as a teacher anymore, I think of myself as a facilitator. And, I always tell the kids we are learning this together. I didn't used to ... [whispered] "I love power" .... that control thing in life, but, releasing control is really the magic moment in your classroom. And there are a couple of days that it is difficult. (12-16-05, CL)

Having ten years experience in a school with a diverse population, Mary has developed many teaching strategies including arts integration. She is motivated to use arts in the classroom because she values the arts, as evidenced by her participation in a writer's workshop and attendance at community art events. She appreciates what the arts add to her pedagogy and recognizes that it is important to teach concepts holistically. Mary expresses frustration as she teeters between district mandates and her desire to integrate the arts. "I really like the vision [Project CREATES] has. I really do like the arts infusion idea and I like that it complements things that I do in the room. That is encouraging to me." (2-24-04, JP)

Mary, as with a majority of the teachers at the school, is Caucasian. The students attending her school generally come from low-income, at-risk families. Sixty-five percent of the 279 students are Caucasian, 13% are African American, 16% are Native American, 4% are Asian, and 5% are Hispanic. In the area of the city surrounding the school, there is only small light industry, a handful of food chains, and a few retail businesses. This fairly isolated area is infamous for its methamphetamine arrests, and it is

a place where nearly everyone knows someone who is or was involved with the judicial system.

Mary and another 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher have collaborated for several years off and on in a combined classroom. The enthusiasm and creativity of this team is evident when entering the classroom; the room vibrates with activity. Hanging from the ceiling and on the walls are changing representations of the current themes, which may revolve around the solar system, cloud formations, mathematical concepts, or reptiles (12-17-03, LV). Mary's classroom is a visual treat; the arts are present within each of the class' curricular themes.

At the beginning of the second year of observations we noticed many changes to Mary's room. In one observation, the researcher was curious about the uniformity in the classroom arrangement (four desks to a group, each desk with a water bottle, plants on desk, drapes on windows, no clutter, one calm color, etc.) and Mary explained that "the district's research-based study specifies that too many colors and cluttered walls can be a distraction." (10-19-04, LV). The district teacher's guidebook is prominently displaced on her desk. Although Mary expresses frustration with the extensive lesson plan format that the *Cirque du District* requires to meet the state objectives, we observed that her teaching practices have become less arts-integrated and more in line with the *District's* lesson plan format. With this pressure, Mary demonstrates a decreased amount of autonomy and in response, Mary has chosen to use arts integration only as an additive to the teaching style encouraged by the *District*.

Mary uses numerous teaching techniques as strategies to enhance student learning. On many occasions, she confides, the arts provide an emotional outlet for the

students and prove therapeutic (2-20-04; LV). During conversations with Mary, she has admitted that she uses arts integration for positive reinforcement for those students who have discipline and behavioral problems in her room. We see this as an indication that Mary has not fully assimilated arts integration into her teaching practices, as she uses it at times as a disciplinary tool despite her understanding of the positive impact arts integration has on student learning.

As part of the CREATES model, Mary invites artists into her classroom to help students make connections to the core subjects and to encourage personal creativity, stating that the arts compliment her curriculum. She has collaborated with a local poet to help the second graders understand different poetic styles. To give the students an authentic experience with reading poetry, the 2nd grade worked with the 5<sup>th</sup> grade to organize a coffee house in Mary's classroom, inviting parents, faculty, and other classes to participate (6-04-04, LV). During one of the arts-infusion sessions she relates that a student who constantly struggles with writing and reading has found his voice in poetry, and offers to share his creations with the class. Mary enthusiastically shares many similar successes and expresses how much she values arts integration and what it brings to the classroom.

On several occasions, Mary shared some specific concerns for her students and confessed that the *Cirque du District's* current practices thwart the ability for teachers to individualize learning. She gave an example of a student who struggles to read and consequently has a poor self-image as he compares himself to his classmates. She lamented that the older the students get, the more the gap widens; however, she stated with pride that he is "the most artistic kid" she has ever had in class. She expressed

frustration, believing that if her class were fully arts integrated, this student's self-image would improve; his gift would emerge rather than be overshadowed by what he cannot do. She admitted that she uses art to reward and motivate (2-20-04, LV) him to use the arts. Again, it seemed that Mary's choice regarding arts integration is self-regulated rather than self-determined, as she saw an entirely arts-integrated curriculum as an impossibility due to the pressure she felt by her principal and ringmaster and the *Cirque du District* to focus on test mandates. During an interview, we asked Mary what she thought would happen when the funding for the arts infusion program ended. She emphatically stated that Mr. Barnum was very supportive of the arts. He found a way to fund the arts; he knew from the teachers' stories that the arts have life-changing effects on the students (2-20-04, LV). It seemed to meet the needs of the kids where nothing else is working, yet Mr. Barnum realized that maintaining his ring of the circus is dependent on higher test scores so the teachers focus on testing.

### **Fiona**

Mrs. Bailey is the principal of a school with a large number of teachers serving a very large population of elementary students. She is concerned with *Cirque du District* assessment as she wants to continue to run her ring; however, she believes that the success of a school is by no means dependent on the outcome of assessment. Mrs. Bailey directs so many performers that she has no way of closely monitoring each performance. Because it is in no one's best interest to ignore *Cirque du District*, Mrs. Bailey introduces the curricular scripts to her teachers; but she knows, as do they, that she has no way of enforcing the use of scripts. Fiona, one of Mrs. Bailey's performers, not only values the arts but feels that they are an integral part of her identity. She has chosen to fly on the

trapeze. She is excited about performing and relishes her freedom. Because Fiona is not mandated to follow scripted curriculum, she is able to identify the positive points of the mandated curriculum. She uses the script to grab the trapeze, which she does between flips, twists, and flying through the air. She knows that as long as she performs to the best of her ability and does not fall to the floor beneath her trapeze, Mrs. Bailey will be pleased. Under Mrs. Bailey's style of leadership, Fiona has come to understand that she performs best when she is true to her creative self.

Experienced, innovative teachers who experience Fiona's sense of freedom are enthusiastic about teaching and relish rich involvement in arts integration. Such integration advocates seek creative solutions to meet *Cirque du District* expectations and teach in a manner that incorporates best practices. These teachers tend to define their classroom experience through art. They describe the arts as a natural learning experience for themselves and the students and believe that the students can become self-actualized through the arts. These teachers experience pedagogical creativity through implementing arts into the core curriculum and appear to understand the Project CREATES philosophy of arts integration. The choice for these teachers to practice arts integration is self-determined, the motivation is integrated regulation and wholly volitional. The arts become alive for these teachers, re-defining them from a disciplinary perspective as arts educators. Providing an outlet for creative expression, transforming their teacher ideologies and methodologies, reaching the whole child, and sustaining student learning are goals of these educators.

Fiona, in her 50s, has a bachelors' degree in elementary education and 15 years teaching experience. Without qualification or reservation, Fiona indicates she experiences

creativity through implementing arts into the core curriculum. In her third year of teaching 5<sup>th</sup> grade in a predominantly Hispanic school, she emphatically believes that “all” academic areas can be enhanced through the arts. Arts integration is a natural learning experience for herself and her students. Her personal commitment to the arts is evidenced by her own creative development over years of private arts lessons and she hopes that “all” people can find a creative outlet.

Teacher attendance is high at 97%. This dedication was demonstrated during the initial transition to super-school. The teachers make regular home visits to encourage attendance and currently send home messages in both English and Spanish so lines of communication between home and school are kept open. To encourage ownership in the community, merchants welcome teachers who often take their students to nearby stores, the community library, the university, and various sights in this historic district for field trips.

Though the school enrolls a few children of parents attending the university, most of the students are from low incomes families with 84-100% of the students receiving free or reduced-price lunches in any given year. The student population is highly diversified with 46% Hispanic, 29% White, 11% American Indian, 14% African-American, and 1% Asian. Many of the parents and relatives speak only Spanish, yet feel comfortable enough to linger at the school long after students are in class. Many of the students live with poverty, violence, parental incarceration, addictions, homelessness, shelter living, and mobility as a part of their daily lives. It is not surprising that the population is highly mobile; transfer rates in and out fluctuated between 62%-69% over a recent three-year period.

The school offers a remarkable number of community support programs, such as Even Start, Early Childhood Center, on-site before and after school care, limited health clinic, domestic violence intervention services, etc., in a concerted effort to meet many community needs, as well as offering free intersession classes to all students during scheduled school breaks. The principal's goal is not only to provide a permanent in-house health clinic, but to convince the school district to extend their K-5<sup>th</sup> program to include two sections of sixth grade in order to provide one more year in an attempt to reduce middle-school dropout among this population.

Fiona speaks with passion about the arts and creativity. She can not imagine why all the teachers in her building would not want to use arts integration. She expresses that there is so much to learn and so much to give back to the classroom. When creativity and connection to the curriculum come together, spirit will show through, and when that happens that connection is beautiful (6-17-03, PW). "In her heart she feels like a Grandma Moses painting is inside her, she just hasn't had the opportunity to take formal lessons, but at some point it will become a priority" (3-16-05-JT) and a way for her to express herself on another level. Fiona has fully assimilated arts integration into her core values and needs; her choice to practice arts integration demonstrates integrated regulation.

Fiona emphasizes that creativity and ingenuity are vital to surviving the testing gauntlet and onslaught that bombards her students. There is always the latest new test to improve test scores and it seems that the school district jumps from one testing strategy to the next (3-16-05-JT) in an attempt to reach that elusive score. In our conversations she has expressed frustration with a writing test that incorporates concepts and ideas that

have no relevance to her Hispanic students. They are asked to read a story about the Florida Everglades and then answer comprehensive questions. Fiona states that these students have never been to Florida and have no knowledge of an everglade, let alone have had much of a choice of locations for a vacation (3-16-05-JT). She affirms that it is not surprising that they performed poorly. She expresses her joy and pride in her students' ability to comprehend and use idioms, even if their choices do not fit with the writing test's prompt. Fiona giggles as she relates a student's story about an old woman on an airplane who was "long in the tooth"; the woman appears throughout the student's writing sample named "long in the tooth." Another prompt asks the students to use "Orlando" (the city) in a paragraph; the student wrote about meeting Orlando Bloom (which in fact she did) (3-16-05).

An example of Fiona's dedication to arts integration is her discovery that the children enjoy using "rap" to summarize stories to reach benchmarks in a creative way. A poet visiting artist to her classroom shared rap as a form of poetry. Fiona and her class ran with it, applying the concept to summarizing selected readings as they studied for the upcoming tests. She says that she will use any creative way to help "[her] students meet those silly benchmarks (3-16-05)!"

Fiona has effectively distanced herself from the first case of Susie.

I believe every human on the planet has creativity within them. I think a lot of times it gets squelched by judgments of people who are too "in the box" ... and lots are teachers. I think teachers squelch creativity a lot because they don't' ... they are looking for too specific, they aren't looking outside the box for creativity to happen. (6-17-05, DW)



## Discussion

Our case studies describe the lived experiences of three elementary teachers who have chosen to balance integrating the arts and testing expectations. These three teachers represent the range of responses to the introduction of an arts integration model designed to reform the culture of school. The teacher who Cracks the whip on her own performance does not choose arts integration as a primary focus of her instruction, but only as an occasional additional teaching strategy because of time constraints imposed by high-stakes testing. The teacher who Walks the tightrope, teeters between arts integration and district mandates in her desire to integrate the arts. This teacher is comfortable using arts integration as one of many teaching strategies; realizing themes, ideas, and concepts should be taught holistically. The teacher who Flies the trapeze seeks creative solutions to meet school district expectations and teaches in a manner that her experience and thoughtfulness has proven to be best practice in which arts integration transforms student learning. She risks the consequences that control the other teachers and keeps the arts as a primary focus in her curricular planning.

The circus metaphor holds an importance to school reform as it specifically addresses the various ways that teachers may respond to an initiative for change. In this case, arts integration was presented to teachers as an invitation to participate, providing support through on-going professional development and substantial financial support for stipends, artists, music classes, or supplies. Although teachers were not required or forced to use any of the components, they were free to adapt, modify, integrate, combine or add the parts that they wished to use to meet District demands. Often, overwhelming and conflicting demands are made on teachers simultaneously, and as we better understand

the process, the intentions of educational services of children will be affected. Here we see that the ways teachers are empowered may be related to the reform efforts they can enact.

The range of responses from teachers in this study informs personal planning for professional development. Guskey (2002) reminds us that teachers enact change one teacher at a time, in slow increments, and with adequate support and resources. Within the current political climate and school assessment context, it appears that flying the trapeze would be a response from a teacher who is fully involved with several professional development activities, constructing a full and purposive personal plan to incorporate the arts. However, she may be reluctant to attend seminars on assessment systems or prescriptive teaching. It would be too simplistic to interpret the opposite reaction from the teacher who cracks the whip as she may attend what is required and feel too exhausted to design her own personal plan for professional development. A professional development model that works for all teachers must be one that allows for and encourages the personal choices among a variety of options for teachers with varying opinions toward using the arts (Oreck, 2005). Providing the climate that encourages choice and autonomy may increase the number of teachers who respond as Fiona by flying on the trapeze actively implement change and work within systems to modify programs to meet schools needs. Programs can adapt as teachers change (McLaughlin, 1976).

We think it is of great importance to notice that the relationship of the principal and the environment that is created through his or her leadership may be influential in each teacher's story. Wise principals learn to trust teachers as colleagues, provide them

the resources and support, and encourage autonomy in decision making. As the environment in which students work influences their self regulatory behaviors, and the teachers are more autonomous in an environment in which expectations are clear, but creativity is encouraged and autonomy respected.

We found that self determination theory assisted in understanding the extent to which teachers were able to accept the invitations to participate in arts integration. Similar to Baum, Owen and Oreck, (1997), who found that that students' self regulatory tasks are affected by participating in the arts, the teachers in our study who participated in arts integration were more likely to demonstrate autonomy with self regulatory behaviors such as taking risks, solving problems, persisting in effort, and thinking creatively. The flexibility of practice was observed in the context of teacher creativity, problem solving and autonomous decision-making. This study did not reveal a direct connection between the teachers and the students, but the question of the relationship of teacher and student self regulation begs for addition in future research.

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