

Music Center: Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County

Approach to Professional Development

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www.musiccenter.org

Why the Arts Matter

The Music Center believes the purpose of schooling is to transmit the key understandings of the human experience to the next generation and to prepare them with the skills and knowledge they will need to contribute to society. Quality arts education does both. It connects students to the key concepts, ideas and meaning communicated through art, music, dance, and theatre. Arts programs foster creativity and innovation that helps prepare young people to shape the future.

Arts education is both a subject matter for study and a catalyst for broader school improvement. We embrace one of the guiding principles of the Music in Education National Consortium: "We believe that a comprehensive *arts* program assumes its full power in education through the dynamic tension between *the arts* as distinct authentic subject areas, and as part of a rich curriculum integrated with other subject areas."

The skills and habits of mind developed in the arts can empower students as effective learners in all subject areas, and promote a school culture that values joy, creativity, innovation and self-discipline.

Our Vision

All children will have access to quality, sequential instruction in music, dance, theatre, and visual arts. To meet this goal, schools will embrace a "shared delivery" approach to arts instruction, built from partnerships between classroom teachers, arts specialist teachers, and teaching artists, supported by a system of collaborative planning and coordinated teaching.

Artistic Excellence at the Core

We believe models of artistic excellence should be at the core of all arts learning. Students and teachers gain inspiration and a much broader understanding of what is possible when they study great works of art and engage with outstanding professional artists. Interaction with works of art and artists can motivate students to express their own ideas in and through the arts.

The Elements of Effective Professional Development

In addition to strengthening teacher practice and improving student outcomes, quality professional development can be a powerful strategy for sparking broader school improvement. The most effective professional development is sustained over time and includes several essential elements that include:

- Sustained leadership
- Effective teaching and learning
- Powerful content (content worth teaching)
- Consistent classroom based support
- Empowered teacher ownership

1. Leadership

School-wide change cannot be achieved through the engagement of a single teacher. Principal leadership, the development of a *team* of teacher leaders, and a sustained investment in planning, reflection and refinement are all essential elements for success.

School and district administrators need to be active participants in arts professional development. When they expand their own experience and understanding about the power of arts learning, administrators are better able to provide increased support and leadership.

Principals are best positioned to:

- Establish a vision at the school site
- Provide instructional leadership
- Set and reinforce priorities
- Support and enable teacher learning and growth
- Establish expectations for teachers

In order to accomplish this, principals also need ongoing support.

2. A Clear Understanding of Effective Teaching and Learning

The Music Center believes teachers and students construct their own knowledge and meaning by relating new experiences to prior knowledge. Good teaching provides guidance – facilitated inquiry and structured creative tasks - to help students come to their own understandings, rather than have knowledge dictated to them.

Teaching and learning in the arts is most effectively supported by:

- The "Four Wheel Learning Cycle"
 - Assessing Prior Knowledge
 - Getting Smarter
 - Becoming an Expert
 - Making Connections
- Lesson and instruction that engage multiple cognitive processes
 - Experience and response to an art work or arts activity
 - Inquiry
 - Creation and performance
 - Reflection and assessment
- Theory-into-practice concepts and principles such as Harvard's "Teaching for Understanding" and Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe's "Understanding by Design"
- Documentation of student learning to inform and improve teacher practice
- Assessment of student growth

3. Anchor Works - Powerful Content

Great works of art can provide a powerful aesthetic experience and help deepen our understanding of important ideas and concepts. When chosen carefully, a single work of art can serve as the focal point for curriculum development and sustained study. This "anchor work approach" is now a nationally-recognized arts learning model. As teachers, administrators and/or students study a masterful, enduring work of art – from either the performing, visual or literary arts genres – they strengthen their arts skills and knowledge, gain deeper understanding about the enduring themes and ideas from the anchor work, and make connections to other concepts across the curriculum.

In the Music Center's approach to studying anchor works, learners express personal meaning through structured creative exercises and performances. As they gain skills in the arts, they develop new tools to communicate their understanding of important ideas. Their exploration of these "big ideas" provides authentic connections to other core subjects such as literature, language arts, history, social studies, science or math. Anchor work content embodies broad perspectives and enduring values from our human history. Interpretation and "meaning-making" processes promote relevancy to gaining deeper understanding.

Touching both mind (intellect) and emotions, works of art inform our understanding of the human experience by engaging multiple dimensions of intelligence.

4. Classroom-based Support

Schools and districts need to make a commitment to build and support teacher capacity to teach the arts. Isolated, one-time teacher workshops do not help teachers develop the skills needed to implement sequential curriculum. The most effective professional development includes real world classroom-based instruction.

Classroom support should include: modeling, co-teaching, observation and feedback, as well as collaborative expertise, arts specialist teachers or teaching artists. Such classroom collaboration is central to the Music Center's approach to professional development.

5. Teacher Ownership

To develop capacity to teach the arts as part of their ongoing practice, teachers advance through phases of learning and development.

- A. **Awareness and Interest through Exposure:** teachers need to participate in quality arts learning to deepen their interest and understanding of the potential power of arts education. (*Participation*)
- B. **Reflective Learning:** teachers need to experience the arts as hands-on, active learners, acquire knowledge and skills in the art form and reflect about the nature of learning in and through the arts. (*Experience and Reflection*)
- C. **Facilitation of Student Learning:** teachers need to gain the experience, skill, competence and confidence to facilitate student arts learning on their own. (*Competence*)
- D. **Collaborative Partnerships:** teachers need to see model arts instruction in their own classroom, collaborating with an arts specialist and/or teaching artist in a shared-delivery model to better understand the unique roles and importance of each partner. (*Partnership*)
- E. **Ownership of Classroom Arts Instruction:** teachers need to create a "permanent place" for instruction as part of the *regular* curriculum they teach each year. (*Arts Instructional Practice*)