

***Making Books Come Alive: Evaluation of the  
Flynn Center/Flynn School Collaborative Arts Education Program***

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This program evaluation examined the third and final year of the arts-based educational partnership between the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts and the John J. Flynn Elementary School in Burlington, Vermont. The primary goals of the FC/FS Collaboration focused on improving reading comprehension for students, collaborative professional development for teachers, and a collective awareness of the performing arts in everyday life in the school community. The collaboration is comprised of three primary components: classroom collaborations between the Flynn's education staff and classroom teachers and students; teacher workshops; and school-wide attendance at live performances at the Flynn Center. During Year 3, a project toolkit, *Words Come Alive!* was also made available to Flynn teachers.

**Major Findings**

Based on teacher surveys and teacher interviews, the evaluation found that the FC/FS Collaboration was very positively received by both teachers and students, and indicated a number of learning benefits afforded to students and teachers in the area of reading, literacy, drama and movement. Specific outcomes that teachers reported included:

- Teachers' acquisition of valuable teaching strategies and techniques. Teachers reported learning from Flynn artists a valuable repertoire of new teaching techniques that utilized movement and drama to support students' reading and literacy. For example, teachers described learning how to focus on a small part of a story in depth to help students learn about settings, characters, or story events, and using role playing activities to heighten students' awareness of character emotions, story conflict and social conflict. Teachers appreciated how Flynn artists modeled useful teaching strategies that addressed teachers' core curriculum, rather than simply providing discrete, "stand-alone" enrichment activities.

- **Students' increased comprehension, recall and writing of story texts.** Teachers indicated that as a result of the FC/FS Collaboration, students displayed greater understanding of story settings, characters and characters' point of view, major story events, and the sequence of events. As a result of enhanced comprehension, teachers reported that students were better able to recall stories at later times, which allowed them to make greater connections between different story texts and between stories and real life situations. Teachers also described how FC/FS role playing and writing activities enabled students to become more aware of what's explicitly written, implicit, or missing from a text, and the ways readers infer and interpret written texts.

• **Students' and teachers' greater appreciation and understanding of drama and movement.** Teachers were highly enthusiastic about the ways in which the FC/FS afforded their students important exposure to live theater. The Flynn matinee performances were considered a critical component of the FC/FS Collaboration. These performances were seen of value in and of themselves, as well as made possible worthwhile, productive exchanges in closely-related classroom-based activities which preceded, or followed, specific Flynn performances. Teachers described lively class discussions concerning what's most important to capture from a book in a stage production, how a single work could be interpreted or portrayed in different ways, the symbolism of props, and some increased appreciation and working knowledge about props, staging and lighting.

• **Identification of key components of program success.** Teachers identified a number of key FC/FS program components and characteristics that they felt were essential to the project's success. These features included the customized and highly flexible ways Flynn artists worked with teachers and students; the expertise and experience of the Flynn teaching artists in both drama and in classroom management and work with schools; and the important offering of Flynn matinee performances. Teachers also positively regarded the "Words Come Alive" toolkit, and felt it would be helpful in sustaining their use of the drama-related teaching techniques in their classrooms, given the conclusion of this three-year project.

This third year, final evaluation suggests that the Flynn Center/Flynn School Collaboration offers a valuable model of arts-based teacher professional development and curriculum that can promote children's literacy, drama, and learning for many students. It is a model that holds great educational promise, and provides a valuable educational alternative that could be of great interest to other schools in Vermont, as well as regions nationwide.

# **Executive Summary**

## **New Perspectives in Arts Integration**

### **Year 2 Evaluation – 2005-2006 Academic Year**

#### **Background**

During the 2005-2006 school year the Evaluation Center at The Vermont Institutes conducted its second external evaluation of the New Perspectives in Arts Integration project (NPAI). The purposes of the evaluation are to document project activities, to provide formative information for program improvement, and to assess program impact.

#### **New Perspectives in Arts Integration**

This project consists of three unique programs, sharing the common goals of integrating arts education and demonstrating the impact of integrated arts curriculum on teachers and students.

Words Come Alive, developed by the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, is designed to strengthen reading comprehension through applications of drama and movement. The implementation site for NPAI is the Highgate Elementary School, Highgate, Vermont.

The Vermont Musical Instrument Digital Interface Project (MIDI) provides teachers and students with instruction in and opportunities for music composition. Implementation sites for NPAI are St. Alban City Elementary School and Cambridge Elementary School.

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) provides teachers and students with strategies to construct and discuss the meaning imparted by images. The implementation site for NPAI is the Oak Grove School, Brattleboro, VT.

While each program can be implemented in a wide range of grade levels, New Perspectives in Arts Integration focuses on grades three through six.

This project operates under the auspices of the Vermont Arts Council.

#### **Evaluation Design**

Evaluation of the project in Year 2 is based on qualitative project data, including observations, participation in project leadership meetings, videotape of classroom sessions and project leadership meetings, and teacher focus group data. Teacher surveys yielded both quantitative and qualitative data.

Year 2 was the first year of implementation of the New England Common Assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics. Baseline NECAP results have been gathered and appear in the full report. This data will be further analyzed in conjunction with 2006-07 data in the Year 3 Report.

## Findings

In all three programs there is clear evidence of the impact of integrated arts curriculum on both students and teachers. These themes emerge from analysis of project impact:

- In Year 2 students and teachers are more ready, more open to NPAI activities and programs than they were in Year 1
- Sharing activities across grade-levels is recognized as a rich learning experience for students as well as an important component for sustainability
- Rich connections to the processes of performing are made through the group work as well as by observing practitioners of the art forms
- Teachers and project leaders are increasingly cognizant of the need to capture institutional knowledge and to document the student learning
- Teachers are more confident in Year 2, starting their NPAI work earlier in the school year and/or with more students
- There is a continuing need for guidance in “best practices” and for examples of many different models of participation
- There was a recognition by the teachers of NPAI activities as “problem-based learning” initiatives
- Teachers are incorporating teaching strategies from WCA, MIDI, or VTS into other content areas
- Students and teachers are learning from each other – there is a two-way exchange of ideas and methods
- Disenfranchised students can be highly engaged by, and learn better through, the integrated arts experiences in the programs
- Providing time for teachers to reflect on their teaching and their students’ learning is very important
- Teachers speak of being able to connect other areas of their curriculum through the arts because of the New Perspectives in Arts Integration projects
- Teachers also report that the programs are building their own as well as their students’ understanding that everything is connected; that a science, social studies, or math lesson can incorporate aspects of music, art or theater in addition to literacy
- Reflection and Critique: VTS students engage in dialogue while reflecting on and critiquing artworks. MIDI students correspond online with teachers, mentors and other students alike as they develop their compositions. Flynn participating students conduct dialogue while developing their theatrical and dance performances
- Students, teachers and artists engaged in NPAI evaluate the efficacy of their work and that of others as it is in progress through taking part in formal and informal assessments.

The complete Year 2 Evaluation Report is available through the Vermont Arts Council. Contact Stacy Raphael at [sraphael@vermontartscouncil.org](mailto:sraphael@vermontartscouncil.org)

# Words Come Alive!

Burlington Public Schools 2005-07

## Executive Summary

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*Words Come Alive!* was designed to bring knowledge and use of dance and theater into 11 selected K-6 classrooms of Burlington Public Schools. Working with the teachers involved we identified three outcomes that would indicate program success:

- Increased teacher comfort level with theater and dance
- Increased range of student expression using the language of theater and dance
- Increased student retention of lessons using theater and dance

Specific measures were then designed to assess achievement of each outcome. The report outlines methods used to gather information, and then summarizes findings after completion of the full two-year program.

### Teacher comfort level with drama and theater

Overall, teachers entered the program feeling relatively unprepared to teach to Vermont standards on both dance and theater, but even less prepared to teach to dance than theater standards. All teachers reported feeling more prepared to teach to theater standards at the end of the program. Teachers that focused on dance reported a marked increase in preparation to teach to dance standards.

Teachers began the program with relatively low self-reported skill levels in teaching the elements of dance, and moderate skill levels in teaching theater elements and linking the creative process with reading comprehension. Teachers focusing on both dance and theater showed improvement in all skills. However, as might be expected, the teachers focusing on dance reported more improvement in teaching dance skills, while teachers focused on theater reported more improvement in theater skills. All teachers reported improved skills in their ability to link the creative process with reading comprehension.

Teachers reported more frequent use of nearly all dance and theater activities at the end of the program than they had at the beginning. In particular, teachers reported increasing use of reflection tools.

As a result of their participation in the program teachers learned that theater and/or dance helps students with learning and comprehension. All of the participating teachers reported that they will continue to use the movement and/or drama tools in their teaching. Many teachers reported that they have already done so.

#### Range of student expression using the language of theater and dance

Students in the two classes using dance as part of lessons reported increasing levels of skills in several elements of dance, particularly in learning about movement phrases, both creating and repeating phrases. Among the classrooms using theater as part of instruction, students reported increased theatrical skills across all elements assessed. When data for classes which included both fall and spring individual student data were analyzed, these differences were statistically significant for nine of the 11 elements.

#### Student retention of lessons using theater and dance

Teachers all reported that lessons incorporating theater or dance resulted in excellent retention and deep understanding of material. In addition to improved retention, teachers noted several other important outcomes:

- Students spontaneously use theater and dance tools to understand new information.
- Students have improved skills in theater.
- Lessons learned through drama and movement generalize to other areas.
- Teachers are better able to prepare students for live performances.

#### Conclusion

*Words Come Alive!* succeeded in achieving the goals of increased teacher comfort with dance and theater, increased student expression using the language of theater and dance, and increased student retention of lessons using theater and dance. In addition, teachers participating in the program were better able to prepare students for live performances. Students became, as well, better audience members, able to appreciate the complexity of dance and theatrical arts.

As a result of the program, students embraced learning enthusiastically, with greater success. Teachers, in turn, have adopted the use of theater and dance into their classrooms.

*“...I could never teach meaningfully without it.”*

