

The students stand in the circle expectantly at their teacher. Anticipation on every face, eager to begin the learning activity. An arts integrated lesson leverages the power of the arts, and allows each learner to



construct meaning through active engagement through the mind, the body, and with a spirit of joy!

Several schools across the state of Missouri are engaging in an arts integrated approach to teaching and learning. Incorporating the arts into instruction can be transformational for both teacher and student. The approach seeks to blend the content and standards

of the non-arts classroom with the content and standards of the arts. Students are engaged, instruction carries meaning and relevance as learning is constructed by the students.

Building upon the success of arts integration coaching which was being delivered by teaching artists in schools in St. Louis and the Kansas City areas, the Missouri Arts Council wanted to extend those services to Missouri's rural communities. Through an innovative program sponsored by the Missouri Arts Council (MAC), positive student learning outcomes were achieved through the **Arts Centered Education** or ACE program. During the 2018, 19, and beginning of the 2020 school year, teachers were able to experience and learn from teaching artist coaches with customized professional learning at their school site by working with veteran teaching artists.

ACE program principals worked collaboratively with members from the Missouri Arts Council, Missouri's Department of Elementary and

Secondary Education and veteran teaching artists Emily Kohring, and Roxane McWilliams to customize the learning plan. That plan was implemented during the 2018, 2019 and the beginning of the 2020 school year. Both Kohring and McWilliams delivered both professional development workshops for the entire staff and customized arts integration coaching for a small cohort of teachers with promising results. Enthusiasm abounded! Student learning soared! Teacher collaboration increased and improved. However, plans to continue the program in 2020 were halted due to the pandemic.

The Missouri Alliance For Arts Education learned of this program which aligns with their goals to promote arts integration as a powerful approach to teaching and learning. A proposal to have the Alliance take on the project was approved by the Missouri Arts Council's executive director, Michael Donovan in the spring of 2022.

"We are seeking rural school partners who may want to pilot Arts integration coaching with a cohort of teachers," said Phyllis Pasley, executive director for the Missouri Alliance for Arts Education. "The Alliance has engaged the services of an arts integration specialist who will help us facilitate the program, determine the needs of the local school, and seek out Arts integration coaches that can help fulfill those needs. In this way, thanks to the Missouri Arts Council, we will be able to implement a customized professional learning program in arts integration, at no cost to the school."

ACE Program teaching artist, Roxane McWilliams, consented to be interviewed for this article.

**Q:** Where did you conduct this onsite professional learning?

**McWilliams:** "We were in Plato, Missouri, and also at Horace Mann in Sedalia, Fremont in Springfield and A.D. Stowell in Hannibal."

Q: How were the teachers who participated selected?

**McWilliams:** “In most cases, the cohort that we worked with was selected by the grade level team. I do believe teachers should be allowed the choice. In one small district, we did a presentation for the entire staff, and although several elementary teachers became very excited about the prospect, Middle school teachers made it clear that they did not want to do it. The principal seemed to be a critical motivating factor. If they wanted it in their building, there was success. When an administrator trusts their teachers, teachers are more confident and even if they fail, they fail forward - because the administrators send that message, teachers, like our students, can keep on trying, until they succeed. “

Q: What kind of impact did this have on the schools served?

**McWilliams:** “It wasn’t just a student learning trajectory that went up. In some cases there was a lot of fear, Teachers wondered, “What is this? Can I do this? People sometimes have a self-perception of ‘I am not an artist.’ or ‘I’m not creative.’ Yet everybody is a creative being! They often just haven’t yet identified that creativity within themselves. The model lessons we did really sold them on the process. They could see great things happening with their own students by folding in the arts content and the non-arts content.”

Q: What does a teaching artist using this model bring that makes it unique?

**McWilliams:** “As a teaching artist, I come to the table with a lot of arts knowledge in several arts areas. Every arts discipline has its own art form, techniques and pedagogical aspects. Teachers may not feel comfortable incorporating an art form outside their experience. Helping students and teachers gain comfort in working with various art forms, and sharing their learning through an art form, makes it unique.”

Q: What responses do you get from teachers engaged in arts integration training?

**McWilliams:** “One key element was that the teachers determine the non-arts content for those model lessons. They focused heavily on math, because that is where they had difficulty seeing a connection between an art form and mathematics. One of the most interesting things that happened time and again was that as the teachers would choose the non-arts content for the model lessons, they would say things like ‘My students don’t like [this subject.]’ But then, after the lesson, the kids are having so much fun, they love it! Teachers were amazed. And I would say ‘So, this is why I’m here.’ It gives all of us such a great feeling of satisfaction!”



Q: Why do you think this approach is so successful?

**McWilliams:** I think that arts integration helps feed our growth as humans. One of the big reasons for success is that teachers feel empowered. They were able to see and feel their own growth. [When that happens] ...it gives them more energy to dive more deeply to improve their practice. It benefits students, because it is fun and engaging. Teachers become reenergized.”

Q: The need to differentiate instruction for diverse learners is so critical to success. Do you believe this approach would be effective in working with students who have special needs?

**McWilliams:** “Yes. This approach is very effective, especially for those who have trouble expressing themselves. The Arts become another form of literacy, another modality of expression for sharing their learning. I don’t think you can put a price on that.”

If you would like more information about the Arts Centered Education (ACE) Program, or the Missouri Alliance for Arts Education, please contact Phyllis Pasley, executive director at [director@moaee.org](mailto:director@moaee.org)

*Roxane McWilliams is an actor, pianist, piano teacher, and freelance teaching artist who works through a number of arts organizations such as the St. Louis based Center of Creative Arts (COCA) and also teaches music at the Clayton Family Center.*



<https://www.moaee.org/arts-integration/arts-centered-education>



