Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The developers of the Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge, or TETAC, never wavered in their goal: to make meaningful study of the arts integral to a child’s education. Through flexibility and adaptability, the National Arts Education Consortium, or NAEC, met success and developed reform strategies that enrich education for children from the inner city to the Plains. At the same time, the vision guiding the group changed greatly during the five years of the project.

When the project began, the Consortium envisioned providing “exemplary arts units of instruction” to the 35 schools participating across the country. The Consortium thought one- or two-week summer conferences and technical assistance would provide the training teachers and administrators would need to integrate the arts into the core curriculum. And the six regional organizations in the Consortium thought the evaluators would primarily measure the effects of the project.

The program that emerged five years later looked much different.

The success the project encountered proves that the arts can hold a key spot in the core curriculum and help change teaching from an isolated, individual endeavor to a collaborative effort that includes students. The story of how TETAC evolved to achieve this success holds valuable lessons for any national school-reform initiative.
The National Arts Education Consortium, or NAEC, seemed perfectly positioned to benefit from Walter Annenberg's "Challenge to the Nation" in 1993. The six regional organizations in the Consortium all had participated in the Regional Institute Grant program sponsored by the J. Paul Getty Trust from the late 1980s until the early 1990s. The program focused on promoting a comprehensive approach to arts education.

NAEC won a $4.3 million grant from the Annenberg Challenge and matching funds from the Getty Trust. The TETAC project, which drew an additional $6.5 million from other funders, started in fall 1996.
At the heart of the TETAC project lies Comprehensive Arts Education, or CAE, an approach that treats art with the same rigor as math and science. CAE was born of the "arts as a discipline" movement that began in the early 1960s. Barkan, of the Department of Art Education at The Ohio State University, built on a theory developed for other subjects, arguing:

- Arts education can be conducted as a humanistic discipline;
- The structure of the arts exists in three domains — the productive, the historical and the critical — each serving as a model for curriculum;

Teaching should employ both problem-centered and discipline-centered strategies; and

Objectives and activities for learning in the arts should be developed through themes focused on life problems to allow for better integration with other subjects.

Barkan believed in treating each of the three domains — the productive, the historical and the critical — equally, a radical departure from the child-centered approach that emphasized performance/making art and the development of creative thinking.

In the mid-1980s, the Getty Trust set out to put Barkan's theories into practice. The approach that developed became known as Discipline-Based Arts Education, or DBAE. To Barkan's three domains Getty added a fourth, aesthetics. Almost 220 schools with 1.5 million students participated in the Getty program.

Proponents believed the approach provided for a rigorous and thorough understanding of any art form, appealed to a wide range of students and showed the need to nurture and guide students in developing artistic skills, perceptions and understandings. Experts in the field agreed that the Getty's efforts had slowly altered the image of arts education as indispensable, not just a "frill."

At the outset, the TETAC project embraced the Getty's Discipline-Based Arts Education. After the initial implementation efforts and the first evaluation...
report highlighted challenges, the Consortium re-examined its approach to advancing instruction in the arts and built on it to develop Comprehensive Arts Education. In addition to the theory underlying DBAE, the new approach required instruction in the arts to be:

- Integrated with other core subjects around important themes or enduring ideas; and
- Delivered using “constructivist or inquiry-based” practices that adjust to the diverse learning styles of students, especially those at risk of failure.

### Focusing on Three Goals

The Consortium designed TETAC to fuse the advancement of education in the arts with general school reform. Three goals surfaced as critical:

- Building support for learning in the arts as an equal part of the core curriculum;
- Integrating a comprehensive approach to arts inquiry with other elements of school reform; and
- Documenting the impact of the TETAC approach on student learning and school culture.

From the beginning, the Consortium wanted a scientific evaluation of the program to provide hard data on the project, a rarity in arts education. Finding a firm capable of the complex responsibilities proved daunting, taking more than a year longer than anticipated. The issues that arose because of the delay provided the Consortium with one of the most important lessons from the project: Involve evaluators as early as the planning stage.
Changing Curriculum Strategies

The TETAC strategies shifted after the research firm Westat from suburban Washington, D.C., uncovered several serious issues in the second year.

The Consortium originally planned to provide the 35 schools with "exemplary units of instruction." But the evaluators found the one-size-fits-all approach failed to accommodate the diversity of mandates and curricular requirements found among the 35 schools, preventing many from using the units the Consortium supplied. With the schools that could use them, the theoretical base did not necessarily become a part of the teachers' understanding or repertoire, bringing issues of quality and sustainability to the surface.

A task force then recommended that the Consortium require schools to develop their own units through collaboration across disciplinary lines. While developing the units, the Consortium believed, teachers would build a deep understanding of the tenets underlying TETAC while producing meaningful units that also fit local mandates.

The Consortium developed guidelines to help schools create units centering on "enduring ideas," life issues that extend beyond specific disciplines and that have lasting human importance. According to the evaluators' data, many schools struggled with designing these units, with the most successful helping teachers "see" the program through examples.

With the change, the Consortium began focusing on building the capacity of teachers in curriculum design, authentic assessment of student learning and assessment of the quality of the learning and teaching environment.

The Consortium introduced the new strategy in the third year, leaving just two years to field test and refine Comprehensive Arts Education.

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### Number of TETAC Schools, by School Characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Characteristics</th>
<th>Overall</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Level</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior high school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of White Students</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>85 percent or more</td>
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<td><strong>Percentage of Students Receiving Free or Reduced-Price Lunch</strong></td>
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<td>6 percent or more</td>
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* Based on data from the last year of the study, 2000 to 2001.
** Information on this characteristic was missing from one school.
At the start of the TETAC project, the Consortium wanted to build the capacity of at least 80 percent of a school's administration and faculty in using TETAC strategies for school reform and the arts. The capacity building, which also would help institutionalize support for the project's approach to arts instruction, would take two forms: professional development — the summer institutes — and technical assistance from mentors.

With a 40 percent turnover in teachers during the project, a common problem for reform efforts, the Consortium found the 80 percent goal unattainable. In addition, many teachers, already enrolled in locally mandated professional development classes, had little time to attend the conferences.

To overcome these challenges, each region put together a menu of professional development opportunities to flexibly provide continuous, long-term capacity-building services at all levels of expertise. The opportunities included regional meetings, graduate-level college courses, classes over the Internet and workshops at individual schools.

The national evaluators also uncovered challenges with the mentor system, which was designed to provide schools with individualized help. Each Consortium member chose its mentors without any general national guidelines, leading to a wide variation in knowledge and skills. In addition, the evaluators discovered the mentors had no clear idea of their role, and schools had no clear idea of what help to expect. The Consortium changed gears again, developing a common set of responsibilities for the mentors and sponsoring professional-development meetings to strengthen their skills.

Making Evaluators Partners

The Consortium originally saw no role for the evaluators other than research. Westat's assignment was to focus on the end results. The change in thinking about the evaluators and evaluations again marks the flexibility that characterized the TETAC project.

The Consortium thought the schools, all participants under the Getty program, started with a mature understanding of DBAE. During their first round of interviews, two years into the project, evaluators discovered the opposite. In examin-
ing its goals and strategies in the face of this revelation, the Consortium invited the evaluators to join the discussion, giving them a much larger role than initially envisioned. In addition, the evaluation expanded with an added focus on gauging the success of the new strategies.

The evaluators encountered several challenges. The researchers were forced to develop a test to measure student learning in the arts because no appropriate assessment already existed. In addition, the evaluators had no way to measure how much CAE sharpened a student’s “softer skills,” such as making connections across subject areas, thinking more creatively, writing more fluently and asking better questions.

**Recording Success**

Based on data gathered during the last four years of the project and the analysis in the year following, the evaluators recorded the success of the TETAC project as it evolved:

- The TETAC strategy provides a means of enriching student learning and for changing the culture of a school;
- TETAC meshes with other reform programs;
- The TETAC strategy works in all types of environments, including the inner city; and
- The instructional approach, Comprehensive Arts Education, can be adapted to a wide range of teaching and learning environments.

The evaluators concluded schools that embraced TETAC’s strategy and adopted and adapted practices consistent with their local mandates experienced many benefits, including increased collaboration among teachers; more opportunity for thematic, integrated instruction; new ways of teaching and collaborating with students in the learning process; higher expectations for students; and new attitudes about the arts and their value to the curriculum.
Learning Lessons

The five-year evolution of the TETAC strategy encompasses a story of experimentation, lessons and new questions and ideas that remained contested as the project ended. By sharing the TETAC story and findings, the Consortium hopes to trigger additional experimentation and research that will build on this work.

Through the evolution of the project, the Consortium learned valuable lessons. The lessons fell into two major categories: advancing the arts in the regular school curriculum and administering a national school-reform initiative in the arts.

Advancing the Arts in the Regular School Curriculum

Improving Instruction In the Arts

The project focused on how to improve the curricula and instruction in the arts to increase student learning in the arts and their status with core subject areas. Five major lessons emerged:

Enduring Ideas as a Focus

In submitting their written units of instruction, TETAC teachers routinely reflected on their work. They often spoke of the importance of articulating and teaching enduring ideas and key concepts. Through this focus, the teachers became far more selective in choosing instructional strategies, as an elementary teacher in Nebraska wrote:

"The art of alignment in a unit is something I am now much more aware of. Do the key concepts guide the lessons? Are the art questions appropriate and do they fit with the artists and lesson design? Is the enduring idea an umbrella for lasting ideas that have value beyond the classroom? All of these questions and more help to define my passion for developing quality units that engage and excite students...."
Curricula in Arts Must Be Comprehensive

Creating art and understanding the arts does not occur in a vacuum. Artists usually look to many areas of knowledge to enhance their ability to realize an idea. Understanding these areas enhances a citizen's experience with the arts. No matter what the art form being taught, students need exposure to a holistic understanding of the arts that includes knowledge and skills not only in creating art but also in the critical, aesthetic and historical and cultural domains of arts inquiry.

Instruction in the Arts Is Best Designed Around a Theme

Artists and other great thinkers throughout time have pondered and drawn upon enduring ideas and themes about life and art in their efforts to create and forge new territory. Organizing inquiry in the arts around these ideas guides students in understanding the philosophical, religious, ethical and social sources that form the foundation of the arts. Use of enduring ideas also provides an overarching guide for aligning instructional activities to assessment.

Teachers Need To Use Inquiry-Based Strategies

Designing learning experiences that actively engage students in the inquiry and creation processes allows youngsters to make meaningful real-life connections to the ideas and skills explored. Learning environments in the arts must provide strategies to assist students in developing their own questions and in guiding them in their own inquiries. The experiences must offer models and opportunities for thinking, discussing, writing and creating based on the understandings being formed. In addition, the learning experience must provide students with the tools for reflecting upon and assessing their own and others' work and for making connections to life beyond the classroom.

Teachers Need To Know the Arts and Inquiry-Based Techniques

Support for the arts as an integral part of the core curriculum grows among general classroom teachers and administrators in accordance with their knowledge of the arts. Additionally, learning environments in the arts are enhanced when both general classroom teachers and arts specialists continue to deepen their understanding of the arts and advance their ability to use inquiry-based teaching strategies.

Student Learning in the Arts Must Be Quantified

In advancing the case for arts in the core curriculum, projects need to build quantitative databases to prove the importance of the arts in education. This means creating and administering standardized tests that can quantify student learning in the arts, as has been done in many other core subject areas.
Integrating the Arts into the School Curriculum

The TETAC project explored ways to synchronize education in the arts with general curriculum reform, particularly with interdisciplinary studies, which attempt to make students adept at using cross-disciplinary approaches to solve real-life problems. Three primary lessons emerged:

- **Learning in the Arts Must Be Meaningful**
  When integrating the arts into multidisciplinary learning experiences, schools tend to use them as the vehicle for learning in other subject areas, especially areas assessed by local proficiency tests. An example of this would be using arts activities to increase a student's achievement in reading. While this approach may give the arts more visibility, it does little to advance the important place of the arts in education. The arts in and of themselves impart important knowledge and skills that need to be a part of the core curriculum.

- **The Status of Arts Specialists Must Be Elevated**
  To assure that the arts are incorporated meaningfully, arts specialists can play a vital role in collaboration with classroom teachers but only if they become key members of a school's curriculum planning efforts. If a school places the specialists on the same plane as classroom teachers, they can serve as resources and mentors for their colleagues.

- **Better Tools Must Be Developed to Assess Arts Learning in Integrated Settings**
  Assessing the impact on student learning becomes a challenge in an integrated curriculum setting. Most local proficiency tests fail to assess learning in the arts or the most valued skills and knowledge exhibited by students in integrated learning situations, such as critical thinking or transference of skills. Additionally, no standardized test for assessing arts learning exists. Both quantitative and qualitative assessment tools and strategies must be advanced for evaluating learning in the arts.
TEACHERS ADDRESS MANDATES WITH LESSONS

In developing units of study, TETAC teachers aligned concepts and skills with national, state and local standards. The Curriculum Guidelines also emphasize the importance of building on knowledge students obtained in previous lessons.

For example, a Florida middle-school unit focused on the idea of personal voice and explored this idea through poetry and still lifes. This unit addressed the state-mandated language arts standards concerning the use of literary devices and techniques, word choice and the use of symbolism and figurative language. Standards for the visual arts included using media to communicate ideas, using symbols and making connections between visual arts, other disciplines and the real world.

The sequence of lessons carefully introduced the concepts of personal voice, symbolism and metaphor. The first lessons featured the work of 19th-century still-life painter William M. Harnett. Students focused on how the artist selected objects and used techniques to convey an autobiographical message. In the next lesson, students explored how ordinary objects can have more than one meaning.

Students then considered the work of contemporary artist Audrey Flack, who uses objects to carry several meanings. The students compared the way the two artists worked with symbolism.

Additional lessons introduced the use of figurative language, including simile, metaphor and personification, as found in the poetry of Gary Soto, who wrote a series of "odes" to everyday objects such as the tortilla, tennis shoes and a garden sprinkler. As part of this exploration, students created journal entries about significant objects in their own lives.

In final lessons, students selected and arranged personal objects for a still-life drawing and used the steps in the writing process to create poetry about one or more of the objects. The students reflected on the ways their drawings and poetry symbolically communicated an autobiographical message.
Changing the School Culture To Support the Arts

The TETAC project looked at ways to make the school culture supportive of the arts in the curriculum. Many of the strategies explored in this area extend beyond the arts to embrace general reform projects with proven success. Changing a school’s culture means changing the way a school conducts the business of educating students and improving their learning environments. Five major lessons emerged:

- **Collaborative Planning Must Be Nurtured**
  Educators traditionally learn to work as individuals in developing and implementing learning activities in their classrooms, but today the trend is toward collaborative curriculum planning, especially in integrated curriculum settings. Collaborative environments offer the arts and arts specialists unique opportunities to become a genuine part of curriculum planning efforts, allowing them to advance understanding about the importance of learning in the arts among their colleagues.

  Additionally, these collaborations allow arts specialists to more deeply understand the issues and pressures facing their schools and how the arts might join in solving them. For collaboration to be productive and effective, though, it needs to be nurtured and supported.

- **Self-Reflection Is Vital to Improving Professional Practice**
  Another trend in changing the way schools conduct business involves encouraging educators to continually improve their professional practice, especially in the classroom. A vital tool for accomplishing this goal has been nurturing reflective practices among educators that give them timely and relevant input concerning the effectiveness of the learning experiences they have developed and implemented. Though self-reflective in nature, these assessment practices benefit school change when teachers engage in them collaboratively with colleagues throughout the school. To be productive and effective, educators need training in self-reflective strategies.

- **Students Must Be Considered Collaborators**
  The learning environment has traditionally been viewed as a teacher-orchestrated domain. However, current thinking emphasizes an integral role for students, challenging schools and teachers to view them as collaborators in the
learning process, both in its design and realization. This shift in thinking emphasizes the use of student-driven inquiry in the classroom and asks the teacher to shift roles from leader to mentor/coach.

- **Assessment of Student Learning Must Be More Holistic**

  Reliance on traditional proficiency tests to the exclusion of a holistic evaluation program limits the school’s ability to truly understand what affects student achievement. Holistic approaches not only comprise a diverse package of evaluative tools but also require the development of a more comprehensive slate of criteria for measuring student learning.

  To achieve a diverse package of evaluative tools, schools could couple traditional proficiency tests with student observations, portfolio reviews, student-generated assessment or reflective journals that more comprehensively assess higher-order thinking skills and knowledge transference.

- **Effective Professional Improvement Efforts Must Be Ongoing and Focused**

  A teacher's or administrator's professional growth must be envisioned as long term, directed and appropriate to a school’s educational goals. It must also expand understanding of the larger realm of school and curricular reform to allow for more thoughtful planning and facilitation of change to occur.

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**Enduring Ideas**

'Enduring ideas' comprise concepts that have drawn the attention of humans through the ages. In TETAC, these ideas are taught repeatedly throughout a unit of curriculum. Key concepts and essential questions are derived from interpreting artworks in the context of enduring ideas.

Examples of enduring ideas include:

- The inner quest for self-knowledge.
- Relationships among humans.
- Relationships between humans and nature.
Administering a National School-Reform Initiative in the Arts

- Develop a Common Understanding of a Project’s Purposes and Goals
  
  Soon after hundreds of school-based stakeholders joined the initiative, the steering committee realized that many of the participants were interpreting key concepts differently. The more geographically dispersed and diverse the group of stakeholders, the greater the need to assure a common understanding of the project’s goals and purposes.
  
  To address this problem, the committee had groups of key participants work to articulate common understandings to guide stakeholders as the project progressed. These common understandings were communicated to all participants and provided the foundation for the project’s professional development and evaluation efforts.

- Design Flexible Strategies That Can Accommodate Local Mandates and Needs
  
  The 35 schools participating in the TETAC project represented the diverse range of backgrounds and needs typically found throughout the nation’s schools. This diversity required that the strategies for realizing the project’s goals and expectations accommodate myriad local needs and educational mandates. The challenge in using flexible and adaptable strategies was in maintaining a recognizable commonality among the sites’ perception of the goals and outcomes.

- Expect the Funders’ Policies and Practices To Affect a Project
  
  Traditionally, funders have been viewed solely as sponsors. However, the expectations and influence of the TETAC project’s national funders played a significant role in the development and implementation of the project, especially because of their differing policies and practices. While the stakeholders have anecdotal information to share about this aspect, formal documentation was not collected. Studying the impact of funder policies and practices on a project’s success would be useful to the field, especially in light of the more active role many funders are adopting.
The TETAC Arts Assessment

Because no existing assessment fit the project's needs, the evaluators developed the TETAC Art Assessment. Below are samples from the version for elementary schools.

Today we are going to learn about still lifes. Still lifes are pictures that artists make of objects such as flowers or bowls of fruit.

- Look at still life A. What does the picture show? Use details from the artwork to support your answer.

- Look at still life A again.
  - What object appears farthest away in the picture?
  - How does the artist make this object look farther away than the other objects in the picture?

- Look at still life A. Place a check (✓) in front of the word or words that describe how the artist made the object look lifelike. Check all that apply.
  
  ___ use of light and dark
  ___ shadows
  ___ perspective
  ___ many straight lines

- Look at still life B. Fill in the circle that best describes the style of the artwork.
  
  ○ Impressionism
  ○ Modern
  ○ Abstract
  ○ Realism

Painting A: Gustave Courbet, Still Life: Fruit, 1871-1872
Painting B: Umberto Boccioni, Still Life with Glass and Siphon, c. 1914
Decentralized Governance Structures Require Centralized Management

Management and governance of the TETAC initiative began as a shared leadership effort among six regional organizations. During the project's first year, they realized this decentralized approach was unfeasible for the management of day-to-day operations. As the second project year began, the Consortium established a centralized national office and hired a project manager. This new structure freed the governance committee members to focus their efforts on the larger oversight issues facing the project and the regional needs of their individual organizations.

The Evaluation and Evaluators Must Be Part of a Project's Planning

The evaluation component of the TETAC project was initially envisioned as a data gathering and documentation effort. Due to this belief, the development of the project's evaluation plan and selection of the evaluator became two of many tasks that were to be accomplished during the first year of implementation. However, the articulation of the evaluation plan and the identification of the evaluator became pivotal to the overall project implementation because they facilitated the assessment, definition and evolution of the other key project elements, particularly the curriculum and capacity-building components.

The development of the evaluation component became a de facto self-reflective process that enabled the leadership to construct a more fully integrated implementation effort.
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