

## **Fostering Teacher Learning in the Arts: A Summary<sup>i</sup>**

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Classroom teachers in Ontario, Canada's most highly-populated province, are expected to teach the arts within the elementary curriculum, seldom with sufficient training or background. As in many other jurisdictions, they are expected to help students see relationships and make connections in dance, drama, music and visual arts, the most common arts disciplines (Taggart, Whitby & Sharp, 2000), without a fundamental knowledge about the essential concepts and skills in the arts. For many classroom teachers, the arts disciplines are beyond their personal experience, and they avoid teaching the arts in their classrooms due the anxiety it causes them. Many of them believe that the arts are important and allow students to draw on their unique strengths and talents, especially those less academically-oriented. However, they feel that teaching the arts is mandated of them without adequate professional development and sufficient support from administration. To address this challenge, Canada's national cultural institutions - the National Arts Centre, National Gallery and Museum of Civilization - and its largest bilingual university, the University of Ottawa, entered into a partnership to offer an integrated arts summer program for classroom teachers which featured artists collaborating with teachers to enhance their arts learning and improve their instructional expertise.

The Odyssey Project is a research project designed to assess the effectiveness of the summer program. Phase I, *Fostering Teacher Learning in the Arts*, focused on a description of those dimensions of an arts partnership which foster teachers' personal arts learning. Integrated Inquiry, a mixed method, was employed to examine relationships among data from multiple qualitative sources. Themes from reflective journals, classroom observations and video sessions were identified, combined and transformed to obtain an understanding of how classroom instruction featuring professional artists impacted teacher learning. Findings indicate that it is an emerging group culture within the class, characterized by a sense of community, comfort and mutual support, which fosters trust, emotional openness and personal risk-taking. These dimensions of the program enabled teachers to explore their own creativity, examine their thoughts and feelings, acknowledge each other's views, understand different perspectives, and engage successfully in artistic activities.

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