

**National Museum of Women in the Arts**  
***Teachers Connect: Distance Learning in the Arts Program***

**Final Report – September, 2011**

**Executive Summary**

The National Museum of Women in the Arts' *Teachers Connect* program is a technology-based professional development program funded through a competitive grant awarded by the Office of Innovation and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The overriding goal of the *Teachers Connect* program is to train teachers to incorporate visual arts into existing curricular objectives, especially literacy-based objectives. The program provided participating teachers with a Summer Institute training workshop and an ongoing technology-based professional development program.

The Summer Institute activities included:

- an orientation to the technology-based professional development program
- an overview of *Teachers Connect* objectives and learning strategies as well as Visual Thinking Strategies objectives and practice;
- overview of a framework designed to enable teachers to incorporate visual arts into existing curricular objectives, especially literacy-based objectives and workshops with hands on experiences;
- distribution of art materials designed to help support the students' art activities

The technology-based component of the professional development program was delivered in a blog platform and included:

- multimedia teacher training materials to assist with the integration of fine arts into the core curriculum (instructional materials, visual aides, instructional videos;
- a guided/moderated discussion format for reflection, sharing and collaboration;
- an ongoing technology-based learning community
- e-portfolio displays of student work
- Participant motivation components
- Behavior/participation tracking

In 2007-2008, students in the classrooms of participating *Teachers Connect* teachers significantly higher learning gains than students in the control groups on the visual arts concepts test. The students in the classrooms of participating *Teachers Connect* teachers also had significantly higher learning gains than students in the control groups on the written expression test that required them to meaningfully extend, refine, and use knowledge of visual art concepts.

The first year of the *Teachers Connect* program (2007-2008), found that the *Teachers Connect: Distance Learning in the Arts* technology-based program was appropriate, effective, and well implemented, as judged by participating teachers. The main barriers to full implementation were district technology constraints (particularly in Pascagoula), limited technology skills, and time. NMWA addressed the district technology constraints with district personnel and identified ways teachers could access the technology-based professional development sessions for the second year. In the third year, teachers' perceptions of time constraints were addressed in the 2009

Summer Institute by providing teachers with ideas for integrating the program into their existing curriculum responsibilities. Access to the technology-based professional development site use has greatly increased since year 1 and 2 of the program, and, in year three, there was continued growth in the number of “hits” received on the site each month. Each district has worked with Teachers Connect to be sure that sites were not blocked and made easily available to participant teachers. A group was formed on Facebook and about half of the teachers accessed extra materials as well as the blog site through Facebook. This increased the number of teachers accessing the site on a regular basis.

Based on the focus group data the following evaluation results can be summarized.

- *Reaction:* Teachers continued to indicate that the video training on the blog site was what they needed, and they suggested even more videos could be added in the future.
- *Learning:* None of the teachers had been familiar with a blog-based professional development program prior to their participation in *Teachers Connect*. Teachers said that from this program they learned how to do specific projects in their classrooms, they learned how to use the Visual Thinking Strategies to develop critical thinking skills in their students, and they got ideas for integrating the arts with their curricular objectives. None of the teachers had been familiar with the Visual Thinking Strategies prior to this program.
- *Behavior:* Teachers indicated that they did the projects and used the skills they learned both in the summer workshop and from the professional development blog. They implemented ideas they read about on the professional development blog. They also said that they implement the visual thinking strategies when doing the suggested projects and they apply it in other classroom contexts, as well. Some teachers are still ‘lurking’ on the professional development website and are not active participants. Reasons for this were explored and suggestions were made which drew several more teachers to the site. Teachers accessed the professional development segments more often in the fall and winter seasons and much less in the spring during testing periods.
- *Results:* Teachers implement the critical thinking skills in a variety of contexts and poor participators increase their participation because they are not afraid of giving a wrong answer, since the answers are based on opinions and reasoning. The program activities facilitate transition to writing because students are enthusiastic about projects that integrate the arts with other curricular goals. Students who are not leaders have an opportunity to shine and gain peer admiration through these projects.

The academic year 2009-2010 was the third year of the *Teachers Connect* program for participating teachers. Formative data on teachers’ reactions, learning, and behavior (levels 1-3, above) were collected. Blog activity, teacher sharing and collaboration, increased significantly compared to the first two years of the program.

NMWA created a high quality, technology-based professional development program and learning community to support the integration of fine arts into the curriculum. The program provided teachers with both strategies for integrating fine arts into the core curriculum, and the technological skills necessary to access and participate in a technology-based professional development program and learning community. The program motivated teachers, to varying degrees, to access, participate in, and learn to share and collaborate in the technology-based learning community. The program did appear to address students’ knowledge of visual arts concepts and vocabulary, their ability to meaningfully extend, refine, and use their knowledge of visual art concepts, their ability to engage more effectively in critical thinking/productive habits

of mind, and their attitudes and dispositions, including increased self-confidence with respect to discussing and creating visual arts.

Specific overall findings for the *Teacher's Connect* program include:

- The students in the classrooms of participating *Teachers Connect* teachers outperformed students in the control groups on the visual arts concepts test.
- The students in the classrooms of participating *Teachers Connect* teachers outperformed students in the control groups on the written expression test that covered meaningfully extending, refining, and using knowledge of visual art concepts.
- The majority of *Teachers Connect* teachers perceived that students' ability to discuss art improved in the following ways: ability to use art vocabulary, recognition of art forms, recognition of the elements of art, ability to use visual arts concepts meaningfully, and engagement in critical thinking.
- The *Teachers Connect: Distance Learning in the Arts* program was appropriate, effective, and well implemented, as judged by participating teachers.