

The Arts in Every Classroom: A Workshop for Elementary School Teachers
Handout

Ridgeway Elementary School
White Plains, New York

Instructional Choices

Ridgeway Elementary School is in White Plains, a suburb of New York City with a mixed socioeconomic population. The school serves more than 600 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Effort-based education, in which students are evaluated based on the effort they show, is an important part of the school's philosophy, and students are encouraged to be producers of their own knowledge. The school has one full-time and one part-time vocal music teacher and two part-time instrumental music teachers.

After the summer workshop, the four team members worked together all year on special arts-based instruction for the second-grade class of Joan Roberts and the third-grade class of Monica Bermiss. The school runs on a six-day class cycle, and thanks to principal Sandi Cangialosi, the team had one planning period to work together every cycle. In addition, visual art teacher MaryFrances Perkins had teaching time with Joan and her class once per cycle and with Monica and her class once per cycle. These sessions were in addition to the normal work with arts specialists — two classes per week for visual arts and two classes per week for music.

The unit that the team developed took the students through a process of investigation and creation based on the team's enduring idea developed in Program 5: "Change is evident in all areas of our lives."

Emphasizing the arts in the general classroom was a new idea for Ridgeway. Team members decided to begin by investigating the various art forms. Collaboratively or on their own, they taught the lessons from Program 1: "What is Theatre?" "What is Music?" "What is Dance?" and "What is Visual Art?" using the examples from the Classroom Demonstration Materials videotape. They also watched and discussed *Quidam* with their students. By using lessons that had been tested already and that team members had experienced themselves, the teachers had a built-in comfort level as they began their work with the arts. This approach — which the workshop leaders had encouraged at the end of Program 6 — is useful in any new teaching situation.

Later in the year, students worked at discovery stations created by the team members. As a culminating activity, students developed a multi-arts performance that grew out of the team's enduring idea. In choosing to have their students create a multi-arts performance, team members again were replicating a process that they had experienced.

To create the performance, students did research, developed staging ideas, rehearsed, and created costumes. To portray the life cycle of butterflies, the second-graders studied metamorphosis in science class, worked with MaryFrances to create large monoprints for the wings of their costumes, and worked out movements that were a challenge for some members of the class.

The third-graders kept a running list all year long about “change.” They created a collage about change made from pictures that Monica took and that the students found in magazines. They designed costumes and developed the theme for their culminating performance depicting change over time.

The new methods that the team explored (team-teaching, discovery stations, and original performances) helped the students to understand “change” on a number of levels — and learn about the arts in a new context. For the teachers, these methods also spelled “change,” since they found new ways to explore their own skills and stretch their practice.

Role of the Principal

The principals at each of the Learner Team schools played important but different roles in ensuring that teachers could experiment with the ideas from the summer workshop. At Ridgeway, Sandi Cangialosi worked with the school district to modify schedule patterns so that her team members could work together all year on a regular basis. This included finding time for team members to meet for planning and obtaining release time for MaryFrances to team-teach with Joan and Monica. Sandi’s role also included supporting instruction related to the enduring idea as a worthwhile focus for several disciplines and joining the team as a full collaborator.

Role of the Teachers

Teachers took a proactive role at all three of the Learner Team schools, understanding that they had to be actively and wholeheartedly involved to make the effort work. At Ridgeway, the teachers agreed to work together all year and tried several new methods as they did so. To make their efforts worthwhile, they felt it was important to have adequate time in their schedule for planning and team-teaching.

Role of the Specialist

Visual art specialist MaryFrances Perkins participated in the planning and implementation of the work at Ridgeway on an equal footing with the classroom teachers involved. She took some of the same risks the classroom teachers did in stepping out of her area of specialty to team-teach lessons in music. The chance to be part of a group was important to her.