

SoNA “The Case of the Missing Melody” Program Evaluation

2014-2015

The following is a summary of outcomes for the arts in education program conducted by the Symphony of Northwest Arkansas (SoNA) in local public schools. The program, “The Case of the Missing Melody”, was a collaborative effort with Trike Theatre Group and designed to expose young students to the arts through live music and drama in the form of a site-based training and performance. Students experienced workshops before and after the performance to introduce new content and to review the curriculum for retention and understanding. Teaching Artists spent 15 days in classrooms for pre-workshops, 15 days for post-workshops and gave 13 performances over three months in the Fall of 2014.

Teachers were asked to provide feedback through pre and post performance surveys as well as Observation Rubrics to better evaluate student response throughout the program. Teaching artists from both SoNA and Trike were at the schools for workshops and the performance and also provided feedback on their perceptions of the program. SoNA conducted follow-up teacher interviews and student activities at participating schools to further measure the impact of this program on teacher implementation and student retention of both new content and perception of the arts in general. This evaluation provides analysis based on pre to post to follow-up measures with supporting teacher and student comments.

Participants included Music teachers from five rural school districts in Northwest Arkansas, focusing on Primary schools serving Pre-K through 2nd graders. As reported in pre-performance teacher surveys, these teachers impacted at least 100-400 students on a regular basis, and as many as 1,000, with a high percentage of those students living in poverty. Further, these classrooms also served at least 10% to 20% of students with disabilities and or English Language Learners. Teacher surveys included 10 to 12 items including 4-point Likert Scale items on level of agreement, Yes or No items, and open-ended items allowing for elaboration on responses pertaining to program use. Pre and Post teacher surveys focused on three key constructs, Self-Efficacy, Instructional Strategies, and Student Impact, while the Observation Rubric focused on Student Impact and Response to the Strategies.

Pre-performance surveys asked teachers to respond based upon their own confidence level in using the arts in the classroom, what they hoped to learn, and student ability in relation to the skills taught in these workshops. These teachers indicated that they were not necessarily familiar with arts integration before the program and had no prior training. Post performance surveys asked the same items within the same constructs focusing on teacher confidence, what was learned, and improvement in student ability as a result of the program. Teachers were also asked to rate their own experience and satisfaction with the program in post measures.

The following charts demonstrate average ratings among these teachers pre to post performance on each construct related to the program objectives. The summary findings are listed below:

- Teacher confidence level or Self-Efficacy measures indicated that these teachers were confident in these skills overall. However, they were more confident in their ability to utilize music and movement in the classroom than to use theatre and cooperative groups. These teachers were also seeking ways to motivate students and build a sense of community within the classroom (see Figure 1).
- Teachers also indicated a strong desire to learn arts integrated strategies and how to incorporate them into their own curriculum. Surveys also indicated that teachers felt that they had learned these new strategies in the program, most importantly theatre and cooperative group work, which appeared to be more difficult for them “I am trying to incorporate more small group discussion” (see Figure 2).
- Items related to the impact of the program on students indicated improvement in students’ skills in areas targeted by the SoNA program. The key areas identified by teachers as a need; cooperative skills, sense of community, and level of engagement, all improved based upon teacher response. Further, and most importantly, student exposure to live music and live theatre increased significantly along with the ability to identify a personal response to music. It is interesting to note that although teachers felt confident in their use of music through movement, they did indicate agreement that exposure to the program improved student concentration and focus (see Figure 3).
- These teachers overwhelmingly agreed that the program was effective and appropriate for the learners, the teaching artists were competent, and that they would recommend the program to others. More importantly, all would like to participate in the program again, and some have heard students discussing the program and asking for more,

“The students loved every part of this experience. The visiting teachers worked very well together and the lesson plans flowed very smoothly. The teaching quality was excellent. The kids really enjoyed seeing the actors and the instruments, a true live experience that they would not have had otherwise. The kids are still talking about it and ask me about my friends returning almost daily.”

- Participating teachers strongly agreed that their students would benefit from more programs like SoNA, and indicated a need for more training of this nature. These teachers felt that their familiarity with AIS had increased and that they were confident in sharing with peers. Most importantly, all agreed that this type of training is more effective than traditional methods, and rated the overall program as “Excellent”.

“Loved the pre and post workshop lessons, and the Teaching Artist was very well organized, competent and engaging, as were the theater teachers from Trike. The students were very responsive to the teachers. The performances were also very well planned and professional.”

Figure 1.

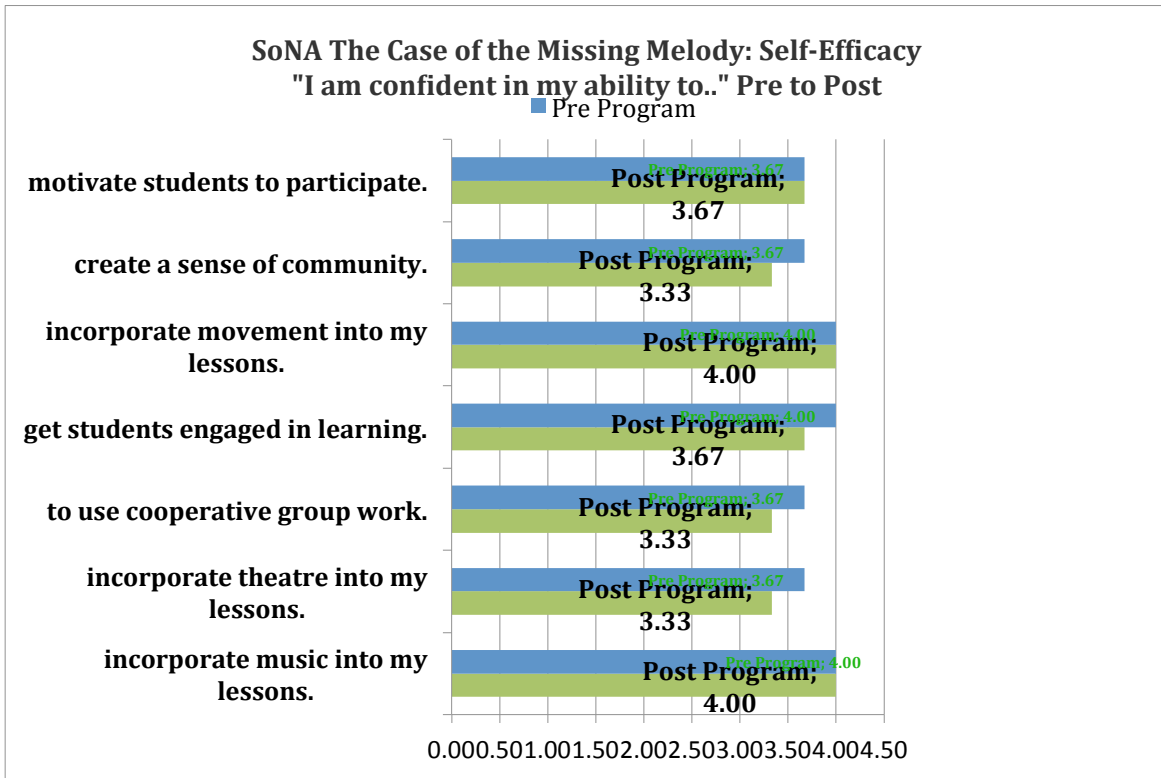


Figure 2.

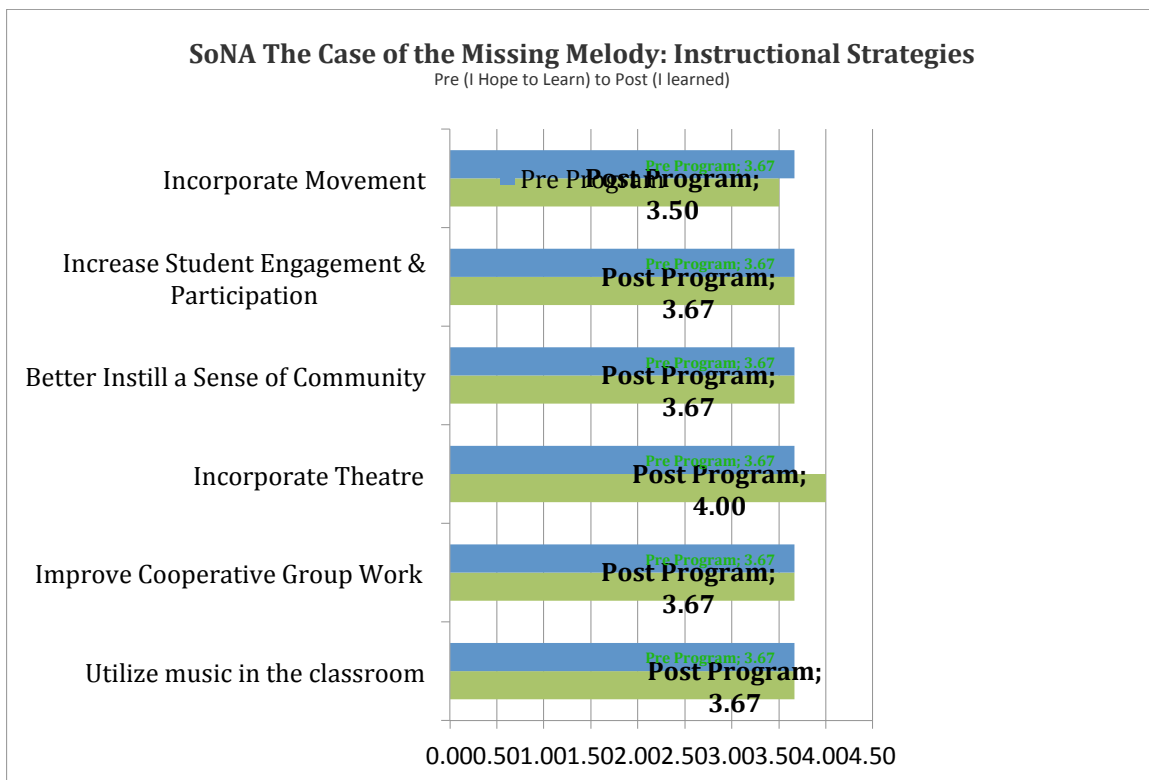
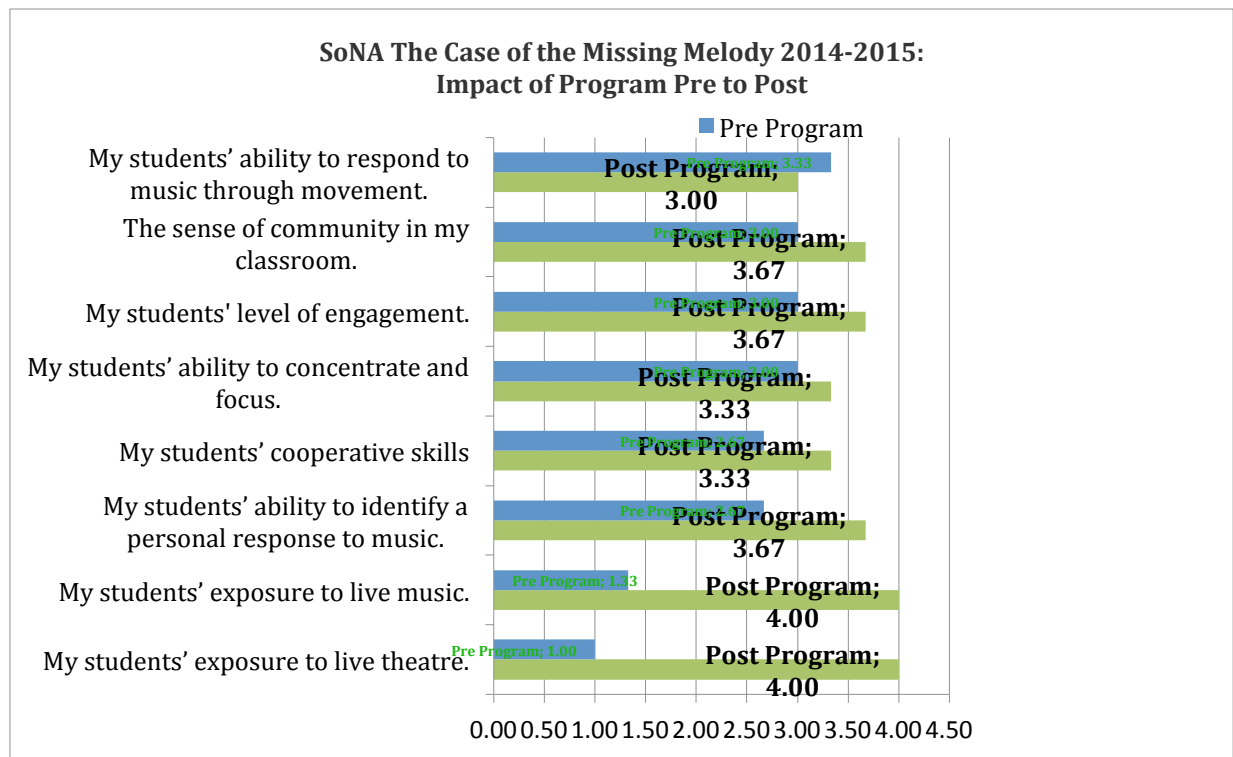


Figure 3.



Question 9. Please share your thoughts on the Pre-Workshop provided through this program (ie: what did you observe in the students, teachers--was it helpful, successful?).

“The pre-workshop was vital for my students to be able to appreciate the different pieces of the music in the performance. I videoed their reaction during the performance, and it was obvious when the quintet played a piece they recognized, they immediately showed it with their body!”

“Students were engaged through participation (ie. "Sing melody", "I am the rhythm" THEY REMEMBER WHAT TO DO). The presenters were excellent, and kids loved hearing the flute Miss K! Goals and objectives were clear.”

“The Pre-Workshop was right on target. The teaching was great for the grade levels being taught and the kids really enjoyed the lesson. It is very similar to the way I would teach. The kids were also introduced to partner talking which we haven't really done at this point in the year.”

Overall, results of the pre and post teacher surveys were positive and indicated that the program was greatly needed among this population of students. Findings may have been impacted by the timing of the workshops and performances in that all initial contact occurred in three months but varied by school in terms of time between workshops and the performance. This is due to scheduling among the schools and not in control of the program. Further, teachers may not have had enough time to practice and utilize the strategies learned before taking post measures. This

was resolved with follow-up activities and teacher interviews over the course of the year and findings are presented following the rubric summary.

Summary of Observation Rubric

Teachers and Teaching Artists directly involved in program delivery responded to an Observation Rubric following the performance and post workshops. Likert scale items based upon four levels of agreement were designed to measure student response to the program throughout the time of contact. Responses are reported below by classroom teacher, teaching artists, and then combined. Keeping in mind the small number of participants in this pilot year, findings should be interpreted in more general terms. The average or mean score for each item has been calculated and organized by construct including Engagement, Student Behavior, and Student Expression. Additionally, some items were designed to measure the impact on students' appreciation of the arts.

Overall, teachers were most positive in relation to level of student engagement and active response to the program. They reported that students were actively participating in the program, worked cooperatively, and demonstrated understanding of the new concepts presented. Most importantly, teachers indicated that students were able to respond to the music through movement, and could identify an emotion in that response. Although teachers also indicated that students were not as engaged by the visual art presented, open-ended responses discuss the need for a different placement of the images for better viewing (see Figure 4).

Teachers were also asked to summarize student response to new arts integrated strategies when utilized in their classrooms. Once again, findings indicate a strong level of participation and cooperation with a positive attitude toward learning among students in response to AIS (see Figure 5). A majority of teachers also indicated that students could better control their behavior, and were more willing to take risks utilizing these strategies. As before, students have demonstrated a greater ability to respond emotionally to music and to demonstrate this response through movement. At least 25% did not observe an increase in students' ability to reflect and revise their work (see Figure 6).

With regard to an appreciation of the arts in general, teachers were positive about student response to the program and new strategies. All teachers agreed that students had expressed an interest in the arts as a function of program participation. Fewer agreed that students used more creativity and imagination due to the program, and did not fully agree that students preferred arts integration to traditional methods (see Figure 7). Given the varying degrees of implementation of the new strategies among these teachers, more data are needed to truly measure the impact of arts integration on students in these classrooms. It would be necessary for these teachers and students to be exposed to such workshops and performances over several years, accompanied by embedded professional development, in order to determine change in both teacher practices and student learning outcomes.

Overall, teachers indicated a high level of satisfaction with the program and positive outcomes for students as a result of participation. It is interesting to note that responses from Teaching Artists were equally positive, as observed during the program. Results indicated that students both recalled program specifics and were highly motivated to participate in the program from the previous year. Both students and teachers indicated a desire to see the program again, and appeared to look forward to the next visit. Participating teachers have indicated a desire for further training and welcome the opportunity to work with the artists more frequently over time. As stated before these findings are tempered by timing and may not allow for teacher practice and implementation of the strategies learned over the school year. Follow-up measures and interviews support these positive findings and provide a broader view of the impact of the program. A meaningful and valid measure of the impact on these teachers and students will require sustained and embedded professional development over 3 to 5 years, as well as continued programming and data collection. Research shows that change of this nature in behavior and attitude require longitudinal analysis of program outcomes and impact over time.

Figure 4.

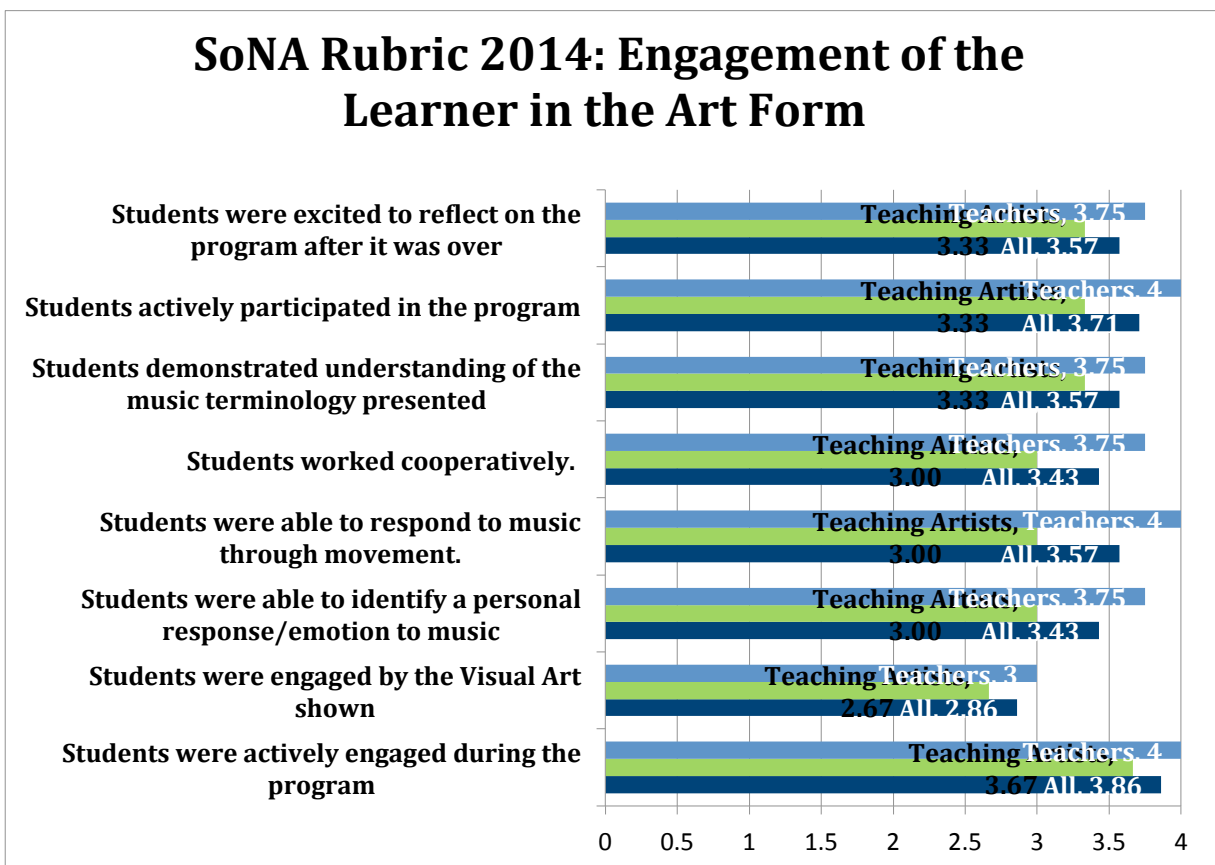


Figure 5.

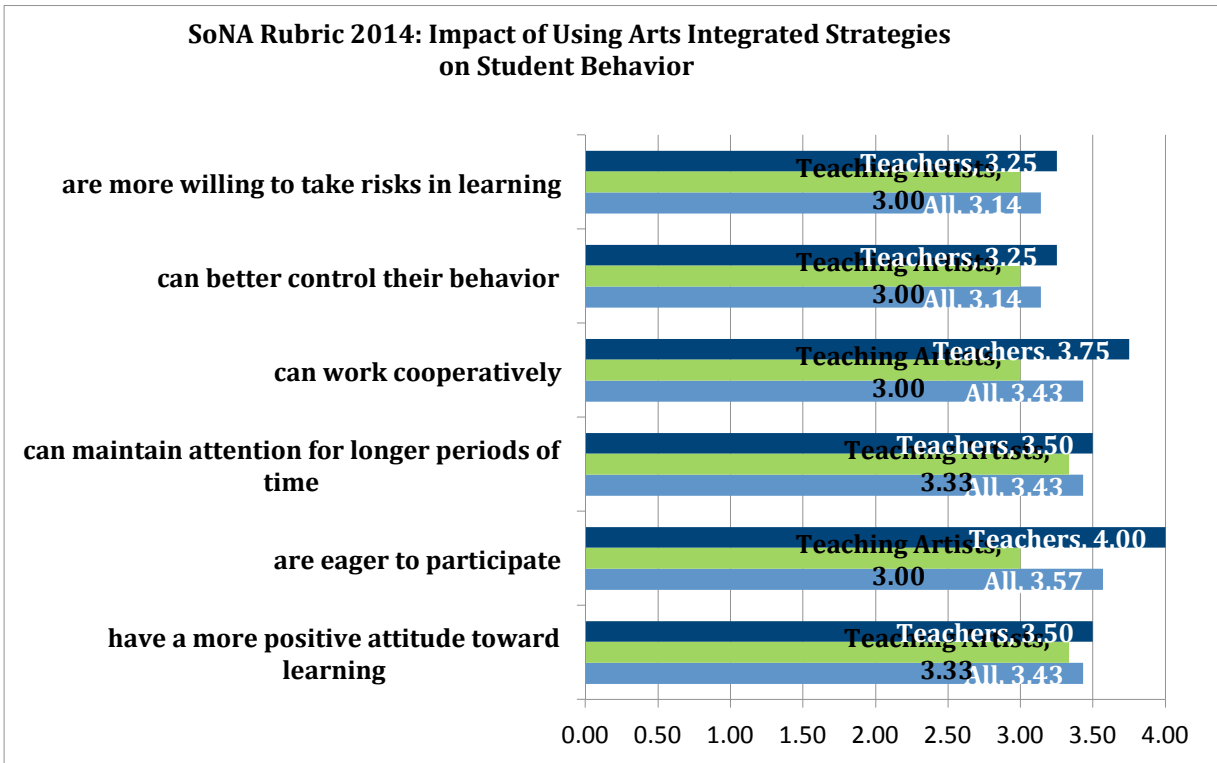


Figure 6.

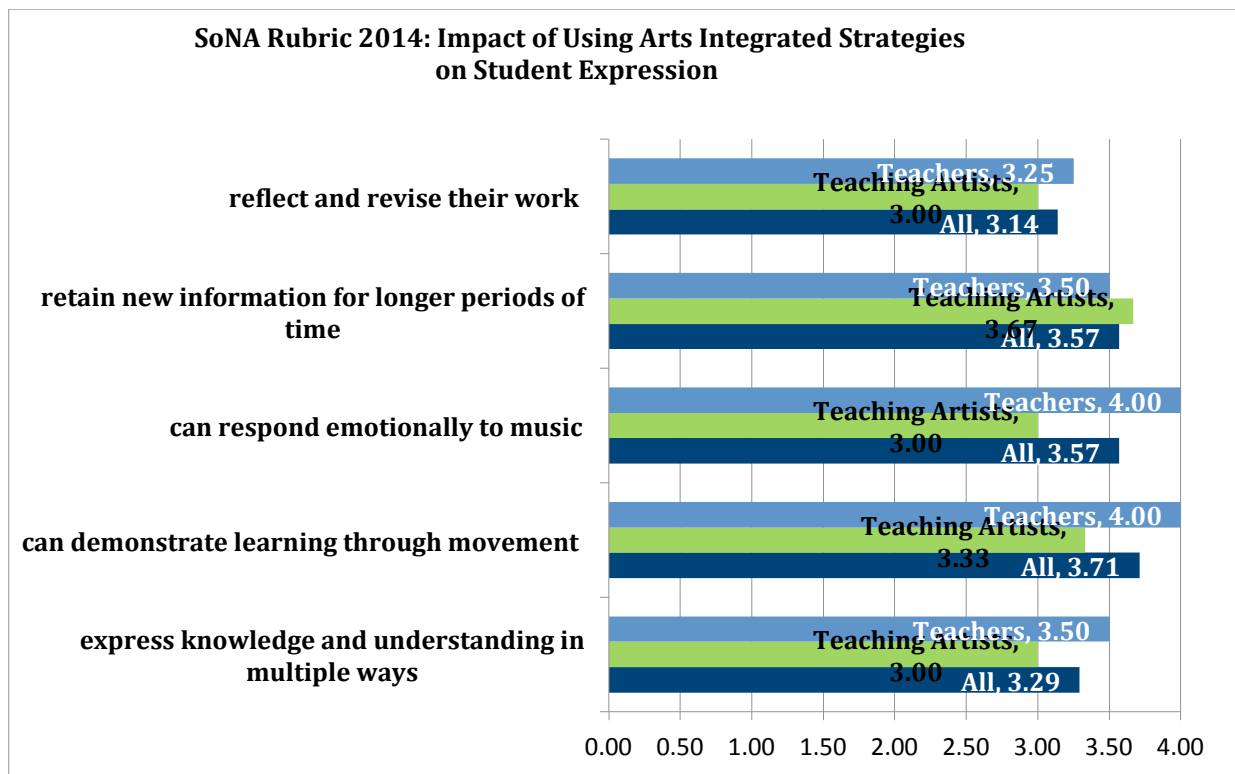
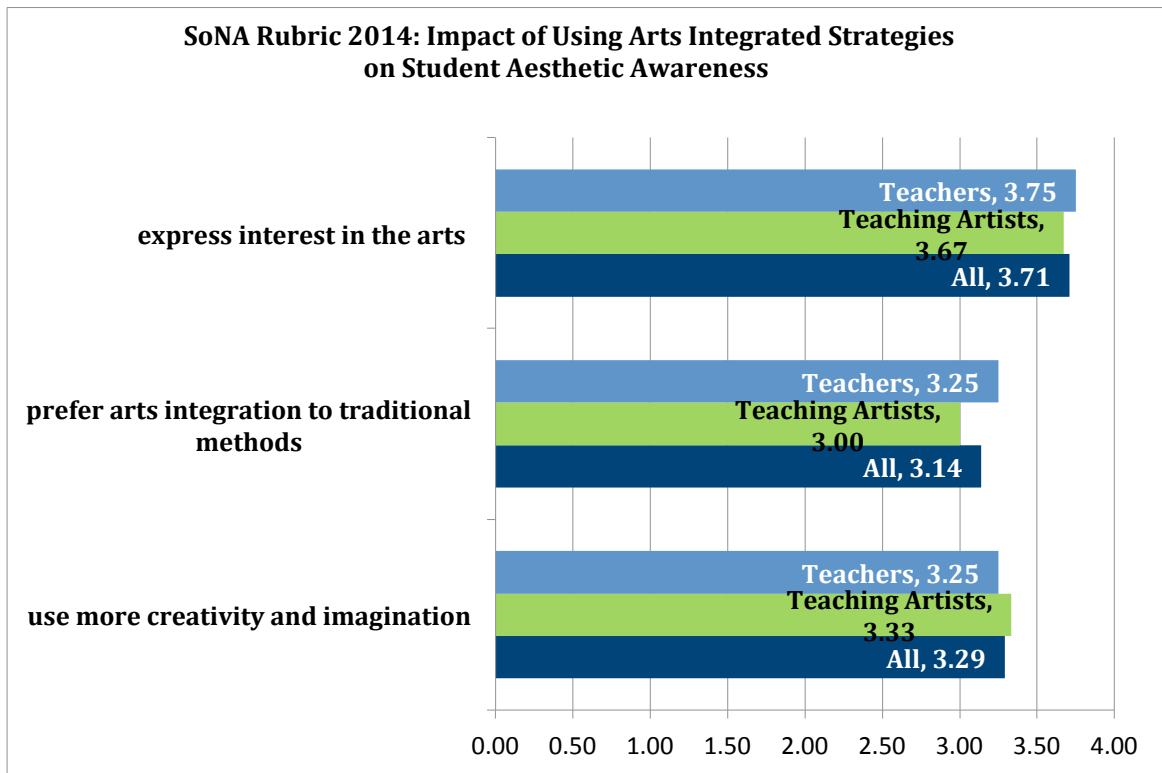


Figure 7.



Open-Ended Responses from the Observation Rubric

- “The kids had a little bit more trouble controlling their bodies during the post workshops. Maybe identifying emotions through music could have been a 'Stop and Go' activity instead of an activity that moved them in groups across the floor to the corresponding picture on the wall.”
- “Hearing an instrument playing as they walk into the room (like in the pre-workshops) seemed to be a great way to engage the kids non-verbally from the very beginning.”
- “All of the people involved in this project have been a joy to work with. I am so thankful for all of the wonderful actors, writers, musicians, and supporters that made this possible! What an amazing experience for my students!”
- “I wish we would have been able to have the projected images in a more visible place during the production.”
- “They loved creating the different parts of music in small groups. The workshops that allowed more time for that activity may have been more memorable.”
- “The musicians and actors were very well prepared. They had a well organized and engaging presentation. I would like to have seen even more elaboration surrounding the music which was played by the orchestra members.”

Follow-up Teacher Interviews

Teachers were interviewed in Spring, 2015 following the program to evaluate the impact of the program on both teachers and students over time. Teachers were asked questions similar to those found on teacher surveys based upon the three key constructs.

Self-Efficacy

Teachers in these rural schools did not have experience with Art Integrated Strategies and had not attended trainings specific to AIS locally or otherwise. However, the more seasoned teachers did express that they were familiar with several techniques through other training related to professional licensure and teacher education in the field of music. Several felt that they were already using movement and cooperative group work to some degree in their classes as a function of music education. Given the time constraints on music education and the pressure to complete standards and prepare for performances, teachers agreed that they were not able to truly implement AIS fully and to the benefit of the students. All were confident in their ability to teach music, but welcomed the chance to observe and learn from another educator utilizing AIS with their students, "I need to see it." Teachers were not as confident in the idea of sharing AIS with their peers, or attempting to co-teach with regular classroom teachers utilizing AIS. This may have stemmed from a feeling of isolation from the general education curriculum and pressure to meet their specific standards and assessment demands. These teachers were open to more extensive AIS training and were willing to work with program directors to schedule and implement further workshops and professional development in the future.

Instructional Strategies

Teachers recognized that the new common core would require a shift in both teacher strategies and assessment, but felt that they were well-prepared for the change due to the arts-based curriculum of their field. However, a majority agreed that arts integrated strategies specific to drama would significantly increase the success of new standards requiring more performance based and cooperative assessments. All teachers mentioned that they were seeking new and effective strategies to reach more students, "I am trying to be more creative". Further, these teachers all agreed that students with special needs or language barriers had demonstrated greater levels of engagement and success through the arts and these types of strategies. One teacher supported the notion that arts integration can "level the playing field" commenting, "The students who typically struggle in their other classes do not have those issues in my classroom".

Unfortunately, most expressed that they felt disconnected from the regular classroom teachers and curriculum, and did not regularly meet with teachers other than "specials" such as PE and Music, and Art. This is not uncommon; music and art teachers appear to be solely responsible for integrating the arts into student learning by linking their lessons to curriculum presented in the regular classrooms. Time was also a key issue in terms of both use of arts integrated strategies and assessment, in that they only see students for short amounts of time over

the grading period. Space and materials were also a concern, as some teachers must travel to several buildings and classrooms to teach. These teachers agreed that although students responded well to these strategies and that use of AIS would probably save time in behavior management, the lack of consistent contact with students makes applying new concepts difficult. However, all agreed that with consistent training and practice, they would feel more confident in applying AIS to current lesson plans.

Impact

Teachers overwhelmingly supported the program and the use of AIS in the classroom. Despite their personal training, these teachers indicated that their students benefitted greatly from AIS across the board and have seen great improvement among both ESL and SPED populations through music and movement. Poverty was also a strong factor among these schools and teachers agreed that this program would be the only exposure to live theatre and music for many students. Further, that exposure to professional musicians and artists had a profound effect on students' appreciation of the arts as a career field or even a possibility for future school activities. Teachers were extremely positive about the outcomes of the program and would like to see it grow across curriculum, grade levels, and schools. Most importantly, these educators reported that these strategies truly reached those students who typically struggle in regular classrooms. When asked whether these strategies seemed to have a greater impact on struggling students, all agreed that they had seen the greatest change in behavior among students who typically would not or could not participate. They added, that the ability to participate and contribute in class at the same level as their peers was key to success for those learners. Student outcomes are presented in more detail below.

Student Follow-up Activity

Student Activity: Students listened to a recording of “Bolero” and were given a worksheet which allowed them to draw a picture about the music, and to describe how the music made them feel. All students in these classes participated in the activity, listening quietly to the music and drawing pictures of what they thought it was about. The content of the student pictures varied greatly and students did not feel the need to copy others or leave the page blank. The work also demonstrated great creativity and imagination in thinking about how the music made them feel. Students were most willing to discuss their ideas and very articulate in describing their emotions, even at these younger grade levels.

Student Engagement

The most significant outcomes reported by teachers were related to levels of engagement and participation. All teachers agreed that throughout this program students were fully if not more engaged and eager to participate in the activities. Most commented that the content presented and the use of movement to music peaked students' curiosity and interest. Further, these teachers felt that the very nature of the live performance and contact with live actors and

musicians had a profound impact on students. Teachers discussed how students participated in the learning fully and discussed the performance and activities amongst themselves after the program. Teachers also agreed that during workshops and the performance students were more cooperative and exhibited fewer behavioral issues.

Student Behavior

Teachers agreed that the use of cooperative group work had a significant impact on student learning. Although several expressed that they often utilized group work and teaming, they were impressed with the use of activities and movement to engage learners and allow for demonstration of knowledge. Several teachers indicated that the ability to observe others working with the students gave them a better perspective on what works and what full implementation looks like. Overall, teachers indicated that they would adopt several of the strategies utilized to manage student behavior and improve the level of participation.

Student Expression

Another significant outcome for this program was student response and retention of content. These students not only remembered the program, but were very excited to see the Teaching Artist again and to talk about the experience. They expressed how much they enjoyed the program and wanted the musicians to come back. Most of the students could name the instruments that were involved in the program and could name characters from the performance. Several recalled the song itself from the performance although they did not know the name of the piece. Although some time had passed, a majority of the students recalled the new vocabulary presented during the program as well. As they discussed the story presented, students became excited to talk about the games and activities involved and which parts of the program they liked best. The most common favorite was meeting professional musicians and artists in person, and having the opportunity to talk to them. Students also favored the games and activities which allowed for movement and working in small groups with other students, "I like to get up and run around to find the parts of the song." A key element of this program was to empower the learners to fully engage in the art form and identify a response to the music through emotion and movement. Students participating in this program were able to express how the music made them feel and to discuss these emotions fluently. These students demonstrated great creativity in describing the music and putting their emotions into words and drawing. Moreover, these students used emotions to describe the different characters in the story, and demonstrated high levels of retention when asked to recall the program.

There was some disparity between schools in the number of students who took music lessons or attended live performances in the arts. As the teachers stated, this program was the first live performance ever seen by a majority of these students. Teachers cited both rural location and poverty as potential reasons for this disparity. The age of these students may also play a natural part in this finding due to the fact that instrumental music through public schooling

is not an option until higher grade levels. However, it was apparent that these students did not have as much access to private lessons or live performance venues as their counterparts in larger districts who are bused to performances through public school programs. Many expressed an interest in the arts as a career, and more importantly indicated that they would explore music in terms of band or orchestra as they got older. Overall, students in these schools were greatly impacted by this program as evidenced by their excitement over the content, and the mere fact that they retained detailed information about the story and instruments over such an extended period of time.

Conclusions and Key Observations

Through this program, SoNA met two key objectives: to impact student ability to identify a personal response to music, and to respond to music through movement.

- ❖ Although students had been exposed to some of the vocabulary through regular music classes, the nature of this program seemed to increase retention of the content and increased engagement in the story by allowing students to create mental pictures or memories of the content and become part of the story.
- ❖ Movement was a key element in the program as students stated that they preferred to learn through games and movement. However, it is also evident that when asked to recall some elements of the program or story, students described what they saw in action terms and how a certain character or activity made them “feel”.
- ❖ Students were fully engaged during the follow-up activity and demonstrated that this was a developed skill in listening to and interpreting music. Students were also keenly aware of their own emotional response to the music and willing to articulate those emotions to others. Most students could describe in words, “why” they felt as they did.
- ❖ All students indicated that they enjoyed the program and wanted the program to return. When asked if the program should happen more often and even in other classes, students were excited and positive about participating in these activities outside of music class.
- ❖ When asked “Would you want to play an instrument for a living?” many students agreed that they would like to perform in some manner and appreciated what the professional musicians had done through the program.
- ❖ Teachers greatly appreciated the training and were interested in bringing the program back on a broader scale with more contact time, and across several grade levels.
- ❖ Teachers indicated that student exposure to live theatre and music increased significantly through this program, supporting the great need for this program in more rural areas.
- ❖ Findings for this evaluation indicate that the use of arts integration strategies can greatly improve student engagement, cooperation, and retention of content. Further, students in this program demonstrated creativity and imagination in response to the art form.
- ❖ This program was highly successful in meeting set goals and objectives and should continue in similar fashion and perhaps grow to cover more grade levels and schools.