A REPORT ON THE TEACHING ARTIST RESEARCH PROJECT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Teaching Artists and the Future of Education

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NORC at the UNIVERSITY of CHICAGO

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NORC at the University of Chicago is an independent research organization headquartered in downtown Chicago with additional offices on the University of Chicago's campus and in Washington, D.C. and Bethesda, Maryland. NORC also supports a nationwide field staff as well as international research operations. With clients throughout the world, NORC collaborates with government agencies, foundations, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and businesses to provide the data and analysis that supports informed decision making in key areas including health, education, economics, crime, justice, energy, security, and the environment. NORC's 70 years of leadership and experience in data collection, analysis, and dissemination—coupled with deep subject matter expertise—provides the foundation for effective solutions.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Teaching Artist Research Project was conducted in a dozen communities from Boston to San Diego between 2008 and 2011. More than 3500 artists and program managers completed a survey, and over 200 key informants were interviewed in the various sites. The project was supported by grants from twenty-five funders – private foundations and state arts agencies. The entire report, from which this executive summary has been drawn, is available at the NORC's website, http://www.norc.org.



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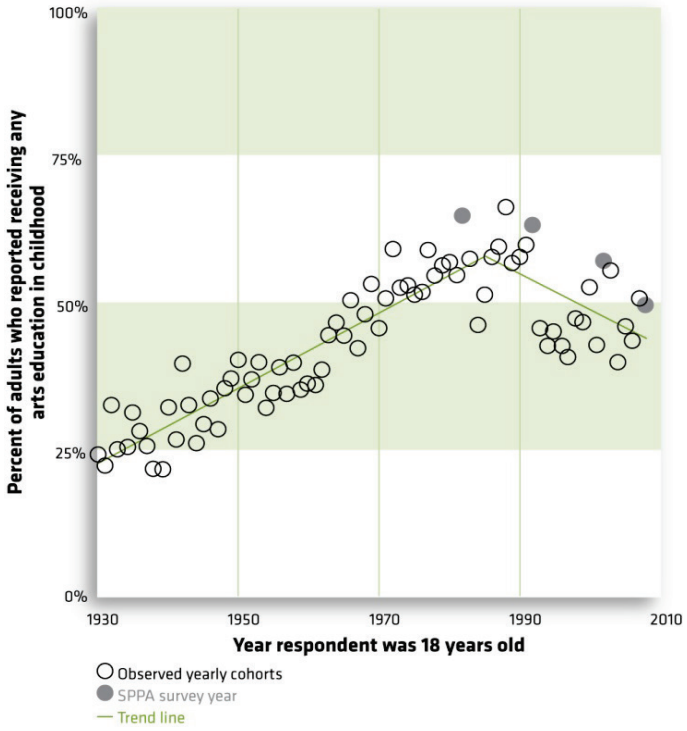
# Executive Summary: TAs and the future of Education

## Teaching artists, arts education, and the schools

There are two headlines in arts education today. The first is that after a century of steady growth both in schools and out, there has been a significant decline in the proportion of American children who have taken classes or lessons in the arts. In 1930, less than a quarter of 18-year olds had taken any classes or lessons in any art form during their childhood. By 1982, that figure had risen to sixty-five percent. But by 2008, and throughout a period of heightened concern and effort to improve schools, particularly those serving low-income children, it had dropped below half again, and the decline shows no sign of abating.[1]

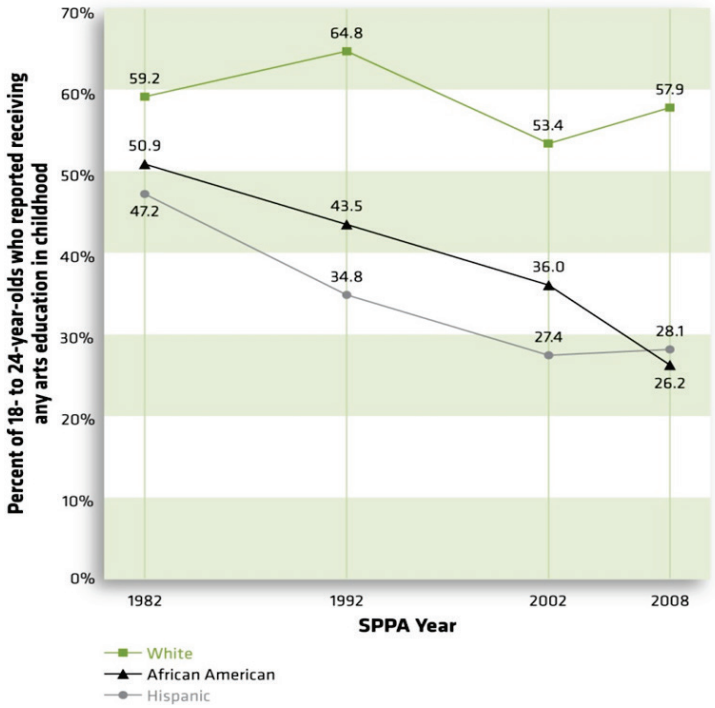
**Figure 1:** Rate of childhood arts education (1930-2008)




Arts education among white children is down only slightly since 1982. The decline has been precipitous, though, among African American and Hispanic children. They have absorbed nearly the entire decline. (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011)

[1] Data on declining childhood arts education is from a series of Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts conducted in 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 for the National Endowment for the Arts. Large and representative survey samples were asked if they had taken any classes or lessons in music, visual art, theater, dance, and creative writing before their eighteenth birthdays, yielding reliable data from before 1930 (those who were 18 in 1930 were born in 1912) through 2008.

**Figure 2:** Rate of childhood arts education by race (1982-2008)




The arts are taught, of course, in schools and in a range of community settings – from private homes to storefront studios, churches to parks to arts centers. Among the art forms, the decline has been most serious in music and visual art, the two disciplines most commonly taught in schools. Theater and dance, which are taught rarely in schools, are actually up slightly since 1982. Simple deduction leads to the inescapable conclusion that the decline in childhood arts education has been most dramatic and concentrated in schools that serve African American and Hispanic children. There is a virtual arts desert in many of the schools they attend.

The second headline is that over the same three decades a substantial number of teaching artists have moved beyond the community venues in which they have taught for more than a century and into the schools for the first time. They have mitigated, but not reversed, the decline, and they have brought arts education and innovative practices to schools where they are badly needed. There is, of course, great variability in the work they do in schools – in content and curriculum, pedagogy, intensity, duration, and quality. But the best programs have established track records of remarkable success, often where the need for innovation and improvements are greatest: schools that serve low-income children. Not only do TAs teach in these programs, they often design and manage them as well. It would seem logical that any strategy to reverse the broad decline in arts education, any effort to distribute arts education more equitably in American schools, or any effort to extend the successes of arts education programs in schools would include teaching artists as a critical element.

## School reform and arts education

So far, though, the track record of success has not broadened policy support. Arts education and teaching artists themselves are very much on the proverbial bubble. They are underfunded and under-supported by education policy and policymakers. This is nothing new. School reform has failed to give serious consideration to the value of the arts since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the report that made a national priority of turning the "tide of mediocrity" in American schools.

Americans believe good schools and education are essential to getting children off to a good start in life. *A Nation at Risk* argued that the quality of education in American schools had become so debased that it represented a serious security threat to the future of the country. It found deficiencies in standards, rigor, focus, teacher expertise, and student workloads. It described school curricula as a "cafeteria" in which "appetizers and desserts [were] easily mistaken for the main courses," and it advocated expanded use of standardized tests. It barely mentioned the arts, suggesting that they were among the distractions from the real business of schools. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) Its prescriptions have shaped school reform ever since.

But after nearly three decades of effort to improve schools, the situation is not significantly better. Graduation rates from high schools nationwide are flat and by some accounts may even be down since 1990. (Chapman, 2010) (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2011) Gains on standardized tests in some troubled school systems have been offered as evidence of progress, but in Houston, New York, Chicago, Washington, and other districts, the claims have been badly discredited in recent years. When judged by the standards of international exams, American students have actually fallen *farther* behind students in more countries in critical subjects, and the principle reason is that the prevailing strategies of school reform have not been effective in low-income schools. (Darling-Hammond, 2010)

Improving schools, particularly those serving low-income students, is a complex and resistant challenge. It involves large systems, poverty, privilege, race, politics, and conflicting values. Sometimes, though, pathways to solving complex problems are in plain sight. We just fail to see them. Research has strongly and consistently associated arts education with higher student achievement. Careful evaluation of program after program has shown that learning in the arts is strongly correlated with improved student behavior, attendance, engagement in school, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, social development, and, yes, even test scores. The evidence suggests arts education can light the way to practical solutions for schools. But policymakers, deeply influenced by the norms of school reform, appear unable to assimilate the evidence and stare blindly at its light. It simply does not fit their understanding of reality. That will need to change before the fundamentals of the situation are likely to shift broadly. But developing arts education as a strategy to improve schools and student learning will

also require we know more about TAs, as they have proven to be essential human and intellectual resources for what is most promising in arts education.

## From settlements to schools

TAs are hardly confined to working in schools. They have been vital to community-based arts education for well over a century. The first TAs were hired to run the arts programs at Hull-House, the social service and reform settlement founded in Chicago in 1889. By 1914, there were 400 settlements across the nation. Following the Hull-House model, most had substantial arts programs, and they had great influence. Teaching artists gave Benny Goodman his first clarinet lessons and Louis Armstrong his first cornet lessons at Hull-House and the New Orleans' Home for Colored Waifs respectively.

If the settlements contributed nothing more to American culture than to start those iconic artists on their way, they would have been significant. But developing professional talent was not the core purpose of the arts at the settlements. The settlements believed that the arts were for everyone, not just the particularly talented. They saw the arts as essential to weaving the fabric of strong communities. And they believed that learning the arts cultivates the agency and voice required to participate in a democratic society, where everyone has the right to be heard and contribute to the culture.

A new kind of arts pedagogy began to emerge at the settlements, and it reflected those principles. It departed from conservatory traditions of elite patronage, exclusive training for pre-professionals and professional artists, and singular embrace of classical culture. Like the conservatories, arts education at the settlements embraced rigorous study of aesthetics and the technical skills of the arts, but it also was attentive to the arts as tools for critical exploration of the world, celebration of community values and traditions, weaving the arts into daily life, cultivation of imagination and creativity, and appreciation of the world's many cultures.

TAs have sustained and developed those principles for more than a century through their work in the wide variety of community institutions that succeeded and supplemented the settlements. By the 1970s TAs were actively working in what came to be called "community arts," making art for the public *with* members of the community, linking their talents to pluralistic aspirations, imaginations, and social agendas. They worked in community schools of the arts and taught music, visual art, theater, dance, and more. They worked for arts organizations – teaching patrons about the work on museum walls and on theater and concert stages. They worked for social service agencies, senior centers, and youth agencies. They led teen and community theater ensembles, senior citizen choruses, church choirs, and theater and creative writing circles in libraries and prisons.

Artists slowly began to enter the schools in the 1950s. Their roles were initially limited to introducing students to the excitement of live performance. Participating artists had no meaningful relationship with the life of the school

itself, no significant connection to the curriculum, and little personal interaction with teachers or students. They appeared at small scale special events, and then they left the schools. They were not yet teaching artists.

That began changing in the mid-1960s, when poets sent to the schools began teaching children to *write* poetry. Artists in the Schools became one of the first programs of the new National Endowment for the Arts. By the mid-1970s, Young Audiences, Urban Gateways, Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education, and other organizations in many major cities were sending artists to schools to teach workshops and residencies, repeating visits to the same classrooms to help students learn how to make art themselves. State arts agencies developed "rosters" of teaching artists they supported for work in schools, including those in rural areas. TAs began to move beyond arts "exposure" and "outreach" experiences toward something more serious, engaging to students, meaningful to schools, and consistent with the settlements' ideas about the role of the arts.

School reform and budget cuts – precipitated by fiscal crises and burgeoning political resistance to the cost of public services like education – began eroding arts faculty positions in schools and districts across the country by the late 1970s and early 1980s. Some principals, determined that their students should have access to arts education despite the cuts, found they could mitigate the damage by bringing in arts education programs offered by arts organizations to their schools. The numbers of artists working in schools began growing. More conventional arts organizations, not-for-profits that present or produce performances or exhibitions, developed or expanded education departments and offered programs for patrons and for schools. New organizations dedicated exclusively to delivering programs to the schools emerged. Arts education programming for schools became more than a quick "drive by" or "one off" experience. By the 1990s arts philanthropies were starting to provide support specifically for arts education, and some were particularly interested in work in schools.

Many of the TAs that worked in schools had prior teaching experience in other community venues. As they began applying the spirit of social purpose that grew from the settlement tradition to work in schools they also developed deeper understanding of the ways the arts affect learning, and their programs began a more intentional application of the arts to the challenges of improving schools. This work is at the heart of many of the most successful arts education programs in schools, and it is why it so important that we understand the world of TAs and how to best support their best work.

## Reasons to believe

Our principle purposes for this research have been to learn more about teaching artists and how to support their best work, but we suspected that the effects of their best work were likely to be related to two things: First, to the ways that the arts themselves excited, challenged, and engaged students cognitively, socially, and emotionally; how the acts of imagination and expression that are the heart of the arts differentiate arts education from other

subjects. And second, to the ways that teaching artists practiced the art of teaching; how they approached curriculum and pedagogy. So in addition to learning the "facts" about teaching artists, we also hoped to learn about their practice and the field knowledge they were developing through their practice.

The Teaching Artist Research Project has been a three-year investigation of the world and work of teaching artists. We looked at TAs in a dozen communities – Boston, Chicago, Providence, Seattle/Tacoma, and eight in California – San Diego, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Bakersfield, Santa Cruz, Salinas, the Bay Area, and Humboldt County. The study sites do not represent the entire universe of TAs across the country, but their diversity does demonstrate that TAs are not just making contributions in large urban settings. It seems likely that TAs are present, to greater or lesser degrees, in most communities across the country – urban, rural, and suburban. They are often hidden from view, but they are an abundant resource.

We collected over 3550 surveys from artists and program managers. We conducted 211 in-depth interviews with artists, managers, funders, teachers, principals, district leaders, and civic leaders. We looked at TAs' work in an array of settings. They make vital contributions to communities in all of them, but the study made a special priority of looking at their work in schools. Schools are, after all, the only institutions in which arts education can possibly reach all children, the principle locus of the three decade decline in arts education for children, and the site of a simultaneous effort to improve student outcomes that may have generated more heat than light.

What we heard from TAs, program managers, teachers, principals, and other key informants largely tended to support our suspicions. TAs *are* bringing innovative pedagogy and curriculum to schools. And there is broad belief that there is something in the nature of arts learning itself that has a particular power to drive student development. Our purpose was not to test or prove that belief. Our logic model began with studies that found substantial positive effects from arts education programs and with new cognitive science that suggests the arts have unique power to engage students, commit them to learning, and invoke and develop deep cognitive processes that are essential to thinking and learning in general. Our purpose was to learn more about the artists who are responsible for those effects. If TAs can do all that, all those who care about the education and development of our children need to know more about them and what they know.

## Teaching artists: Getting a bead on the field through the data

### What is a TA?

A TA is an artist for whom teaching is a part of professional practice. 96 percent of the TAs in the study have been paid for their creative work in addition to teaching. More than three-quarters earned money from their work as artists in the past year.

## Who are TAs?

A majority of artists are men nationally, but two-thirds of TAs are women.

TAs are more racially diverse than artists nationally. They are also better educated. Half have master's degrees and two-thirds have degrees in an art form. One in eight has a degree in education, and one in six has been certified to teach by a state board of education.

Their average age is 45, and the average TA has 12 years of teaching experience. Most enter the field in their early to mid-30s.

## What do they teach?

They teach all the art forms. Two in five teach visual arts. One in five teaches music and an equal proportion teaches theater. One in ten teaches dance, and smaller proportions teach creative writing, media arts, or another art form.

TAs teach basic and fundamental skills far more than advanced skills. They are often responsible for providing gateway experiences to learning in the arts, and they make a priority of creating meaningful and engaging experiences to generate the enthusiasm that might lead to a longer term student interest in the arts and the development of higher levels of technique. Helping students create quality artwork is a priority. TAs often spoke of giving the "processes" of the arts greater or equal weight to the "products."

## Who do they teach?

Most TAs teach young people, at least some of the time. Three of five TAs teach mostly young people, a quarter teaches mostly adults or seniors, and one in seven teaches all ages.

## Who do they work for?

More than half of TAs work for a non-profit arts organization. Of those, about one in five work for a community school of the arts or a theater. About one in ten work for a music or visual art organization, one in seven for an organization that specializes in school-based programming. One in twenty work for a dance organization or a museum. Nearly a fifth work in higher education and more than a tenth work for K – 12 schools. About a third work for a school – primary, secondary, or post-secondary. Less than a tenth work for a for-profit business.

## Who manages the programs?

A large majority, 70 percent, of the managers of the programs for which TAs work have worked as teaching artists themselves, and 59 percent are still teaching artists.

## Where do they teach?

TAs usually, but do not always, teach at their employer's venue – their museum, theater, or school. Half of TAs reported that they were sent, sometimes or always, by their employers to other venues to teach.

Three quarters of those who are sent to other venues go to K – 12 schools. Altogether about half of TAs teach in schools at least part of the time. Most of those teach during regular school hours, but more than half also teach in after school programs. A fifth of TAs are sent to teach at other not-for-profits, mostly social service or youth organizations. And a tenth are sent to parks or other public agencies.

## Conditions of employment

Three quarters of TAs work on contracts. They are not salaried. Contracts are generally of short duration and rarely offer guarantees of renewal.

Less than a third of TAs teach full-time. The average part-time TA teaches less than eight hours a week and had 2.7 different employers in the last year.

## Income and pay rate

The average hourly rate for TAs is $40. That figure is misleading, though. Full-time TAs earn about $39,000 a year. That is roughly equal to the average for all artists nationally, but far less than a $40 hourly rate, and slightly less than the mean income for all workers in the U.S. Part-time TAs, working relatively few hours, earn just $9,800 a year from teaching. Most part-time TAs have additional income that brings their average total personal income to about $36,000. In the last year, three-quarters made money from their art-making practice, a quarter from arts administration, and three-eighths from work in other fields. Their average household income was $67,000.

## Benefits

More than one in five has no health insurance at all, and less than one in five has health benefits through their work as a TA. The TA uninsured rate is a third higher than the national uninsured rate of 16 percent. More than half have no retirement plans other than social security.

## Why do they teach?

TAs teach primarily because they enjoy the work and because it is a way to earn money in their artistic field. Many are motivated to teach in order to contribute to their community and social change. Most believe that teaching makes them better artists.

### Satisfactions and dissatisfactions

Despite serious dissatisfaction about pay, health insurance, job security, and time to make their art, most TAs plan to stay in the field and would take more work if it were available. They like the work. Its satisfactions and the dearth of other opportunities in the arts keep TAs in the field despite their concerns.

## Teaching artists and the future of education

The strongest predictor of student success in school is socio-economic status. Children from wealthier families are far more likely to do well in school than those from poor families, and children from poor families are likely to go schools with high concentrations of other low-income children. Schools have no control, of course, over the income of their families, but they must deal with the consequences of their families' affluence or poverty.

The single most powerful predictor of student success that is *under* the control of schools is the quality of teaching in their classrooms. It seems reasonable, then, to assume that when educational programs are associated with student success, there is a strong likelihood that good teaching has an important role. As we interviewed TAs and program managers in our study sites, we focused on the approaches, perspectives, practices, and strategies that they brought to teaching.

### What is good teaching?

Research at the Harvard School of Education, the National Academy of Sciences, and the University of Chicago, and reports by professional associations of educators in science, math, language arts, social studies, early childhood, and the National Board for Teaching Standards share common findings about teaching methods and learning theory. The research and reports distinguish good teaching from much of what happens in American schools. Good teaching fills classrooms with challenging, authentic, and collaborative work focused on deeper exploration of a smaller number of subjects. The characteristics of good teaching cluster in three categories:

- Good teaching is student centered. It starts with students' interests and what they already know, offers them real challenges, choices and responsibilities, and features curriculum that connects, rather than fragmenting, ideas across subject areas.
- Good teaching is cognitive. Learning is the consequence of thinking and making work that demonstrates mastery of meaningful ideas and compelling problems. Good teaching employs the range of communicative media – including the arts – and makes student reflection a regular part of the learning experience.
- And good teaching is social. Students learn better together. The classroom is a community, and students are its citizens. Teachers nurture the community and provide intellectual, emotional, and social supports

to students. (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000) (Perkins, 2010) (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005) (Smith, Lee, & Newman, 2001)

Not every program or teaching artist is equally committed to the kind of teaching and learning described in the research and reports. A far more hierarchical pedagogy long characterized conservatory arts education and it continues to be influential. The striking successes of so many arts education programs in schools and out of schools would suggest, though, that there is powerful and good teaching going on in them, and that a great many artists are very good teachers. Indeed, we found that many programs and TAs are expert at the kind of teaching the research identified as high quality, and they promote it in the schools where they work. We found this approach to teaching, in some respects, is a consequence of dispositions woven into TAs' identities as artists and the complex of mental processes that are integral to making works of art – vision and planning; imagination; discipline; attention to detail; seeing the whole; pattern making, finding and breaking; reflection, revision and assessment; persistence; judgment; spontaneity and play among them.

As quasi-outsiders, with relative freedom from the constraints and norms of schools, TAs can introduce innovation and change that has been slow to come from the inside alone. They are often partners and catalysts for change with teachers and other school leaders. TAs and program managers spoke about elements of their pedagogy that are exemplars of the qualities of good teaching.

## Engagement

A third of all high school students do not graduate in four years, and in most large urban districts the graduation rate is far lower. A "slow process of disengagement" is well underway by third grade or earlier for many students. (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010) Research on engagement is generally focused on behaviors like attendance. TAs, though, evaluate engagement by whether students contribute to discussions, enjoy and apply themselves, reflect on and try to improve their work, and listen and show interest in each other's work. They see the first signs of engagement and learning in a display of physical indicators. "I see it in their posture. When things are working, the kids are literally leaning into each other." Some TAs call these indicators "The Look." "The Look is the canary in the mine. If you don't see it, shift gears." The alienation that is too prevalent in many schools does not end when an artist walks into a classroom. TAs must win students' commitment quickly to accomplish anything of significance in the brief hours they spend together. Principals and teachers we interviewed confirmed that they are very good at that. "Perhaps it's because they don't have all the proscriptions and requirements that teachers have. They get an energy flowing right away," a teacher told us. A Boston area dance teacher confirmed that TAs are different. "I can say, 'lengthen on your supporting leg' a hundred times, but then a visiting artist comes in, and a light goes on." TAs take advantage of their novelty, capture students with appealing tasks and skills, create a "safe space" where students can take risks, and quickly get students started with simple assignments and

simple rules, allowing them considerable freedom to make aesthetic choices themselves. Opening assignments are designed to yield reliably good results, build students' confidence, and whet their appetites. "Warm ups," exercises artists themselves use to get their minds in gear and move them into a creative modality, are usually done in groups, connect students with each other, and act as a gateway into the content of the lesson.

## Voice and discipline

Artists in every art form spend their lives developing their "voice." It is a metaphor for building a coherent perspective on the world and life, a focused set of concerns that matter to them and stimulate curiosity and creativity, and an aesthetic signature of their own. TAs expressed a conviction that students, too, have voices waiting for development. A focus on voice is a focus on students. Committing to the development of student voice begins with an understanding that students are not empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, but come to school with experience, perspectives, ideas, and questions of their own. Activating them is the surest pathway to engaging students in learning. TAs frequently spoke of finding ways to connect curriculum to the world outside the classroom and to students' own experiences. They did not, as some might fear, suggest that students' interests should *dictate* curriculum, or that the norms of school behavior should be abandoned to develop student voice. TAs indicated that they found that students want to understand their own world, but they also want to broaden it. They were keenly aware that good learning environments are orderly and well-managed, but offered that classroom management is mostly a function of engaging students in work that matters to them and in which they can develop their voices. Student self-regulation is a more effective strategy for classroom management than imposed behavioral discipline.

## Standards and meaning

A poet TA summed it up well: "I'm all for standards of excellence. But that means more than teaching poetic forms to write poems. Students might get the form right, but they'd write lousy poems. Writing a good poem demands that the writer know what they care about, why they care, and how words can make others feel the way they feel. Poetic form has to serve the meaning. There's no excellence without meaning." TAs used that word, "meaning," frequently, and it meant at least two things. Meaning is about what something *means* – a word, a gesture, an historical fact, a thought, a color, or a sound. When we know what something *means* in that sense we understand its role in the world, its relationship to other things, and what it means to others. But meaning is also very personal and subjective. It is about what something means emotionally *to* someone. This is what is meant when people refer to something as *meaningful*. TAs are constantly concerned with meaning in both ways. Meaning is about putting knowledge to use to create something that matters – intellectually and emotionally. Good teachers encourage their students to make great effort to do that. TAs model it. As artists, high standards are important both for the purpose of achieving their personal best *and* because their work is seen and judged by

the public. Artists reach for high standards because their work has meaning *to* them and because they want it to have meaning *to others* as well.

TAs are often critical of the arts standards that have been codified by the states. Many consider them both too aspirational – because they cover far too much material indiscriminately – and, paradoxically, insufficiently aspirational – because they do not cover higher order cognitive skills like creativity or problem solving, social skills like collaboration, skip lightly over meaning, and pay scant attention to connecting ideas and concepts across subject areas to make them more coherent.

"Standards are a starting point," said a program manager, "not an end point for us. Since there's no time to cover them all, it's important to select standards that are rich and complex for the focus of curriculum, and to design lessons that make them meaningful to the students."

## Curriculum integration

Subjects are ways to organize and access knowledge. But subjects are not *how* we learn. We learn best by exploring questions we find compelling, and good curriculum poses compelling questions about big themes, concepts, and problems. These can almost always be explored through multiple lenses, using the disciplinary tools of different subjects to develop understanding. Good curriculum encourages the movement of students' minds from discipline to discipline and between the already known and the newly experienced. The learning is in the movement of the mind. Arts integration links arts methods, ideas, and content with methods, ideas, and content in other subjects around compelling problems and through an artistic medium. It helps to make a fragmented curriculum whole. Nearly two-thirds of TAs said integration was very important to their work, two times more than teaching the standards.

Arts integration is very challenging. It can be trivial and badly done, but it can also be extraordinary. It may be the most significant innovation TAs have brought to schools. A program manager said, "We develop units that work like two-way streets. We read strong works of literature to inspire student art, and make art that deepens understanding of literature." Some TAs are skeptical of arts integration, fearing that it trivializes art, makes it a handmaiden to other subjects, and dispenses with artistic rigor. An integrated unit in a very low-income middle school linked middle school math concepts — ratio, proportion, measurement, and pattern—to Monet's "Stacks of Wheat" paintings. What do those paintings have to do with math? They are a data set: Monet painted light and color over time. Careful observation of the paintings reveals patterns that enable predictions. That is what math does, too. The connections between the two subjects are real and exciting. Curriculum like that elevates both math and visual art, trivializes nothing, and, according to the math teacher, it engaged low-income eighth graders in both algebra and art.

## Assessment

Artists reflect on their work. They measure its progress against their vision. They imagine how it will "work" for others. They tinker, tweak, and revise. They make judgments based on intuition and imagination, trial and error, and learn from mistakes. These are sophisticated meta-cognitive functions, and they are assessment practices that are authentic to artistic production. They are one important way artists learn and get better at what they do. That is, of course, what we hope students will do, too – learn and get better at what they do. But that kind of assessment is in short supply in school environments, where mistakes are discouraged and standardized tests are the ultimate assessment. Testing so dominates schools that some TAs conflated all assessment with the distortions of testing. They are concerned that school assessments are inevitably insensitive to students' growth and learning in the arts, and that arts education is fundamentally disadvantaged by school assessments.

But the kind of assessment that is central to artistic practice – formative, qualitative, authentic, and ongoing – is badly needed in schools. It will not replace quantitative assessments, but it can complement them, and TAs are starting to explore how to develop its practice in schools in a few places. TAs' contributions to curriculum and pedagogy have been very substantial. Those contributions flow directly from their practice as artists. It would seem that TAs could make very substantial contributions to improving assessment in schools as well by developing new sophisticated assessment strategies based on their practices as artists.

## Play and games

The phenomenon of digital gaming has reminded us of the centrality of play and games to learning and spawned new interest and research on their power in learning. "We believe that games… have vital roles to play in…building critical skills like systems thinking, creative problem solving, collaboration, empathy and innovation." (Institute of Play, 2010) From peek-a-boo to flashcards to spelling bees to competitive sports and children's imaginative games, play gives children the opportunity to take risks, to fail without dire consequences, and to learn from their mistakes. Play and games are natural features of the arts. They have been a significant component of the work of TAs since the 1930s, when Viola Spolin studied children's imaginative play, the worlds of "pretend and make-believe" that they create and inhabit as active characters, at Hull-House. Spolin created an inventory of improvisatory theater games that have become part of theater training everywhere and is now part of the repertoire of many TAs in every discipline. The power of Spolin's work comes from an understanding that imaginative play helps children make sense of the world and prepare to take their places in it. Her great insight was that the roots of theater are in their imaginative play, and that the impulse to make theater is in everyone. Her inspiration was to draw creativity from its source in childhood, and her gift was teaching others to do it, too. Spolin described theater games as "energy sources" that help "students develop skills in concentration, problem solving, and group interaction" as well as particular theater skills. "Most games worth playing are highly social

and have a problem that needs solving within them – an objective point in which each individual must become involved with others while attempting to reach a goal. Outside of play there are few places where children can contribute to the world in which they find themselves. Theater-games offer students the opportunity for equal freedom, respect, and responsibility within the community of the schoolroom." (Spolin, 1986) She could have been quoting from the literature on good teaching or the literature on digital gaming, but neither had been written yet. TAs use games consistently to create a safe space for students, to release imagination, build connections between students, and to support problem solving.

## TAs and arts education today

TAs have contributed to arts education for more than a century. They have been the foundation of instruction in community-based arts education, first in the settlements and more recently in a wide range of community venues and institutions, including schools. They have provided gateway experiences in the arts to millions, including some of America's greatest artists. In the last thirty years they have contributed energy and innovation to arts education in schools, where they have mitigated but not reversed the decline of arts education. TAs have played a pivotal role in the development of arts integration, probably the single most significant innovation to arts education in schools.

Serious efforts are underway in most of our larger study sites – Boston, Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles, Alameda County, and San Francisco – to expand arts education in public schools. All involve TAs and arts integration as strategic elements. And all embody a partnership structure that includes multiple stakeholders, echoing the instructional partnerships between TAs and teachers and the institutional partnerships between schools and arts organizations. None are driven entirely from within school districts. Some have made meaningful progress despite the consequences of the recession on school budgets. And there are serious initiatives to develop non-school arts education resources in Providence and Boston in which TAs are also central.

These efforts, particularly those in schools, face great challenges. Education policymakers do not match rhetorical support for arts education with policies designed to move the arts closer to the center of school life. (The superintendent of schools in Boston is probably the only leader at that level in any of our study sites who is actively advancing a strategic effort to expand arts education in her district.) Their *behavior* suggests that they presume that the arts are insufficiently cognitive and academic to be of great value in schools or to earning generally. Until that misconception is broadly overcome, progress will be slow, the arts will remain a low priority, and arts education will inevitably be among the subjects targeted when school budgets are constrained.

The fiercest objections to TAs' work in schools, improbably, have come from parts of the arts education community itself, especially professional associations of arts educators. They have argued that TAs lack the

training to be expert educators, no matter how expert they may be in their art form, and that they cannot deliver standards-based arts instruction as mere visitors in schools. Some also have argued that arts integration is a damaging diversion from disciplinary curriculum and the state arts standards. The former is, technically, a legal obstacle, since law requires teachers in public schools be "highly qualified" by the state in which they teach. Behind both of these issues, of course, is concern about the long-term erosion of positions for arts faculty in public schools, and a perception that TAs represent a kind of low-cost outsourcing that enables the erosion. These divisions within the arts education community undoubtedly diminish the efficacy of advocacy for arts education.

Over 120,000 post-secondary degrees are granted in the arts annually. A surplus of labor keeps pay low for most artists, with the exception of a relatively small number of arts "stars." Artists are drawn to teaching because it offers opportunities to earn income in their field. On the face of it, then, it would appear that there is likely to be a continuing supply of trained artists to fill available TA positions. There is no question many artists find teaching deeply satisfying despite low pay and difficult working conditions. But sustaining the field over the long term will almost certainly require that issues of pay and conditions be addressed, particularly if TAs are going to play significant new roles in expanding arts education.

## Training, professional development, and certification

Program managers profiled the kind of TAs they seek. They look for the core characteristics of good teaching. They want TAs who:

- Bring rich artistic skills and ideas to their classes, *and* develop students' ideas through curriculum that is sensitive to questions of interest to students.
- Focus on cognitive work, engaging students in concepts, ideas, and questions to and through the art form that are significant, complex, age appropriate, and relevant.
- Understand learning in the arts as a social process, enriched by collaboration and group discussion; and that teaching the arts in schools is best sustained through serious collaboration with the teacher.
- Are sensitive to the culture of the instructional venue – whether it is a school, hospital, prison, church, park, or senior center. TAs may sometimes push limits, but not to the breaking point.

Training and professional development is an issue in every study site where there is interest in expanding arts education. TAs' work is challenging and complex, and it is reasonable to be concerned that they can do the job well. Training, professional development, and certification are norms for warranting that teachers are "highly qualified," so it seems natural that a similar system might make sense for TAs. Most training and professional development for TAs is provided now by organizations that employ them. There are maturing and broader professional development efforts in Alameda County, Los Angeles, and Chicago, and some colleges and

conservatories now offer classes in arts education for prospective TAs. At least one arts school, the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, has started issuing certificates to TAs who complete a two-year course of study.

No programs have reached that level of development in our study sites as yet, and TAs expressed broad skepticism about both certification and the role of higher education in training. They feared that it would become overly academic and were not confident certification would warrant quality or expand career opportunities for them. TAs were also critical of many of their experiences with training and professional development provided by employers, which too rarely addressed the needs and interests of veteran TAs. Some TAs did identify high quality professional development, though. Their descriptions, again, aligned with the principles of good teaching: Focused on their interests and experiences as teaching artists, reflecting on their practice, assessing their work from the perspective of student learning, and structured around the development of strong communities of TAs and teachers learning together and from each other. Arts education programs are diverse, but some elements of a training curriculum seemed to be broadly accepted as vital:

- Writing curriculum, lessons, and units that make sense, that have an arc that starts at the beginning, moves students through the middle and toward an end point of ideas and skills for making art that can be shared with their classmates and others.
- Learning to be attentive to all of the students in the classroom, to notice when some lose their way, and to get them back on the pathway to learning; to vary their teaching style and strategies to students' different learning styles.
- Learning to work closely with teachers, draw them into the arts and past their own resistance and insecurities, understand the context that teachers work in daily, and how to support teachers taking the risks involved in bringing the arts into their classrooms.
- Bringing their artistic personality into the lessons without losing the thread of the content.
- Learning to develop constructive group critique strategies, value assessment, manage collaboration, use assessment tools, and document student learning.

## TAs and the future of education: Key findings, objectives, and recommendations

***Finding One: After three decades of decline, and in the midst of major financial challenges, this may be a turning point for arts education.*** This is certainly a challenging moment for education in America. After three decades of effort to improve schools, three decades in which arts education has substantially declined, there has been too little progress in too few schools, particularly those serving low-income children. Now the recession has imposed harsh new constraints on school budgets. Arts education will continue withering in American schools if policymakers are unwilling to rethink the strategies that have dominated school reform. Or it could become a

focus of bold new efforts to develop valuable resources that engage students, deepen learning, and enliven school cultures. There is ample evidence that arts education can make very important contributions to helping schools and students start moving in the right direction, and there is growing critical dissatisfaction with school reform and the distortions of over-zealous testing. Some key architects of the prevailing school reform strategies have concluded that they "are clearly outliving their usefulness," (Finn, 2010) and that testing has gutted the integrity of the standards. (Ravitch, 2010) There is also growing awareness that standards that defined good education in the 19th and 20th centuries are inadequate in the 21st, and that the arts might play a role in raising new and more appropriate standards. Education Secretary Arne Duncan recently wrote, "Education in the arts is more important than ever. In the global economy, creativity is essential…*The best way to foster that creativity is through arts education*." (Italics added.) (President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 2011) The pendulum that swung away from the arts during these last three decades of school reform may swing back if values like creativity and innovation are more broadly embraced as essential purposes of education.

***Finding Two: TAs' teaching strategies are aligned with what experts agree are the principles of good teaching and learning.*** We consistently found that TAs approach teaching on the basis of principles widely understood to be the foundation of good teaching, and concluded that the arts themselves align with those principles:

- Good teaching is student centered. It starts with students' interests and what they already know, offers them real challenges, choices and responsibilities, and helps them connect ideas across subjects.
- Good teaching is cognitive. Learning is the consequence of thinking and making work – often hands-on and project based – that demonstrates mastery of meaningful ideas and problems; it employs the range of communicative media – including the arts; and it makes student reflection a regular part of the learning experience.
- And good teaching is social. Students learn better together, the classroom is a community, and students are its citizens. Teachers nurture the community and provide intellectual, emotional, and social supports to students.

Program managers and TAs consistently cited the importance of core art-making principles and processes – "making meaning," "student engagement," "voice," "making connections," reflection and self-assessment, collaboration on group projects and critiques, personal agency and expression, and community-building as key elements of their practice as educators.

***Finding Three: The assets TAs bring to schools were first developed in their work in non-school settings.*** Artists have worked in community-based arts education for more than a century, and the roots of their work in the schools are found in arts programs at the settlement houses at the turn of the last century and in community arts

since the 1960s. They modified the more hierarchical pedagogy of the conservatories, rooted in European classical tradition, to find an approach based on the principles that the arts are for everyone and essential to the fabric of a democratic society. TAs are the core human resource in non-school arts education, and schools have benefited from the field knowledge that was developed in a wide variety of community venues for arts education. It is vital to sustain and support non-school community arts education as a resource for neighborhoods and communities, and as a source of intellectual and practical innovation in arts education for schools.

***Finding Four: TAs are an abundant but underdeveloped resource, and eager for more work.*** We found TAs working in schools and communities in every study site, even in those, like San Bernardino, Salinas, and Bakersfield, without highly developed arts infrastructures. Most TAs work part-time, and would take more work if it were available. As might be expected, their practice is far more advanced in some sites than others. Everywhere TAs expressed frustration and dissatisfaction with low levels of recognition, validation, and compensation, but most find the work itself deeply satisfying. They enjoy doing it, and most are serious about improving their practice as educators and as artists.

## Key objectives and recommendations

These findings lead to six recommendations, drawn from the innovative practices TAs have introduced to schools and communities, from their needs and concerns, and from the best efforts underway to advance arts education and the potential of TAs and other arts educators to make education work for all American children. These recommendations have three objectives:

- Expand demand for arts education through advocacy and research;
- Improve conditions for TAs and other arts educators to assure the stability of the field and improve their lives; and
- Improve the quality of the work and effectiveness of TAs through learning communities, professional development, and attention to strategic issues.

Progress on these objectives will benefit TAs as their opportunities grow and their perspectives broaden, and TAs will add value to efforts to pursue them by providing leadership and field knowledge that is simply not available from other sources.

1. **Build demand for arts education:** Demand for arts education is low and has declined, particularly in schools and systems serving low-income students. TAs are making a significant difference in hundreds, perhaps thousands of schools in communities across the country, and they can make even more substantial contributions if arts education establishes a secure place in the schools, a status it has never enjoyed. Creative advocacy by broad alliances of stakeholders, focused on the value of arts education to

critical workplace skills and academic achievement, is being advanced in several study sites. These systemic efforts are vital and important, but they need to be sensitive to the nuances of arts education as they create a place for the arts at the education table.

Effective advocacy efforts in our study sites have promoted partnerships between schools and arts organizations *and* more arts specialists in schools. And they have themselves been partnerships between multiple stakeholders. There is almost an inevitable tension between these broad systemic partnerships and instructional partnerships between artists and teachers. The impulse to systematize arts education carries both the promise of expanding resources for the field *and* the threat of constraining a field that has thrived in the absence of constraints that inevitably come with systemization. Practitioners in instructional and institutional partnerships have a great deal of frustrating experience with schools systems everywhere, and they worry that there may be a cost to their freedom and flexibility as systemic partnerships develop.

Systemic partnerships all recognize that institutional and instructional partnerships are key building blocks for strong arts education systems in their communities. But because they have systemic perspectives, they tend to look at issues from a level of abstraction practitioners sometimes complain is "out of touch." School districts have made the arts second class subjects, but advocates must learn to work with them while sustaining the allegiance of the practitioners in instructional and institutional partnerships in the schools. The practitioners must also understand that their partnerships, so difficult to sustain, and so unstable, need far more systemic support to become sustainable for the long term. The challenge will be to make the tension between them productive and generative, rather than contentious.

Education leaders everywhere understand that they need to raise student achievement, keep students in school, and prepare them for higher education and work in a world that demands far more than better test scores in reading and math. The case for arts education has many dimensions, but it needs to begin there. When education leaders believe that arts education can help them solve the problems *that they need to solve*, they will begin to give it the support it needs.

The case for arts education should be based, in part, on rigorous research that explores its effects on student outcomes, including achievement in other subjects, student engagement, higher order thinking skills like creativity, and social development including collaboration and self-regulation. Research should also test the effects, strengths, and weaknesses of provision in different disciplines, integrated and disciplinary instruction, and dose – how much arts education makes a significant difference for students. It should assess student learning in the arts themselves. And research can also help to resolve the best roles for specialists and TAs in schools.

Research should be complemented by powerful stories about student learning and development, particularly stories about those students who have the most difficulty in schools. Success stories about them matter, and TAs are a fine source of such stories. TAs can document these stories themselves in journals, video, and audio. TAs can also be instrumental in "experiential advocacy" efforts directed toward principals and district leaders, who will be more likely to be open to logical research-based arguments if they have had powerful personal experiences in arts education themselves.

2. **Make the field sustainable**: The biggest threat to teaching artists is that demand for arts education in the schools will decline further. Close behind is that TAs will abandon the work as they become discouraged by the difficulty of making a living, acquiring health insurance, establishing job security, and being recognized and validated in both of their worlds – education and the arts. All of these elements are likely to improve if demand for arts education grows, but programs and funders should make them a consistent focus of their attention, and advocates for arts education should not pretend that arts education can be extended far more broadly without attending to material conditions for TAs.

   Awards and grants to artists provide some significant validation and income opportunities for artists, even if they are not systematic changes. TAs almost never win them, though, because they do not fit established categories of competition. We recommend that award and grant programs establish a teaching artist category, as the 3Arts awards did in Chicago.

   Teaching artists lead isolated professional lives. They need communities that support them professionally. Some are emerging in study sites, focused exclusively on TAs. Others are more fluid and include TAs and their partners in education – classroom teachers and arts specialists. We recommend that these networks and associations be developed everywhere.

3. **Develop arts integration:** Interest in arts integration is heightened among school district personnel who are hopeful that arts learning can improve student performance in other subjects, and that curriculum integration is a practical idea in the crowded school day. That is a powerful pragmatic reason to give arts integration the sustained policy and financial support it needs to mature and develop high quality curriculum, pedagogy, and standards. Arts integration also advances the principles of good teaching practice – the consistent use of hands-on and project-based learning, the connection of big ideas and concepts across subject areas, the centrality of student understanding and experience, and the development of classrooms as learning communities – in every subject. New cognitive science implicates arts processes in the fundamentals of *thinking,* not just in art, providing theoretical support for the arts integration across the spectrum of subjects. Yet arts integration has not received the developmental support that disciplinary or standards-based arts education received from the late 1980s. It should get it now.

Key informants repeatedly told us that disciplinary arts instruction and integrated arts instruction are more alike than different when they are grounded in good teaching practice. Many dismissed the competition between the two as a false distinction, and urged policies that supported provision of "both/and" rather than "either/or." We find that idea persuasive and powerful. It allows for variations in practice and approach that will enable learning a great deal more about how to understand the strengths and maximize the value of both disciplinary and interdisciplinary instruction.

The development of arts integration practice has been largely local up to this point. It is more mature and highly developed in some communities and more primitive in others. There is a need to develop a national community of practice to take responsibility for disseminating learning, shaping implementation strategies, speeding its maturity, and creating a public image for the work. A recent report from the President's Committee for the Arts and Humanities suggests a new national organization might take on this responsibility as a part of a broader effort to build more creative schools by "reinvesting in arts education." But if an existing organization or collaboration took it on, development might be quicker, and it might signal the conclusion of the destructive antagonism between advocates of disciplinary and integrated arts instruction.

4. **Standards and provision:** The insights of teaching artists and program directors about the arts standards are profound. The standards are a "starting point," not an end point for arts instruction. They are too aspirational, in the sense that they fail to make distinctions between learning goals that are of the highest importance and consistent with the practical realities of schools are responsible for so much more than the arts. Paradoxically, they are insufficiently aspirational, inattentive to critical dimensions of learning in the arts – meaning, higher order thinking skills, and social skills like collaboration. TAs have much to offer a new effort to develop common core arts standards in the arts, but they do not appear to be directly involved so far. We hope that it is not too late to include formal participation by leading TAs in this work.

   The arts standards were organized around a sequential ladder of knowledge and skills, and then used to prevent the erosion of faculty positions in the arts *and their replacement* by lower-cost teaching artists. The restriction has failed to end the erosion of faculty positions. That trend appears to be driven by forces that probably have nothing to do with teaching artists coming to the schools. Schools need full-time arts faculty, and those that have arts specialists need TAs as well. Provision of a reasonable dose of arts education for all students is clearly beyond the capacity of the low numbers of specialists in most schools. They need to be supplemented. It is time to move beyond the either/or choice between arts specialists and TAs. There is simply no way to expand arts education for all children in schools without the development of TAs as a resource.

Clear delineations of the responsibilities of TAs and specialists can be developed by careful analysis of their work in the many schools in which both are working successfully now. We recommend that such a study be undertaken. Those schools should be models for reconciling the conflict. The national arts education associations should recognize that teaching artists are already an element of the infrastructure of arts education – both in and out of schools – and create new membership categories designed for them. We recommend that they commit themselves to work for better conditions for TAs as well as more security for arts specialists.

5. **Assessment:** Reflective practice and formative assessment are key processes in the cycle of art making. Both are badly needed in schools, where students are trained to be fearful of mistakes, rather than learning from them, and where summative assessment in the form of multiple choice tests dominates. Their own practice as artists suggests that they have a great deal of value to add to the practice of assessment in schools – authentic, rigorous, on-going assessment focused on *student* reflection on their own work and that of their classmates, and on student growth.

   Important as that kind of reflection and self-assessment may be to student learning, it needs to be ramped up to provide programs with useful information about how well students are doing and policymakers with information to make judgments about the value of programs. We saw evidence in several study sites that new approaches to assessment are bubbling up, capturing valuable data about higher order skills like creativity, and it should be a reasonably simple matter to begin collecting more data about the effects of programs on student engagement. Low-hanging fruit like data on attendance and student participation in classroom activities would be a big step forward.

6. **Professional development and certification:** Too much training and professional development appears to be aimed at new TAs, and not enough is designed to challenge and advance the development of veterans. Too much training is limited to orienting TAs to the logistical requirements of programs, and not enough to the big ideas and concepts that make the work coherent and powerful. TAs are hungry for professional development that conforms to the qualities of good teaching: centered on the practice and experience of TAs themselves, built on a foundation of big ideas about the arts and learning, filled with hands-on project-based experiences, and vital to the development of a community of learners among TAs and the teachers with whom they work. Programs should work closely with schools or school networks to structure professional development grounded in learning communities of TAs, classroom teachers, and arts specialists learning from each other. There is a need for specialized professional development in advanced topics like working with special populations, and in the development of integration strategies for the arts with the STEM skills, history, geography, and foreign language study.

Certification of TAs was a matter of interest, but it is premature to attempt to develop certification programs until it is reasonably clear they will lead to more work opportunities for TAs. As demand for arts education grows, this situation is likely to change, and certification may become a more pressing priority.

Some elements of professional development are best provided by programs themselves, of course, but some elements are common to virtually all programs, and communities can (and in some cases already are) provide professional development that cuts across many programs. We recommend such efforts be developed in all communities and that they are nationally networked.

## Summary of recommendations

1. Build demand for arts education through advocacy
    a. Research is needed on the effects of arts education on student outcomes, the effects of different kinds of provision, and on the best roles for TAs in schools.
    b. TAs can be a source of powerful stories of student learning that should be part of advocacy efforts.
    c. TAs can help create "experiential advocacy" for school administrators and education policymakers.
    d. Advocacy should be directed toward education policymakers at all levels and toward philanthropy in both education and the arts.
    e. Network local efforts across the nation.
    f. Find allies among educators in other subjects who share a commitment to the principles of good teaching and learning. Move beyond advocacy for the arts as an interest group and toward a broader vision of education shared across many subjects.
2. Make the field sustainable
    a. TAs can contribute to expanding arts education far more broadly, but the field will be inherently unstable until pay, job security, and benefits are improved.
    b. Improve recognition and validation for contributions to the field by creating new awards for teaching artists.
    c. Develop local communities of TAs and colleagues that serve the field through professional development, social networking, scholarship, and advocacy for TAs. Network them nationally.
3. Develop arts integration
    a. Make strategic investment in arts integration to take advantage of broad interest in the approach to deepening learning and expanding arts education among school administrators and policymakers.
    b. Reconcile the tired and false dichotomy between disciplinary and integrated arts instruction.
    c. Develop national discourse and scholarship on arts integration practice and theory, as was done for disciplinary arts education in the late 1980s and 1990s.

4. Standards and provision
    a. Deepen the standards for arts education by attending to key concerns of teaching artists – meaning, student voice, and more.
    b. Use the development of common core arts standards as a vehicle for this, and involve TAs in their development.
    c. Develop clear and complementary roles for TAs and arts specialists in schools by studying schools where the two are already working together effectively and successfully.
    d. Welcome TAs into the national associations of arts educators.
5. Assessment
    a. Pay strategic attention to the contributions that TAs can make to assessment in education by articulating and disseminating the assessment approaches they already use in art making.
    b. Ramp up assessment in TA-based programs to provide policymakers with better intelligence on the value of the programs.
    c. Identify key learning objectives and develop more formal strategies to assess them.
6. Professional development and certification
    a. Develop better approaches to professional development for veteran TAs.
    b. Assure that TA professional development – provided by arts organizations, higher education institutions, or by arts education service organizations – is grounded in the principles of good teaching, centered on meaningful questions from the field, hands-on, project-based, and social.
    c. Formal certification for TAs is probably premature, at least until demand for arts education has grown. Collaborative professional development on common themes across programs is not, and should be developed at local levels and beyond.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