

Students in Liza Funke's 8th grade class at Freedom Middle School architecting a shape with stones and reflecting the shape with their hands. Photo by Alycia Scott.

# Teaching, Full Circle: A Dialogue About a Cycle of Education

by Alycia Scott and Megan Klein

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– Alycia Scott



Alycia Scott (on left) and Megan Klein. Photos by Alycia Scott.

## THE LAY OF THE LAND: WHAT IS ARTS (MOVEMENT) INTEGRATION?

In their book, *AIMprint, New Relationships in the Arts and Learning*, Cynthia Weiss and Amanda Leigh Lichtenstein offer a holistic description of arts integration. “We believe that arts integration is a field that offers teachers, artists, and students a protected space within school buildings and school systems for nascent ideas, emergent curriculum, personal and collaborative inquiry, engaged learning, abstract thinking and relevant practice to take root, be nourished and grow.” In this way, the practice of arts integration plants seeds in the existent soils of curriculum to grow new understandings, appreciation and insight in the minds and imaginations of students. Movement integration, activates this process by engaging the body as a tool for a three-dimensional inquiry of body, mind, and reflection which deepens students’ awareness of their body language in relationship to themselves and the curriculum.

## SOWING THE SEEDS

**Alycia:** Sometimes, serendipity manifests itself in very propitious ways. Two years ago, I met with Pam McNeil and Dardi McGinley-Gallivan, the faculty who lead the teaching track at The Dance Center, about finding more opportunities for students. A day later, I received a call from Northeastern Illinois University’s Chicago Teachers’ Center about arts integration opportunities for dance teachers; a partnership was sewn, and the Community Outreach and Education’s Movement Integration Program was born.

As a movement integration teacher of seven years, I have firsthand knowledge of the trials and errors arts integration specialists encounter in laying the path for integration implementation. While movement integration has been gaining in popularity and attention, most training is on the job, and requires quick and creative thinking on the spot. With this in mind, The Chicago Teachers’ Center (CTC) and The Dance Center’s Community Outreach and Education program (COE) forged a partnership that offers both apprenticeship and teaching opportunities. In the apprenticeship program, students are involved in every stage of the process, from envisioning lesson plan ideas, to educational standards selection, planning, implementation and evaluation.

During the Spring of 2009, Megan Klein, a senior at The Dance Center, began an apprenticeship with me serving two Berwyn schools as part of CTC’s involvement with the Berwyn Arts Initiative. Throughout the process

of implementing the movement integration units at each school, Megan and I would discuss and design the plans reflecting on what happened, what could have happened, and what we wanted to try next, weaving my teaching experience and insight with what Megan learned in the teaching course and knew from her previous experience teaching dance.

**Megan:** I have always been interested in teaching and being involved with the community through dance. My work with Alycia over the last two years has shown me the possibilities in connecting with different communities through dance. Before the apprenticeship, I had no real world experience in arts integration. I did have a few years background in teaching dance though, and possessed a real passion for arts education in the community. At the end of my apprenticeship, Alycia and I had a conversation about how my education at The Dance Center and my experience working in Berwyn were linked. This article digs into my personal realizations about arts integration, and together, our reflections and insights about the journey.

## TILLING THE SOILS: DRAWING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE DANCE CENTER AND MOVEMENT INTEGRATION TEACHING IN THE CLASSROOM

**Megan:** The first course in the teaching track is appropriately named Teaching I. The class focuses on Anne Green Gilbert’s methods for teaching dance. Although arts integration is only briefly touched on at the end of the teaching course, I was able to draw upon Gilbert’s methods and other techniques to help me



Students in Susan Bratta’s 2nd grade class at Emerson Elementary School dancing along an immigration route they shaped in the blue fabric on the floor. Photo by Alycia Scott.

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– Megan Klein



Claudia Lavista of Delfos Danza Contemporanea leading a movement workshop at Freedom Middle School. Photo by Mary Carpenter Rechner.

Susan Bratta dancing a movement phrase with her students about the experience of immigrants coming to the United States. Photo courtesy of Emerson Elementary School.

Megan Klein and students brainstorming "what is dance?" Photo by Susan Bratta.

teach arts integration in Berwyn. Initially, when planning for the Berwyn sessions I drew upon *The Elements of Dance* to drive the dance connections to the curricular content. After proposing my plans to Alycia, I was surprised when she said she used a similar method of teaching the fundamentals. It was reassuring to see that what I learned in class was transferring over into the 'real world' of teaching.

When I was teaching in Berwyn with Alycia, we utilized many different props to help teach curriculum to the students, something I also did in the Teaching course. Alycia and I used a large piece of fabric, stones, water, music, large laminated shapes and other various items. My favorite prop was a large piece of blue Lycra fabric. With our help, the students were able to experience pathways, shapes and strength while manipulating the fabric. I saw how props can be a good tool for students who are hesitant to move/dance; it allows them to move while concentrating on the object in use instead of being self-conscious. The experience of using props in the Teaching I course allowed me to be confident in the efficiency of using these items when teaching curriculum, no matter how abstract.

**Alycia:** As a movement integration teacher, I connect with students as humans who have an inherent curiosity and need to move. So much academic learning in school is done sitting down at a desk that when I enter a classroom, the idea of moving around is often initially perceived as a foreign concept, or an activity associated with

getting in trouble, entering, or exiting. Very few people don't like to take a deep breath, sway their hips or roll their shoulders though. So, I start with basic movement fundamentals like these, then show students footage of dance that will be presented at The Dance Center. Last season, students saw footage of Delfos Danza Contemporanea during the first week of the unit. Weeks later, when Delfos was in residency at The Dance Center, I brought the company to do a movement workshop with students at each school. Later, students and their families had the opportunity to see Delfos perform a FamilyDance Matinee in The Dance Center's theater. In this way, students experience movement in connection to curriculum in their classroom and professional performance in a theater.

#### CULTIVATING THE SEEDS

**Alycia:** Nowadays, so much information is given and received via text whether it be through a cell phone, computer screen, chalkboard, or written handout. While these are all effective tools of information sharing, many of the students' senses are disengaged, and a process of memorization and regurgitation is often induced. Including the body and senses in the process of learning, engages the students in a thinking process that literally happens within and outside of the academic structure. When a student has to embody a concept or passage from a book, it challenges students to think more comprehensively, to delve deeper into the material and ask new questions about the subject matter.

Depending on the academic subject, I will often use other media to help draw connections between the curriculum and using movement in the learning process. For example, at the Chicago Freedom School, when guiding 8th grade students through an analysis of Gaudi's Casa Battlo, I had students watch a video tour of the building while drawing shapes, lines, and curves they saw in the building's structure. Then, they selected three of their shapes to put together. This served as their choreographic map from which to create movements and guide them in using the space. The video also served as an aide to look deeper into the feeling of the building and how it connected to Spain's culture and environment. This process of movement cultivation, deepened the 8th graders' understanding of cultural relevance as well as the shaping of architecture and movement.

**Megan:** There was a particular day in class at Emerson Elementary School, when the process of cultivating the integration unit surfaced important classroom discoveries. Together, the 2nd grade social studies class and I were exploring choreographic mapping in relation to immigrants' journeys' to the U.S. Initially, the concept proved to be abstract and difficult for them to grasp. We were all stuck in a moment of confusion when one of the boys in the class, Adrian, made a connection to a previous lesson about pathways. He announced his revelation to the class and instantly we were unstuck and moving forward with the lesson. Through this, I realized how deeply students learn, retain information, make

connections and engage with content. Abstract information can work well in the classroom if the groundwork is laid, and as a teacher you can facilitate connections. Suddenly, the abstract choreographic process became very real in the way it brought to life aspects of the immigration experience and the students began to thoroughly physicalize these concepts into movement.

#### GROWTH

**Megan:** The Arts Berwyn Initiative gave me an important and useful experience in the world of teaching movement based arts integration. I was very nervous at first, but after diving in and finishing the session, I have a new found confidence in my teaching ability. It was always a concern whether or not the students would gain from the curriculum we were teaching, but now I know that no matter how successful or unsuccessful the material may seem, the students will always take something from the experience. This was especially true if I kept an enthusiastic and engaged presence throughout the sessions. I was happy to find that everyone could work together to help teach the curriculum. Many times, I would find students helping each other learn the content and I would in turn learn from them. Teaching is hard, but extremely satisfying. You have to keep a positive attitude no matter the situation. A spin can be put on any student's behavior, turning "mistakes" into connections.

**Alycia:** When thinking about growth in the Berwyn units, many moments come to mind.

Our experience on the last day of our units when students in each of the classes took charge was particularly profound to witness. Suddenly, the students no longer needed our direction in which steps to take. They knew what their movements represented and how it connected to the curriculum. Short of a few choreographic suggestions from Megan and me, they took the reigns, marked the counts and embodied their own created movements. It was wonderful to see them so empowered in movement, and directing with confidence.

#### HARVEST REFLECTIONS

**Megan:** In the Teaching I course, Arts Integration is stressed as an influential and important job opportunity for students looking to teach. Arts Integration is a very accessible means of work for dance teachers and it is important for students to be aware of the opportunities to teach arts integration while they are still studying in school. I was fortunate to have access to these opportunities while apprenticing with Alycia. The experience has left me confident and ready to teach. I think any student interested in teaching should seek out opportunities to start apprenticing or even teaching.

**Alycia:** The reflective cycle of education in the apprenticeship relationship is phenomenal. Throughout each phase of this experience, I have been able to use my experience as a guide for Megan, and Megan's questions and reflections as a guide for me. In the classroom, regardless of all the planning in the world, there is a lot of

thinking on your feet and envisioning new places to land, all within a moments' realization. With an apprentice by my side, my reflexive detours and momentary inspirational responses to classroom discoveries and progressions were fully exposed. In turn, this provided constructive fodder to highlight and analyze movement integration teaching, a critical cycle of inquiry in effect. Paulo Freire makes a statement in the "Last Words" section of his book, *Teachers as Cultural Workers, Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach*, that really resonates with the experience. It reads: "To Know and to Grow – Everything Yet to See."

**Megan:** Since the apprenticeship, I have grown an intense appreciation and devotion to continuing arts integration. I had no idea of the opportunities that were at my fingertips in the Chicago community. I have profoundly realized, even as a student, I have the knowledge and capacity to do this kind of work. I am grateful to Alycia for her guidance and connections that allowed me to experience movement integration, full circle. ■

*This article was born from a conversation between Megan Klein, a senior at The Dance Center of Columbia College Chicago and Alycia Scott, Community Outreach and Education (COE) Manager at The Dance Center. It traverses Alycia's and Megan's experiences as a teacher and apprentice in the COE Movement Integration Program.*