

# Leveraging Integration and Collaboration with the Arts to Enhance Teacher Preparation

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## ABSTRACT

Traditional collaborations between schools and teacher preparation programs provide real-world experiences for teacher candidates and contribute to their professional learning. However, when preparing candidates to work with the whole child, one must also consider things outside the typical classroom. Preparing candidates to work with families, support students in community settings, and explore their own learning, attitudes, and experiences can be accomplished through unique collaboration opportunities, as well. In this article, faculty from three teacher preparation programs describe three very different collaborations utilizing visual and performing arts resources to enhance teacher candidate knowledge and skills. We categorize these collaborations into two groups related to candidates' professional learning: skill building and skill application. Activity descriptions are provided and benefits and concerns regarding each partnership are discussed.

## KEYWORDS

**Collaboration, professional development, simulation, teacher education, teacher preparation, visual and performing arts**

**D**r. Wright sat quietly in her office, reviewing teacher candidate feedback from her latest course evaluations. She began to sense a familiar challenge emerging. “We learned so much this semester, but I would have liked to have seen ways we could do this every day in our classrooms,” one said. Another responded, “We really like Dr. Wright, she definitely knows her material, but I just wish the class was more engaging and included things outside of Reading, Math, and Writing.” A third stated, “We have learned so much about how to work with our students with disabilities in the classroom, but what about when we are at recess, or art, or music?”

Dr. Wright thought about her own outside interests in theater, music, and art—many of which her teacher candidates shared—and an idea sparked: what if she could harness the arts and partners in the local art community not just as supplemental activities, but as fundamental components woven throughout her coursework? She knew K-12 students with disabilities and their families who would benefit from greater access to theater, writing, and visual arts to express their interests. Many of these same children struggled with reading and writing but flourished when it came to the arts. She considered how she might invest in interdisciplinary collaborations in the arts to deepen her teacher candidates' experiences. These questions soon led her and her candidates on a powerful journey, reshaping perceptions of teaching, learning, and the transformative role of the arts in special education teacher preparation.

Teacher preparation programs increasingly emphasize interdisciplinary collaboration as a fundamental requirement for teaching effectiveness. Teacher candidates who connect with community resources develop a better understanding of students' lives, which extends past the classroom environment (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2023). These collaborations enable teacher candidates to grasp the multifaceted nature of their students and families, leading to better community relationships and

more meaningful connections (Murawski & Scott, 2023).

A core element of effective teacher training is practice-based experience that connects academic theory and evidence-based instructional methods to practical classroom application (McLesky et al., 2017). Direct application of knowledge occurs through authentic experiences, where candidates can practice and enhance their instructional skills across various real-world teaching settings (Grossman et al., 2009). Further, through practice-based experiences in authentic environments, teacher candidates can develop essential and inclusive relationships with diverse student populations through their direct interactions with students and families (Cone, 2012).

The integration of arts-based learning into teacher preparation programs offers a dynamic and multidimensional approach to teacher development by fostering creativity, critical thinking, and socioemotional learning. Arts-based learning refers to the intentional use of artistic practices—such as visual arts, music, drama, movement, and storytelling—as pedagogical strategies that enhance learning beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries (Zhou & Hartline, 2023). These approaches allow for the inclusion of diverse modes of teaching and learning, enabling teacher candidates to design instruction that accommodates varied student needs and learning preferences, including those of students with disabilities (Catterall, 2022). By engaging in arts-integrated practices, teacher candidates can develop more inclusive and differentiated instructional strategies, rooted in experiential and expressive learning. Research has shown that arts-based learning supports student engagement, fosters critical and creative thinking skills, and facilitates deeper connections to academic content (Allina, 2018; Ogden et al., 2010).

Additionally, these approaches en-

courage teacher candidates to explore their identities and interests beyond the traditional classroom setting, contributing to increased motivation, professional self-awareness, and the development of practical teaching skills (Ogden et al., 2010). When used intentionally, arts integration provides innovative strategies that promote embodied learning, collaboration, emotional engagement, and authentic application of theory to practice, thereby enriching the overall teacher preparation experience (Donahue & Stuart, 2024). Thus, teacher preparation programs can extend their areas of focus beyond traditional topics by exploring collaborative partnerships that include community-based and arts-focused organizations.

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This article explores three unique collaborations in teacher preparation programs, each leveraging visual and performing arts resources. These initiatives demonstrate significant benefits in skill-building and practical application while also addressing challenges associated with interdisciplinary and experiential partnerships. Through detailed descriptions and reflective analyses, this article highlights how strategic collaborations in the arts can enhance teacher preparation, particularly within special education contexts, through three examples: (a) improv acting simulation, (b) visual expression via cartooning, and (c) art museum-based field experiences. The first two examples focus on skill *building*, while the third example focuses on skill *application*.

## EXAMPLE 1: IMPROV ACTING TO IMPROVE COLLABORATION SKILLS

*Dr. Wright remembered attending a presentation at the Teacher Education Division conference conducted by a faculty member who partnered with local actors on simulated role play exercises*

*with teacher candidates. That faculty member, Dr. Wilkinson, shared how her teacher candidates expressed fear and apprehension when entering meetings with parents of their future students. She relayed how one student stated, “I am so nervous, what do I do if she starts talking about her ex-husband?” Dr. Wilkinson smiled and said, “Try to keep the conversation focused on the child. Redirect back to the goals, the accommodations, and ask her questions about strategies she uses at home to keep Samuel focused on his homework.” Dr. Wright was eager to learn how her own teacher candidates might engage with actors in a similar way to develop their application of the high leverage practices for collaboration. Many of her candidates had expressed anxiety about their field experiences and asked, “When will we actually work with families?” Dr. Wright hoped simulation experiences with real actors would reduce their apprehension and provide opportunities for the candidates to practice their collaboration skills. She was eager to learn from Dr. Wilkinson’s work.*

## Purpose of Improv Acting in Teacher Preparation

While teacher candidates receive many opportunities to engage with students during their time in the field, most do not get the opportunity to interact with families (Mancenido & Pello, 2020). Collaborating with actors who can take on the part of a parent during a simulation or role play allows teacher candidates to practice engaging with parents and family members in a safe space (Wilkinson & Potts, 2022). In this example, the teacher preparation program partnered with actors from the local theater community to simulate such interactions. Buffalo, New York has a prolific theater district. Through connections between the department chair and the Theatre Alliance of Buffalo (TAB), a partnership was secured with

**TABLE 1:** HLPs used during simulations

Domain	Pillar HLPs addressed	Embedded HLPs addressed
1: Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HLP 1: Collaborate with professionals to increase student success.</li> <li>HLP 3: Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HLP 2: Organize and facilitate effective meetings with professionals and families.</li> </ul>
2: Data-Driven Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HLP 6: Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HLP 4: Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student's strengths and needs.</li> <li>HLP 5: Interpret and communicate assessment information to collaboratively design and implement educational programs.</li> <li>HLP 11: Identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals.</li> </ul>

several actors who were well trained in improvisation acting. The actors were brought in to a “Methods of Inclusion” course where they took on the role of a parent or guardian during a culminating improvisation activity. While not required, many of the actors were also parents or had some teaching experience. Actors were modestly compensated for their service using funds collected from a small lab fee in the methods course.

One of the learning outcomes for the three-credit hour methods course involves candidates learning about effective collaboration with colleagues, staff, families, and community agencies. Throughout the semester, and prior to the end-of-semester simulation, candidates work with a partner or a small group to complete activities that focus on building communication skills and interpersonal problem-solving. These activities include scenarios involving different communication and conflict management strategies as well as the development of co-taught lesson plans.

Candidates also read articles about a variety of collaboration situations, complete online modules regarding collaboration from The IRIS Center, and explore related High Leverage Practices (HLPs; Aceves & Kennedy, 2024). The HLPs targeted for this activity fall under Domain One: *Collaboration* and Domain Two: *Data-driven planning*. See Table 1 for a list of additional HLPs and how they are addressed in this course.

### The Simulation Experience

The culminating simulation experience with the improv actors and teacher candidates occurs at the end of the term. Candidates meet with one or two actors who are portraying family members of a fictional student during an IEP team meeting. To prepare, teacher candidates are introduced to the roles and responsibilities of each person on the IEP team, including the student and the parent or guardian. The simulations require each teacher candidate to take on a role as either a general education or special edu-

cation teacher. These roles are randomly assigned approximately a week before the simulations occur. The actors are made aware of the course goals related to communication and collaboration and both the actors and teacher candidates are provided with a short scenario regarding the IEP team, the plan, and background information for a target student (see Figure 1). Background information includes case-specific details such as assessment data, class observations, and a brief family history.

During the simulation, there are no scripts or prompts other than what is provided in the scenario and case information. Candidates are encouraged to prepare talking points, including any visual representations of data they feel will be helpful to the conversation. The actors are asked to step into the roles of parent or guardian for each situation. Given the limited context provided to both candidates and the actors, the actors are given free rein to deepen the family’s backstory, even adding details about their own character’s life.

For each scenario, the teacher candidates have two options from which to choose: *mild* or *challenge*. Only one simulation is required per candidate. The actors prepare for both options as candidates might change their decision on simulation day. During a mild scenario, an actor might shed a tear or two, but the conversation is relatively amiable. The parent or guardian is more willing to go along with the teachers’ suggestions for the student’s activities and goals in school. However, during a challenge scenario, the actor can become more frustrated or combative in speech. They might be argumentative and resist suggestions made by the teachers. The actor might increase their volume, and their tone might be critical of the other adults in the room. The actor could also decide to sob uncontrollably, displaying grief or frustration related to the situation. If

**FIGURE 1:** Sample Scenario used During Simulated IEP Meeting**Teagan's Scenario:**

*You and your co-teacher are meeting with Teagan's aunt about his behavioral goals for this upcoming school year. You may want to discuss your thoughts/recommendations on his placement and related services. Be ready to discuss strategies you will use in the classroom to help Teagan with social skills.*

*Review your case and IEP carefully. Prepare for a **conversation, not a monologue**. Prepare for questions and a discussion. After reading the case, what issues **might** come up during this conversation? Keep the aunt's perspective and role in Teagan's life in mind as you prepare to speak with her.*

**FIGURE 2:** Simulation reflection prompts

**Directions: Use the prompts below to reflect on your simulation experience in a 2-3 page paper.**

1. What is your initial reaction to this meeting?
2. Which Collaboration HLPs were most evident during your experience? Why do you think these presented themselves?
3. Which Data-driven planning HLPs were most evident during your experience? Why do you think these presented themselves?
4. Was there a particular communication or collaboration strategy you used that was effective?
5. Was there a particular communication or collaboration strategy you used that was ineffective?
6. Were there any cultural considerations you kept in mind during this meeting?
7. Were there any cultural considerations you should have thought about that you did not consider?
8. Do you feel you left the meeting on good terms with the family? Why or why not?
9. Describe something you learned about yourself as a result of this experience.
10. Identify 1 communication, collaboration, or general professional disposition skill you want to develop moving forward based on this experience.

two actors are present, they might argue with each other, completely ignoring the teacher candidates.

In a challenge scenario, teacher candidates will need to display increased levels of empathy and compassion while still trying to get their talking points across. Because the actors are trained in improvisation, they are ready to change their mood and dialogue based on the candidates' response to an emotional outburst. Actors might move from anger to acceptance based on a candidate's

display of empathy. Alternatively, the actor might shift from passive complacency to indignation if the teacher candidate implies that a problem stems from home rather than a school incident. These unanticipated reactions from the actors keep teacher candidates on guard. The experience pushes them out of their comfort zone into a much more realistic situation in which they have no idea how the parent or guardian might act. It should be noted that the teacher candidates have known one another for

approximately two to three years at this point and tend to have a level of comfort with their peers before, during, and after this activity.

Each simulated IEP meeting lasts approximately 20 minutes and is recorded using university-adopted software. After the simulation is complete, the teacher candidates are asked to independently watch their own video and write a two-to-three-page paper connecting the experience back to course content. Candidates are given a list of prompts to guide their reflection paper (see Figure 2). This serves as the final assignment for the course.

### Outcomes for Teacher Candidates

The main goals for these simulations are to build collaboration skills and make connections to the HLPs. In their reflections, many teacher candidates express fears and anxieties they had about going into the simulated meeting. The uncertainty of this experience pushes candidates to use the collaboration skills they have been working on throughout the semester. The teacher candidates are no longer engaging with the predictable, genial classmates with whom they have interacted for two or three semesters. They have absolutely no indication of what the actor might say or do until it happens. However, as they continue to reflect, they note relief at having had this experience. They comment on how preparation for the simulated meeting allowed them to continually address any concerns brought up by the actors.

Many candidates attribute success in their simulation to utilizing a strengths-based approach when discussing the student with family members. Teacher candidates view the actor as more "at ease" with the conversation when candidates are identifying the student's strengths. They acknowledge that they can literally see the actor "tense up"

when they must address something that could be perceived as negative or deficit related. Improvised dialogue aside, the body language displayed by the actors allows them to convey emotions the candidates would not be able to receive or interpret from classmate simulations alone.

Regarding the goals of the Methods of Inclusion course, the actor participation allows our teacher candidates to actively explore the three HLPs in the Collaboration domain (Aceves & Kennedy, 2024). During the meeting, candidates must practice taking turns speaking and asking questions to ensure everyone feels heard. In addition, they recognize and discuss how teachers use HLPs from the Data-Driven Planning domain (Aceves & Kennedy, 2024) to facilitate meetings. Candidates often bring visual representations of data into the simulations to help explain connections between goals and student performance. Building their skills in the pillar and embedded HLPs in both domains will help these future teachers to support students with disabilities throughout their careers. Although they are not working with actual families, this actor collaboration bridges the gap between research and practice for the teacher candidates in a safe space of learning.

## **EXAMPLE 2: CARTOONING TO IMPROVE IMAGINATION, EMPATHY, AND REFLECTION**

*After exploring the simulated experiences of Dr. Wilkinson's teacher candidates, Dr. Wright became even more interested in incorporating the arts into her special education methods coursework. A common question that Dr. Wright often heard from her teacher candidates about teaching students with disabilities in general education settings was, "But what does that look like?" Her candidates understood the importance of inclusion and individualizing in-*

*struction, but many struggled to imagine how that looked in practice. Dr. Wright realized her teacher candidates needed more opportunities to reflect, empathize, and imagine if they were to move beyond surface-level understandings of the theory and evidence-based practices they were learning in her classes. She wanted to investigate ways to support her teacher candidates to develop the imagination, empathy, and critically reflective practice necessary to create the unique learning supports and environments that each of their future students would need. This inspired her to explore the use of drawing in her teacher preparation courses. Dr. Wright arranged a meeting to learn more about the collaboration between nationally renowned cartoonist and art faculty member, Lynda Barry, and Dr. Bubash, a teacher educator, to integrate drawing activities into special education methods courses. The goal of the collaboration was to help teacher candidates imagine inclusive educational settings that centered the voices and needs of their students.*

### **Purpose of Integrated Visual Arts for Teacher Candidates**

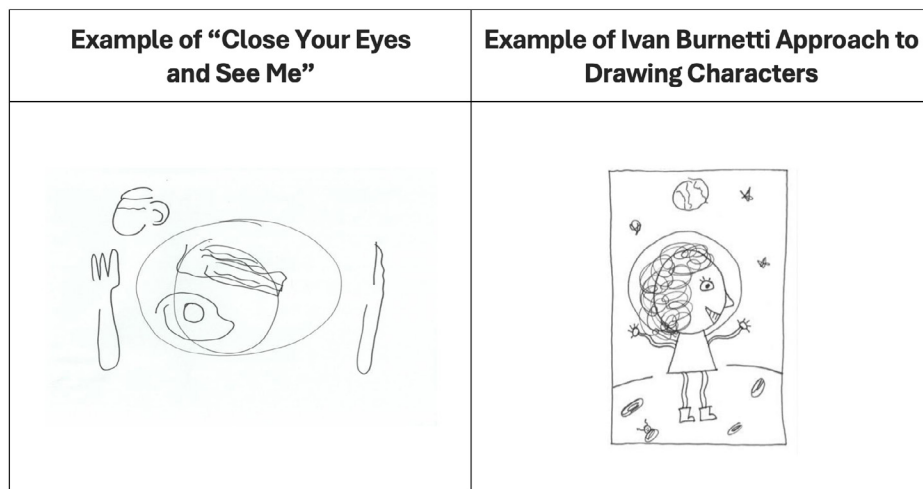
Arts-based approaches such as drawing and cartooning are promising ways to cultivate an imaginative and reflective mindset. Incorporating visual image-based arts activities into teacher preparation can increase knowledge retention by encouraging candidates to engage deeply and connect emotionally with the material (Zoss et al., 2010). Further, drawing offers teacher candidates a way to examine their assumptions, challenge their beliefs, and deepen their understanding of themselves and their students. Lynda Barry (2014) frames drawing not as a demonstration of talent but as a process of discovery, as it helps us understand what we see, what we think we see, and what that reveals about our perceptions. She explains, "Some-

thing happens to my thinking when I start to draw. It becomes more like listening than formulating" (Barry, 2008, p. 157). This shift mirrors the goals of critical reflection in teacher education: slowing down, noticing, questioning, and interpreting. Encouraging teacher candidates to listen first supports not only their critical reflection, but also their ability to imagine while using empathy to center the voice and experience of students with disabilities. Building on this, Dr. Bubash collaborated with Lynda Barry to integrate Barry's cartooning methods into a special education methods course.

The methods course focuses on evidence-based strategies to help special education teachers meet the individual needs of students with disabilities while aligning instruction with grade-level content in general education settings. Barry and Dr. Bubash held biweekly meetings to plan which drawing activities, adapted from Barry's own teaching practices as outlined in *Making Comics* (Barry, 2019), would best support course objectives. Between meetings, the pair communicated through email when immediate feedback was needed. These ongoing conversations also helped provide a space to collaboratively interpret the comics created by the teacher candidates and to refine future activities.

### **Building a Safe and Accessible Drawing Environment**

Before diving into the core drawing activities, it is important to prioritize building a classroom environment where drawing feels playful, accessible, and emotionally safe. For many teacher candidates, drawing is scary. Further, many teacher candidates might not have drawn since they were in lower elementary school. With this in mind, it is important for the teacher educator to create a joyful and collaborative atmosphere, which includes the teacher educator drawing

**FIGURE 3:** Classroom Drawing Activities

alongside their teacher candidates.

An easy introductory drawing activity is called “Close Your Eyes and See Me” (Barry, 2019). Every candidate receives a blank sheet of paper and a pen. A timer is set for one minute and candidates are asked to draw a familiar object from memory with their eyes closed. Barry suggests starting with a “bacon and egg breakfast with coffee, toast, and silverware” (p. 54), but you can choose anything. Once finished, teacher candidates show their drawings to those around them. This exercise invites laughter and, as Barry (2019) suggests, helps teacher candidates “make friends with the lines their hand naturally makes” (p. 55). See Figure 3 for an example.

Another strategy involves introducing a method for drawing people without using stick figures, which Barry does not allow. Instead, Barry suggests using cartoonist Ivan Brunetti’s approach: characters made from two basic shapes for the head and body, “noodle” shapes for limbs, and optional details (see Figure 3 for an example). When integrating drawing into teacher preparation coursework, drawing in every class is not mandatory, but it is highly encouraged. Even short activities, such as drawing oneself doing something (e.g., playing an instrument, floating in space) for three minutes

while attendance is taken, can help build comfort and routine. Teacher candidates also mentioned that short activities used at the beginning of class helped relieve some of the stress of the day, allowing them to be more present in the teacher education classroom. Once a playful, accessible, and emotionally safe environment is established, the drawing activities can transition to connecting directly to course content. The following is an example of one of the structured activities adapted and delivered in class as an alternative way for teacher educators to check for understanding and for teacher candidates to begin applying their learning without a direct field placement or classroom.

### **Embedding Structured Drawing Activities Connected to Course Content**


One of the main objectives of this special education methods course is for teacher candidates to practice person-centered planning. Person-centered planning is a collaborative process in which students with disabilities, their families, and educators share information about the student’s strengths, preferences, interests, needs, and goals. This information then guides the design of curriculum, instruction, and learning

environments (Wells & Sheehey, 2012). The Review Frame (Barry, 2019) was adapted to help teacher candidates reflect on their understanding of person-centered planning and imagine themselves applying the components of person-centered planning in their classrooms. When teacher candidates complete the Review Frame activity, the teacher educator can see how they understand person-centered planning and determine what additional support they might need to put their new learning into practice.

The Review Frame uses a vertical single sheet of paper. First, teacher candidates divide the top two-thirds of the paper into two equal vertical boxes. Each box is numbered one through seven to prepare teacher candidates to create two separate lists. In the bottom third of the paper, two smaller vertical boxes are also added. These bottom two boxes are left blank. Once the Review Frame structure is complete, the top left box is labeled “Information” and teacher candidates are instructed to spend three minutes writing seven things they remembered or that stood out to them from the readings they completed. The top right quadrant is labeled “Visualized.” In this box, candidates are instructed to spend three minutes writing seven things they visualized from the readings. In the bottom left quadrant, candidates are given thirty seconds to write a quote or phrase that stayed with them from the readings. Finally, in the bottom right quadrant, teacher candidates are asked to spend thirty seconds drawing a simple image that captured a key idea from the readings. See Figure 4 for a Review Frame completed by a teacher candidate.

Once the Review Frame has been completed, teacher candidates select a single idea or image from the “Information” or “Visualized” list that is particularly vivid to them or that they want to explore in more depth. In the example

**FIGURE 4:** Candidate Example of a Completed Review Frame Comic

	Points / Info	Visualized
1	Center the person	Sitting with the power at the table
2	Plan backwards	Mapping from the treasure
3	know why you use the systems / support	Clear pathways
4	Start w/ the end	Building plans before building foundation
5	Many + personal pathways to the goal	Flip books!
6	Make it meaningful	Personalized problems of special interest
7	Make it joyful	Children laughing
8	Give agency + autonomy	The word no
Sometimes they have so many nightmares they cannot dream		

shown in Figure 4, this teacher candidate chose to explore “make it joyful” from her list. Teacher candidates then create a scene based on their choice. First, they divide a blank sheet of paper into four triangles by drawing a large X across the page. The X is used to help prevent them from focusing too much on the organization or completeness and encourage them to fully immerse themselves in the image. The teacher candidates are encouraged to write freely anywhere on the page as the teacher educator guides them through prompts exploring time,

setting, sensory details, and context adapted from *Making Comics* (Barry, 2019, pp.145-46). For example, questions such as “If you turn your head and look to the right, what do you see?” can help the teacher candidates build a vivid mental image of themselves engaging in person-centered planning and teaching.

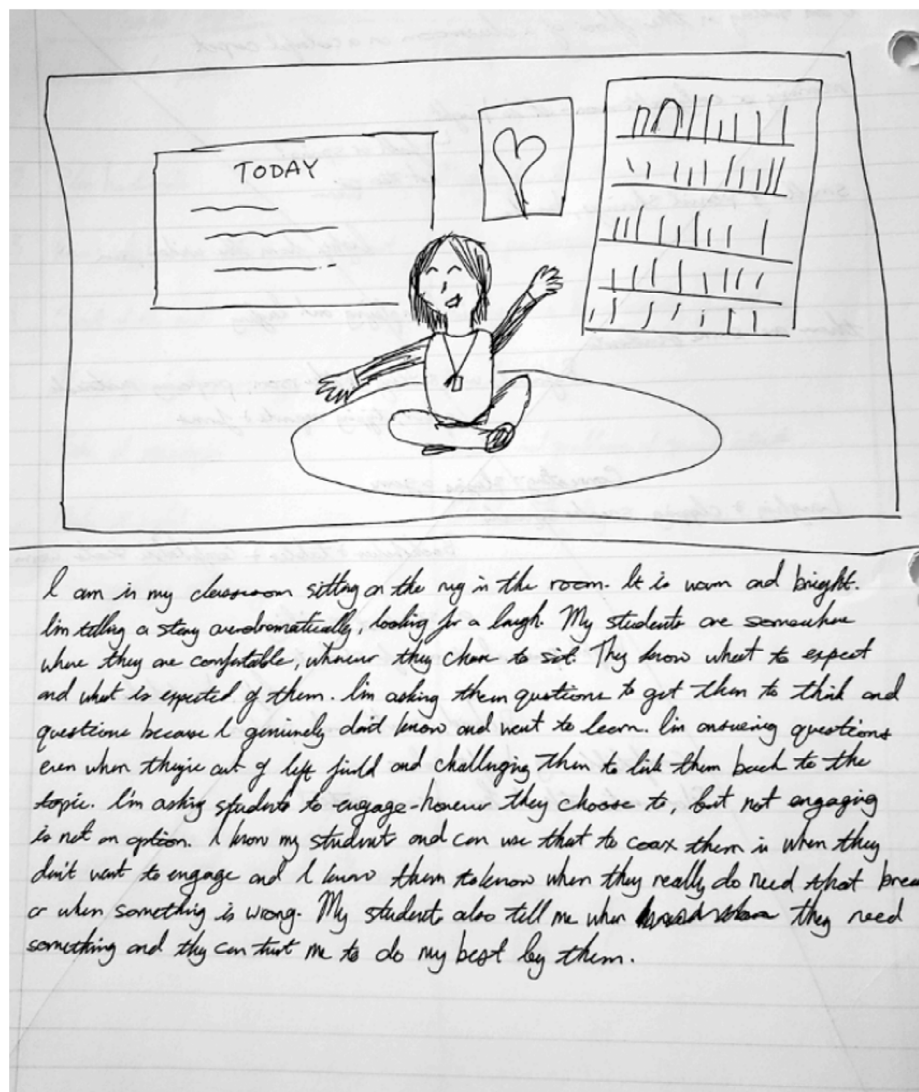
In the final step, teacher candidates use their thinking from the guided prompts to turn their imagined moment into a one-page comic. Given a third blank vertical sheet of paper, they draw a horizontal line across the middle of

the paper, splitting it into two sections. On the top half, a quarter inch frame is created to make a large box. Teacher candidates then take five minutes to draw themselves in the scene they imagined with as much detail as time allows. In the lower half, they spend five minutes writing about the scene they just drew in first-person, present tense, beginning with “I am...” and ending with a description of the scene’s setting. See Figure 5 for an example of the final comic.

### Outcomes for Teacher Educators and Teacher Candidates

By embedding drawing throughout a methods course, teacher educators created consistent and structured opportunities for teacher candidates to practice critical reflection, empathy, and imagination skills. The drawing activities also served as a way for the teacher educator to assess how well candidates understood the content and how they planned to apply it in the classroom. Through candidates’ comics, the teacher educator gained insights into how they internalized key concepts beyond what traditional assignments, such as written reflection papers or lesson plans, typically reveal. The visual and narrative components helped surface teacher candidates’ assumptions, goals, and values in relation to their future classrooms.

Additionally, teacher candidates reported high levels of engagement and emotional connection with the activities. One candidate described the Review Frame as a “helpful way for me to understand what my teaching philosophy is,” while another shared that they enjoyed the drawing process so much that they shared their work with peers and began using similar techniques in their own teaching placements. These responses suggest that cartooning not only supported conceptual understanding but also fostered confidence, creativity,

**FIGURE 5:** Final Comic Created by Teacher Candidate

and professional identity development. These candidate outcomes would not have been possible without the collaboration between two faculty: a nationally renowned cartoonist and art professor and a teacher educator.

### EXAMPLE 3: FIELD-BASED EXPERIENCE WITHIN AN INCLUSIVE SUMMER CAMP

Dr. Wright now had two innovative approaches for engaging her teacher candidates in skill development through the arts. Having enjoyed her community's local arts offerings, she wondered how she might expand her teacher can-

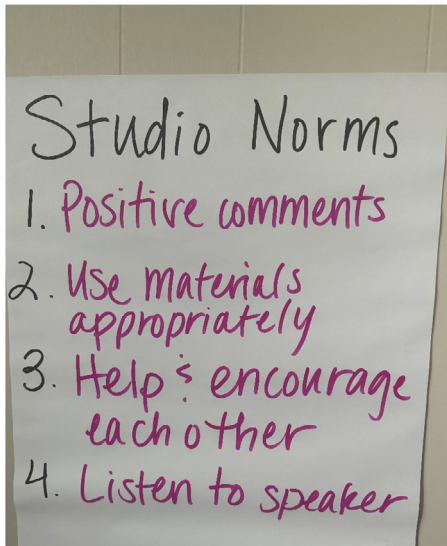
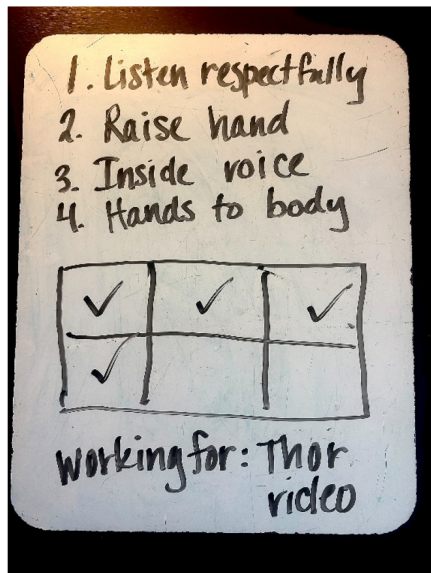
didates' experiences outside the university setting as well. She decided to visit Dr. Speight to learn about her collaborations with the arts community through an annual inclusive arts summer camp in Northwest Arkansas. This was a unique collaboration between a university special education program and a world-renowned museum of American art. Dr. Wright was most interested in understanding how teacher candidates were provided opportunities to practice implementation of evidence-based educational practices during the week of camp and how the museum art educators and university faculty partnered on

this initiative. She developed a few questions to ask Dr. Speight and her art education colleague, Miriam, during their remote video meeting. She was curious what training and support of candidates looked like during camp and how the two organizations worked together to deliver a cohesive camp experience.

### Purpose of Museum-based Field Experiences for Teacher Candidates

Each summer, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art delivers arts-based summer camps to Arkansas children and youth. For several years, the University of Arkansas (UA) has partnered with Crystal Bridges to deliver a week-long inclusive summer camp for children and youth ages 11-14 with disabilities (e.g., autism, ADHD, anxiety) as part of their regular summer programming. During the week of camp, campers create and view art aligned with a theme (e.g., biomes, home, architecture). The art creation activities take place in the studio where campers typically are seated in groups of three to four that share materials. During gallery time, campers visit and view pieces across museum exhibitions. While these learning experiences are designed by Crystal Bridges Museum educators, UA faculty bring their unique knowledge and expertise to enhance camper experiences. For example, a lesson on clay sculpting might be planned and delivered by Crystal Bridges educators with UA faculty suggesting adaptations to the lesson, such as presenting different sculpted objects or using different sculpting tools to strengthen camper engagement.

While the initial intent of the partnership was to provide inclusive camp experiences for children and youth with disabilities, it also presented an opportunity for an innovative field-based experience to foster skill development of teacher candidates. In recent years,

**FIGURE 6:** Studio Norms Poster**FIGURE 7:** Token System to Enhance Task Engagement

teacher candidates in UA special education preparation programs have facilitated this arts-based summer camp with support from faculty. Given the importance of field-based experiences for skill development (Leko & Brownell, 2011), educator preparation programs must identify contexts in which teacher candidates can practice using strategies with the support of a knowledgeable mentor. This partnership created a unique opportunity for faculty to support the devel-

opment of teacher candidates' skills for supporting children and youth with disabilities. These skills foster camper independence in art engagement, art creation, and relationship development during the inclusive arts-based camp and fall into three pillars: (a) behavior supports, (b) active engagement, and (3) social interactions.

### Enhancing Teacher Candidate Field-Based Experiences Behavior Supports

Camp experiences bring unique opportunities for teacher candidates to experience unfamiliar contexts. While the novel setting can facilitate engagement and excitement, there is also a strong possibility that campers will not have enough knowledge of the context to demonstrate expected behaviors. Crystal Bridges Museum of Art is similar to other museum contexts in that there are a number of rules or norms. To name a few, while in the gallery, visitors are expected to use a lower voice level, walk, keep hands off art, and take pictures without a flash. Campers with limited experience in these settings or with more intensive behavioral support needs might require additional support to follow the rules or norms outlined by the museum.

During the week of camp, UA teacher candidates and faculty work together with Crystal Bridges Museum educators to support campers in their demonstration of expected behaviors by creating and teaching norms, using pre-corrections, and providing positive acknowledgement when norms are demonstrated (Center on PBIS, 2022). The week begins with discussion about different camp contexts (i.e., gallery, studio) and brainstorming with the campers about what might be expected in each setting. The suggestions or ideas shared by the campers are then recorded on posters which are displayed throughout the week (see Figure 6).

As campers move across settings and activities, the posters are referenced as pre-corrections. These pre-corrections are particularly important as campers prepare to enter the gallery spaces. The pre-corrections can be provided to the group. For example, a teacher candidate might remind all campers, "Remember, when we are in the gallery we are going to use lower voice levels." They can also be provided to individuals, such as by reminding a specific camper, "Please keep in mind you can only bring pencils into the gallery." Our teacher candidates also positively acknowledge students when they are observed demonstrating the norms. For instance, they might say, "Thanks for staying with the group in the gallery," or "I appreciated the respect you showed during our studio discussion by raising your hand and waiting until you were called on." These supports support all campers in showing expected behaviors across different camp settings.

### Active Engagement

Throughout the week of camp, campers create art during studio time. Campers use a variety of mediums (e.g., clay, sketching, painting) to create their own unique studio projects aligned with a theme, such as *Home*, *Biomes*, or *Nature*. While the nature of studio time creates opportunities for campers to make choices, the flexibility of the experience and potential misalignment with their interests can create barriers to engagement. To support campers in engaging during studio time, UA teacher candidates are guided to look for opportunities to align studio activities with camper interests. For example, if campers are creating figures from clay to live in a camper-created home structure, a teacher candidate might suggest that a camper who enjoys video games could create a video game character. If campers are creating animals from recycled materials, a teacher candidate might help a camper who enjoys cats to identify different recyclable materi-

als they could use to create a cat, like using cardboard to make ears. To further support campers in completing tasks and sustaining engagement, teacher candidates are guided to assist with breaking down complex tasks into discrete steps for campers to follow. If breaking the task into steps is not sufficient to support engagement, the teacher candidates might also create token systems (see Figure 7). These experiences support teacher candidates in using different strategies to enhance learner engagement in various learning environments.

### **Social Interactions**

Finally, one goal of camp is to support campers in making connections with peers who have common interests. Prior to the start of camp, UA faculty briefly describe ways teacher candidates can facilitate these connections. They recommend that teacher candidates look for opportunities to prompt interaction between campers by getting to know their interests, planning games and activities, and recognizing natural opportunities for campers to interact during tasks. When teacher candidates do not recognize these opportunities on their own, UA faculty might model or provide a verbal prompt. For instance, the UA faculty might suggest that a teacher candidate encourage a camper to share their art creation with another camper who is interested in a similar topic. This creates a natural opportunity for two campers with common interests to connect while also providing a clear occasion for the teacher candidate to practice. Through these experiences, teacher candidates learn to provide low levels of support and foster relationship development between youth.

### **Outcomes for Children, Youth, and Teacher Candidates**

Summer camp experiences create space for children and youth to participate in different activities, experi-

ence diverse community settings, and connect with others their age. However, the unstructured environment coupled with a short duration of time can lead to unwanted outcomes for campers and facilitators. This partnership enhances teacher candidate readiness for their future roles of creating inclusive spaces in which all learners belong. Further, the collaboration improves inclusive experiences for children and youth with diverse support needs and assists those in the community tasked with planning and delivering summer camp experiences. Without partnerships such as the one described, children and youth with support needs would likely have more limited access to the experiences offered to their peers. Thus, this camp meets a critical need in teacher preparation by leveraging innovative field experiences to enhance teacher candidate skill development while simultaneously improving community inclusion by fostering inclusive community-based experiences for all children and youth.

### **DR. WRIGHT'S REFLECTION ON ARTS INTEGRATION AND COLLABORATION**

*Dr. Wright reflected on what she learned from the ways Drs. Wilkinson, Bubash, and Speight had leveraged the arts for their teacher candidates. She learned how museum-based field experiences provided an innovative community rooted in collaboration through summer camp programming at Crystal Bridges. It was clear Dr. Speight's training of Crystal Bridges camp staff had strengthened inclusive camp experiences across museum summer programming for children and youth. She recognized the unique opportunity for teacher candidate skill development created by their co-delivery of an inclusive camp.*

*Dr. Wright also considered the benefits provided by Dr. Bubash in*

*collaboration with Dr. Barry. Their use of visual imagery provided teacher candidates with fresh ways to explore their learning, attitudes, and experiences.*

*Visual expression was a powerful way for Dr. Bubash's teacher candidates to develop and examine their emerging teaching philosophies and underlying assumptions about their efficacy and expectations for their future students.*

*Dr. Wilkinson's approach to collaborating with local actors through simulations of challenging interactions with fictional families also created opportunities for teacher candidates to reflect deeply on their assumptions of students and families. Role playing through challenging scenarios provided teacher candidates with opportunities to practice preparing for important engagement with families. Such opportunities in field experiences were insufficient for the types of application that Dr. Wright knew her own candidates longed for and would benefit from.*

*With three new ways to leverage arts integration into her work with teacher candidates, Dr. Wright was excited to explore opportunities within her own teacher education program. She felt re-energized to explore art-based partners in her community and consider ways to work with them to develop field-based and in-class experiences for her teacher candidates. She considered the possibility of engaging the local children's theater program, wondering if the leaders of the theater would consider creating simulation experiences for her candidates. She remembered an art educator in residence at the local museum whom she had met previously and wondered if he might be interested in sharing his approach to the creative narrative expression of high schoolers with her teacher candidates. Dr. Wright was full of ideas she knew would better meet the expressed needs of teacher candidates in her program.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### Colleen Wilkinson, Ph.D.

Colleen Wilkinson, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at Daemen University, teaching instructional design, classroom management, and inclusive methods courses. Dr. Wilkinson worked in public schools as a special education teacher for over ten years before moving into higher education. Her research interests include classroom management, student teacher supervision, and universal design.

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Sarah Bubash, PhD, is an Extension Associate for the Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University. As an Extension Associate, Sarah develops and provides professional development for the Office of Special Education Technical Assistance Partnership for Transition. Her research interests focus on using arts-based methods within teacher education to support the development of person-centered inclusive instruction for students with disabilities.

### Renee Speight, Ph.D., BCBA-D

Renee Speight, PhD, BCBA-D, is an Assistant Professor of Special Education at the University of Arkansas. Dr. Speight's research and teaching interests focus on supporting in-service and pre-service teachers in implementation of evidence-based practices to foster improved academic, social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes for adolescent learners at-risk for and with disabilities. Her research occurs in typical school-based settings where Speight investigates the impact of practices on student outcomes using single-case research methodology.

### Jennifer Sears, Ph.D.

Jennifer Sears, PhD, is an Associate Professor of education at the University of North Georgia. Dr. Sears has been in education for over 20 years with positions including special education teacher, school and district level administration, and, currently, higher education. She received her bachelor's degree in music from Central Connecticut State University, her MEd in school administration from American International College, and her PhD in exceptional student education from the University of Central Florida. Her research interests are in pre-service teacher preparation using mixed reality simulation and co-teaching.

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