

**I Teach What I Do, I Do What I Teach:  
A Study of the Experiences and Impacts of Teaching Artists**

*Executive Summary*

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## **Introduction**

Like many informal or itinerant groups, teaching artists appear to have flown under the research radar. They are hard to categorize as a group or define as a profession. They often work freelance and have no national organizing or governing body. The body of empirical research about them is slim. This absence of research continues to exist despite the call for further research into the experiences of and impacts by professional artists in schools (Arts Education Partnership, 2004).

How artists prepare for work in the classroom is also a relatively unexplored area in research. There is no union, no certification nor credential to formally prepare or identify a teaching artist. Artists are not typically trained to take their arts expertise and translate it to the classroom (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2002). Research about teaching artists' impact on schools is very much in its infancy (Arts Education Partnership, 2004). There is still much to explore about who they are and how they may impact public education.

This study attempted to address some of these questions and gaps in knowledge. There were three research questions that focused on the teaching artist population in San Diego County in southern California. The first question focused on the demographics characteristics of the teaching artist population in the county. The second research question examined teaching artists' experiences working in public schools. The final question examined the impact of teaching artists on public schools, as perceived by both teaching artists and public school principals.

## **Methodology**

For this study, 93 teaching artists were surveyed in San Diego County in 2006. While there is no official list, database or head count of teaching artists in San Diego, the best guess of many arts professionals is that there are about 100 teaching artists total. From the surveyed sample, 10 teaching artists were selected and interviewed in depth about their experiences. In addition, 650 public school principals were invited to participate in the study. 152 principals did so and completed the survey. 60% of the responding principals had used teaching artists at their schools and 40% had not. The findings reported in this summary are only from principals who had used teaching artists at their schools (see Appendix A).

This study used a mixed-method design, incorporating both surveys of teaching artists and public school principals and interviews with teaching artists, to develop a better understanding of the experiences and impact of teaching artists. A sequential quantitative-qualitative analysis process (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann & Hanson, 2003) integrated two different data sets into a comprehensive whole that provided a general sense of teaching artists and their impact as well as a more detailed look at particular practitioners and their work in schools.

## **Findings**

### **Demographics**

The sample of 93 surveyed teaching artists was made up mostly of women (74%) and was mostly white (79%). They were very well educated, with 51% holding a bachelor's degree and 38% holding a master's degree. Eighteen percent held a California teaching credential. The average age was 39 years. Theatre artists were the largest cohort in the sample, making up approximately 49%. Visual artists were the next largest group at 27%. Dancers and musicians each comprised 12% of the sample. Tables are included in Appendix A.

## Wages & Employment

The surveyed teaching artist sample reported earning approximately \$39 an hour from their teaching artist work. Only 6% of the sample reported receiving any benefits from their teaching artist work. On average, the sample did teaching artist work for 42 hours per month and their professional art for 77 hours per month. Nearly half of the sample had 3 types of employment - their teaching artist work, their professional artwork and a third source of employment that was typically not related to the art but helped fund the whole enterprise.

The qualitative data suggested there were some differences among teaching artists in their attitudes towards teaching hours. Drawing on both the open-ended questions from the teaching artist survey and the interviews, there appeared to be two sub-groups of teaching artists regarding hours. One sub-group wanted more teaching hours and wanted their teaching to be more sustaining as employment. The second sub-group preferred the part-time and often irregular schedule of teaching artist work. This sub-group was resistant to more hours. This sub-group was typically concerned with the encroachment of teaching hours on their time spent at their art form.

## Teaching Artist Training

Most of the responding teaching artists (71%) reported having had some teaching artist training, which they typically received from an arts organization or university. Teaching artists with any kind of teaching artist training worked less at their art form than artists who had no training at all. Teaching artists who were trained by school districts spent significantly less time at their art than artists who had not. Most teaching artists were not interested in a teaching artist credential, but most said they would get one if it was required to do the work.

The interviewed artists reported two key methods of informal preparation - mentoring and experiential learning. Nearly all of the interviewees reported having a significant mentor who greatly influenced their teaching. In addition, nearly all the interviewed teaching artists described experiential learning as a key approach. A pianist who was interviewed explained, "There's a lot of very talented and very experienced artists who have years in the classroom with kids, who know about classroom discipline, who've learned so much on the job. There's so much hands-on teaching experience in this."

## Why Do Artists Do Teaching Artist Work?

The surveyed teaching artists provided a variety of motivations to do teaching artist work. The primary motivation was intrinsic, in that the large majority reported teaching because it was something they enjoyed.

I enjoy teaching my art form	67%
Teaching is a source of income	26%
Teaching is personally rewarding	20%
Students & schools benefit	14%
Teaching and my art form compliment each other	12%

### Why Schools Use Teaching Artists

The surveyed principals were overall very positive about having teaching artists in their schools. Nearly 60% of the surveyed sample reported having a teaching artist on campus at least once a week. The principals reported a wide variety of reasons that motivated their use of teaching artists at their school sites.

Our school believes the arts support academic performance.	87%
Teachers want more arts for the students	64%
Parents want more arts for the students	54%
The arts are related to our school's mission/charter	40%
Our school does not have a music/art/drama/dance specialist, so we use teaching artists to provide instruction in that area.	39%

### Teaching Artists in Schools

The teaching artist sample reported teaching most frequently in upper elementary and middle schools. The very low response to teaching in preschools may be related to the small number of public preschool programs in San Diego County.

Preschool	17%
Kindergarten-2 <sup>nd</sup>	54%
3 <sup>rd</sup> – 5 <sup>th</sup> grades	86%
6 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup> grades	82%
9 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> grades	73%

The surveyed teaching artists reported providing a variety of services to public schools. The large majority of the sample reported that they teach about their art form. Over half of the surveyed teaching artists indicated that they integrate the arts into other areas of the curriculum. Professional development for teachers, such as workshops and coaching, was the least common activity reported.

Teach about their art form	81%
Integrate the arts into the core curriculum	54%
Performing	53%
Teach after-school programs	53%
Direct an arts group, such as a choir or a drama group	40%
Professional development for teachers	36%

### Teaching Artists' Impact on Schools

Teaching artists and public school principals perceived unique impacts that teaching artists make on schools. Artists saw themselves primarily as role models and as positive influences within the school community, whereas principals saw artists impacting their schools by sharing their expertise and passion for the arts.

#### Teaching Artists' Perceptions

Positive influence on students	61%
Enhancing school life	41%
Bringing arts into the schools	15%
Working with teachers	12%

#### Principals' Perceptions

Artists bring arts expertise & real world experience	59%
Enthusiasm & passion	38%
Student enrichment in the arts	29%
Quality of artistic product	17%

### Challenges to Working in Schools

The surveyed teaching artists and principals were also asked about the challenges inherent to working in schools. The majority of artists perceived a lack of respect either for themselves or for the arts in general. The principals perceived their biggest challenges in using teaching artists as being the lack of time during the school day and the issues around funding artists.

#### Challenges Teaching Artists Perceive in Working in Schools

Lack of respect for arts & artist	73%
Working with students	29%
Fatigue(emotional & physical)	5%

#### Challenges Principals Perceive in Teaching Artists Working in Schools

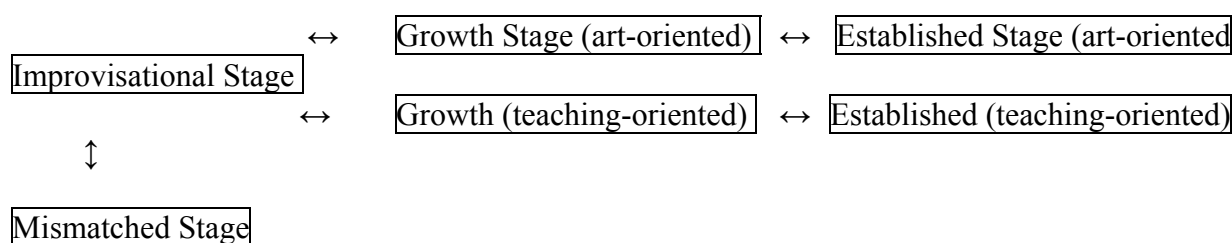
Lack of time & difficulty scheduling	44%
Finding funding & cost of artists	34%
Finding artists to hire	12%
Artists' inexperience in teaching	8%

## A Preliminary Stage Theory of Teaching Artist Development

This study was able to suggest the beginnings of a stage theory of teaching artist development by utilizing the mixed methodology approach. Analysis suggested that teaching artists move through stages as they develop throughout their professional lives. These stages may be fluid. There is some suggestion that artists can move back and forth between stages as they develop new skills.

Teaching artists begin at an “improvisational” stage where they utilize key concepts from theatrical improvisation – learning through doing; being in the moment; and connecting with others (Johnstone, 1994; Spolin, 1963). Some move to a “growth” stage where they explore and develop their teaching artist work and then to an “established” stage where teaching artist work is mature and focused. Some artists, however, feel unsuccessful or struggle with teaching work and are at the “mismatched” stage. There also appears to be two different orientations of teaching artists – art-oriented and teaching-oriented. These findings have implications for schools and arts organizations in their use and preparation of teaching artists in public schools.

### *Teaching Artist Development Stage Theory*



### **Improvisational Stage:**

- Enjoyed teaching artist work
- Had not sought out teaching work but rather had it “fall into their lap”.
- Content with the improvisational nature and was not interested in further developing or codifying their teaching artist work.
- The teaching style itself was often improvisational in nature – typically spontaneous and “in the moment”.

### **Growth Stage:**

- Actively developing teaching skills.
- Actively developing as a professional artist.
- Greatly enjoyed teaching artist work and wanted to continue to pursue it.
- Open to teaching a variety of ages and taking on different types of projects and services in schools.

**Established Stage:**

- Enjoyed teaching artist work but enthusiasm was more muted than the “growth” stage.
- Worked improvisationally and developed teaching skills in the past. This was not a present activity or concern.
- However, continued to develop as a professional artist.
- Had specific parameters for their teaching artist work. These parameters weren’t universal but indicated that these teaching artists were focused in the scope of their teaching work

**Mismatched Stage:**

- Did not enjoy teaching artist work.
- Respected other artists who teach in schools but did not personally have a good experience.
- Negative experience was rooted in student disrespect for their art form.

Within the “growth” and “established” stages, teaching artists appeared to hold one of two types of orientations – an art orientation or a teaching orientation.

**Art Orientation**

- Art-oriented teaching artists had spent significantly more years working at their art professionally than they had teaching.
- They had spent more years working at their art form than had their teaching-oriented colleagues.
- Art-oriented teaching artists did not hold a teaching credential.
- They were unlikely to have had teaching artist training to prepare them for the work.

**Teaching Orientation**

- They had spent more years teaching than they had making art professionally.
- They also had not worked at their art for as many years as their art-oriented peers had on average.
- Many of these artists – over a third - held teaching credentials.
- These teaching artists were far more likely to have had teaching artist training and this training was likely to have been provided by a school district.

## **Implications for Practice & Research**

This study offers much for both teaching artists as well as the practitioners who work with them. With the development of a stage theory, this study highlights that teaching artists can move through different stages and thus may have changing needs in terms of training and professional development. Mentoring is clearly a well-utilized training model for teaching artists and should be further explored and developed. Mentoring as an effective form of learning for teaching artists has been demonstrated elsewhere in the literature (Seidel, 1998). Both mentoring and role modeling are approaches that are traditional in preparing and training artists in their art form and thus are familiar and accessible to teaching artists. Teaching artist training would do well to mimic arts training whenever possible.

This study also found that teaching artists who were trained by school districts spent less time at their art than artists who were trained elsewhere. It is critical that training providers continue to support teaching artists in the development of their artwork. The process of training cannot compromise teaching artists' artwork but should foster it. Trainers need to consider the whole artist and should not try to turn teaching artists into traditional arts specialists. This conversion would defeat the purpose of artists in schools and deemphasize the specific attributes that school communities value about teaching artists.

Further research into other communities around the U.S. would expand the understanding of the experiences and impacts of teaching artists in public schools. San Diego is a city with no umbrella organization that organizes and trains teaching artists – unlike Chicago or New York City, for example. Artists in cities where there is no organizing/training structure may look more like the San Diego sample than teaching artists in cities with an organizing structure. Valuable insight could also be gained by studying communities where teaching artists have organized, such as in San Francisco, Chicago or New York. Comparing and contrasting a community of organized teaching artists with the more disparate community of San Diego could broaden the understanding and provide new insights. Recent research has shown that communities which strongly support arts and culture organizations have a central organizing agency (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Novak, 2007). It is possible that teaching artists may also benefit from centralization to further growth and development.

The stage theory is a beginning attempt to examine the development of teaching artists. Further research into the stage theory would provide a clearer, more articulated understanding of teaching artists. Case studies of teaching artists at each of the different stages and orientations may provide a deeper and richer understanding of the developmental process of teaching artists. Further exploration into the teaching orientation would be particularly useful as there were no interviewees who fit this category.



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## Appendix A

### Gender & ethnicity of teaching artist respondents

	Frequency
<b>Gender (n = 88)</b>	
Female	74%
Male	26%
<b>Ethnicity (n=91)</b>	
African-American	6.6%
Asian	2.2%
Caucasian	79.1%
Hispanic/Latino	5.5%
Native American	1.1%
Filipino	1.1%
Biracial	1.1%
No response	3.3%

### Primary art form of teaching artist respondents

Art form	Frequency
<b>Theatre</b>	
Playwriting	1.2%
Directing	5.9%
Acting	25.7%
Theatrical design	1.2%
Storytelling	3.5%
Puppetry	2.4%
Mime	1.2%
<b>Visual Arts</b>	
Painting	14.1%
Sculpture	3.5%
Filmmaking	1.2%
Photography	2.4%
Graphic arts	3.5%
<b>Dance</b>	
Dance – folk	1.2%
Dance – misc.	2.4%
Dance – modern	7.1%
Dance – musical theatre	2.4%
Choreography	2.4%
<b>Music</b>	
Instrumental music	11.7%
Vocal music	4.6%
<b>Other arts:</b>	2.4%

Educational attainment by teaching artist respondents

Highest level of education	Frequency
High school diploma	10.2%
Associates degree	2.3%
Bachelor of arts	35.2%
Bachelor of science	5.7%
Bachelor of fine arts	6.8%
Bachelor of music education	1.1%
Bachelor of music	2.3%
Master of arts	12.5%
Master of fine arts	14.8%
Master of music	2.3%
Ph.D.	2.3%
No response	4.5%

Grade levels of schools of participating principals

Grade span at school	Had teaching artists n=92	Did not have teaching artists n=60
Pre-K through 6 (grades at school fell within this range)	67 78%	33 55%
6 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup> grades	7 7.5%	11 18%
9 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> grades (grades at school fell within this range)	10 11%	8 13%
Kinder – 8 <sup>th</sup> grades	4 4%	5 8%
Kinder – 12 <sup>th</sup> grades	2 2%	2 3%
6 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> grades	2 2%	1 1.5%