



CASE STUDY:

DESIGNING BALANCED ARTS- INTEGRATED CURRICULUM FOR EARLY LEARNERS

How we helped a federally-funded arts education program build rigorous, authentic curriculum — and the capacity to sustain it.

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OVERVIEW

An independent curriculum consulting engagement supporting a statewide arts education nonprofit implementing a federally-funded, whole-school arts integration model across multiple elementary schools.



BACKGROUND

Organization Type: Statewide arts education nonprofit

Program Type: Federally-funded Comprehensive Arts Integration Model

HITM's Role: Independent Curriculum Consultant

Grade Levels: K–2 (early literacy and early math concept development)

Subject Areas: Reading & Comprehension and Mathematics

Context: Multi-school implementation requiring balanced, standards-aligned curriculum, arts-integrated assessment systems, and teacher capacity building

CHALLENGES

When Christina Jones was brought in as an independent curriculum consultant, the program already had strong infrastructure — Teaching Artists in classrooms, school buy-in, and federal funding. What it needed was something harder to find: curriculum for Grades K–2 that treated the art form and the academic content as genuine equals, assessments that could measure both simultaneously, and teachers who understood enough about the art forms to deliver it all with confidence. What emerged through discovery — including review of prior program data and deep collaboration with the Executive Director and Teaching Artists — was a set of interconnected design challenges that required both specialized curriculum expertise and a people-centered approach.

CHALLENGE #1:

Balanced Integration Was Missing

Existing materials leaned on arts as supplemental — activities attached to academic lessons rather than true integration. The program needed curriculum where the art form and academic content carried equal instructional weight from design through delivery.

CHALLENGE #2:

Assessment Didn't Reflect Integration

There were no formative or summative assessments designed to evaluate both content mastery and arts learning simultaneously. Teachers had no tools for tracking student progress through an arts-integrated lens — and no framework for knowing what to look for.

CHALLENGES

CHALLENGE #3:

Teacher Art Form Knowledge Gaps

Even with Teaching Artists in residence, classroom teachers needed their own foundational understanding of the art forms to deliver curriculum confidently and assess student learning accurately without full dependence on artist presence.

CHALLENGE #4:

Developmental Fit for K-2 Learners

Early literacy and early math concept development require a specific instructional approach — concrete, sensory, movement-based, and accessible to pre-readers and emergent learners. Existing models weren't designed with this developmental stage in mind.

CHALLENGE #5:

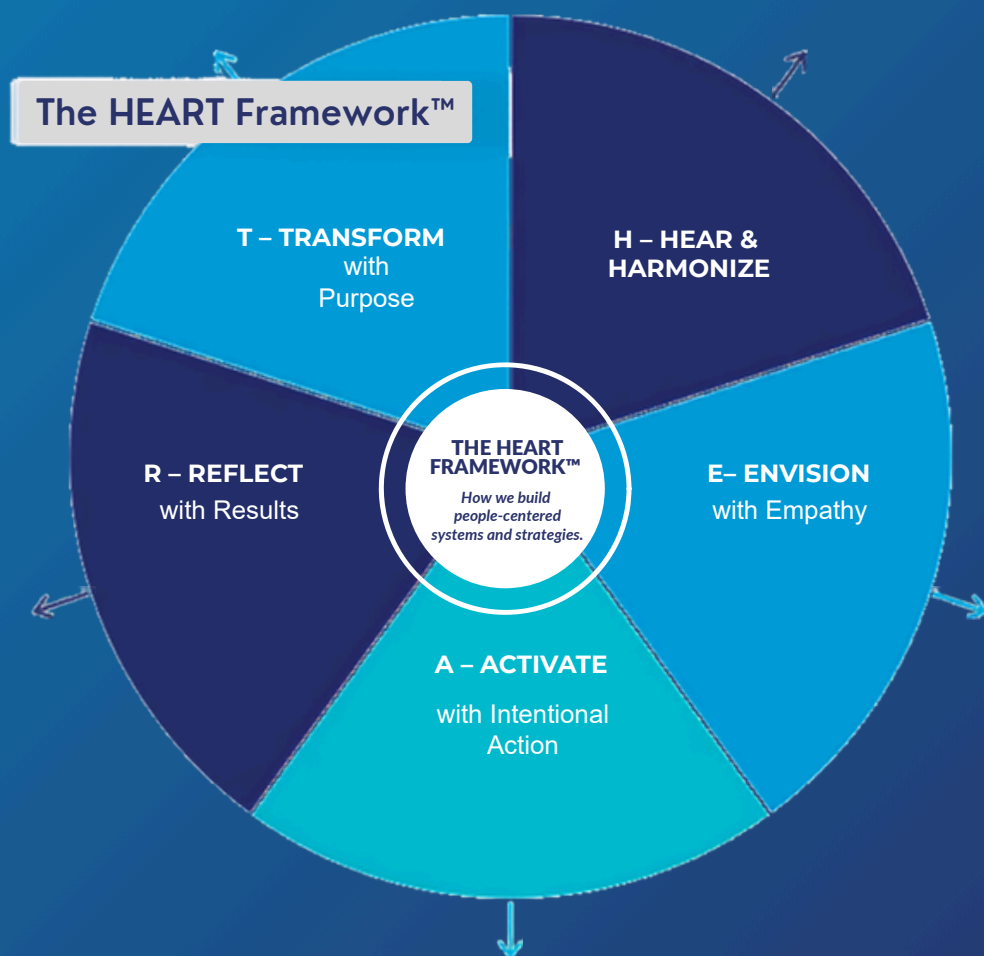
No Path to Scale

The program lacked a strategic framework for expanding what was working. Without formal recommendations grounded in data and program experience, growth decisions would remain reactive rather than intentional.

OUR APPROACH

Christina began by listening — reviewing prior program data, collaborating with the Executive Director, and working closely with Teaching Artists to understand their instructional approaches before designing anything. Grounded in best practice for both early literacy and mathematics, and anchored in a truly balanced arts integration model, she built curriculum and systems from the inside out: learner first, teacher second, program system third.

Every lesson, every assessment, and every professional learning touchpoint was designed with a single purpose: to build the capacity of teachers and the program to sustain authentic arts integration long after the engagement concluded.



SOLUTIONS

Christina designed and delivered an integrated set of curriculum, assessment, and capacity-building resources that worked together as one coherent system. Each component was purpose-built for Grades K–2 — and each one reinforced the others. The result was not just better lessons, but a more capable teaching team and a clearer path for the program to grow.

SOLUTION #1:

Balanced Arts-Integrated Curriculum Units, Grades K–2

Developed curriculum units for Reading & Comprehension and Mathematics where the art form and academic content carried equal instructional weight throughout — not arts as supplement, but true balanced integration. Lessons used visual arts, theater, movement, music, and dance as genuine instructional vehicles for early literacy and early math concept development.

SOLUTION #2:

Arts-Integrated Formative Assessment Practices

Designed formative assessment tools that evaluated student progress through both the content lens AND the arts lens simultaneously — giving teachers a real-time picture of how students were developing across both dimensions. Included explicit guidance on what to look for in an arts-integrated assessment and how to distinguish content mastery from arts demonstration.

SOLUTION #3:

End-of-Unit Assessments Aligned to Dual Standards

Developed end-of-unit assessments aligned to both state ELA/Math standards and arts education standards — allowing students to demonstrate mastery through the art form itself, not just traditional formats. Assessment design made both sets of standards visible and measurable.

SOLUTION #4:

Teacher Capacity Building in Art Forms & Assessment Literacy

Developed professional learning materials that built teachers' foundational knowledge of the art forms embedded in the curriculum — so they could deliver lessons with confidence and assess student work accurately. Capacity building was embedded directly into the curriculum, making every lesson also an adult learning opportunity.



SOLUTION #5:

Strategic Recommendations for Scale

Delivered formal written recommendations to program leadership for expanding and sustaining the balanced arts-integrated curriculum model — grounded in prior program data, implementation experience, and best practice in early literacy, mathematics, and arts education. Recommendations addressed curriculum expansion, assessment infrastructure, and teacher development pathways.

RESULTS

ELA Growth vs.
State

3X

All-Subject
Growth vs. State

+5%

Independent
Arts Integration

70%

Teacher
Agreement

95%

Key Highlights:

3x ELA Growth — Students in program schools improved in ELA at three times the state average — in the exact subject area and grade band where Christina's balanced arts-integrated curriculum was designed and implemented.

+5% All-Subject Growth — Program schools grew state assessment Mastery+ scores across all subjects at more than double the state growth rate, reflecting curriculum coherence and strong instructional design.

HIGHLIGHTS

Key Highlights:

70% Independent Arts Integration — Teachers independently integrating arts monthly grew from 52% to 70% — a direct indicator that capacity-building embedded in the curriculum and PD materials was working. Teachers weren't just using lessons; they were growing as arts-integrated instructional designers.

95% Teacher Agreement — Nearly all teachers agreed arts integration supports student learning — validating the balanced integration model that grounded every lesson, every assessment, and every professional learning touchpoint Christina designed.



SIGNIFICANCE

This engagement demonstrates what becomes possible when curriculum is designed with full respect for both the art form and the academic content — not one in service of the other, but both in service of the learner. For the youngest students in the program — kindergarteners, first graders, second graders building their first relationship with reading and mathematics — the curriculum Christina designed made learning feel like something worth doing. Joyful, rigorous, and real.

But the deeper impact was on teachers. When curriculum is built to also build the people delivering it — when assessment tools teach teachers how to see student learning differently, when professional learning is embedded in the lesson itself — the program grows stronger every time a teacher opens the materials. That's not just curriculum design. That's capacity building by design.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Balanced arts integration means the art form and academic content carry equal weight — in lesson design, in formative assessment, and in end-of-unit evaluation.
- Assessment literacy is a critical teacher competency — teachers need to know what to look for in both the content and arts dimensions, not just one.
- Capacity building works best when embedded in the curriculum itself, not treated as a separate PD add-on.
- Early learners (K–2) require curriculum designed specifically around early literacy and early math concept development — not adapted from upper-grade models.
- Strategic scaling requires formal recommendations grounded in data — growth without a plan produces inconsistency, not impact.

CLIENT EXPERIENCE

Program outcomes were independently validated through a rigorous mixed-methods evaluation by a third-party global consulting firm. Christina's curriculum, assessment, and capacity-building work for Grades K–2 was a contributing component within these broader program results.

TESTIMONIAL

"What Christina brought to this work was rare — she understood the art forms, she understood early childhood learning, and she understood how to make both work together in a real classroom. The curriculum she designed gave our teachers something they could actually use, and the assessment tools changed how they saw student progress entirely."

— Program Leadership, Arts Education Nonprofit



THANK YOU!

**Inspired by this organization's
success story?**

Get in touch with us to start your
journey toward outstanding results.

*Where strategy meets **heart**—and transformation begins*

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