

PREPARE: Context

Addressing context within the design of a professional development experience supports its relevance to classroom teachers.

DEFINITION: What is Context in an arts integration PD experience?

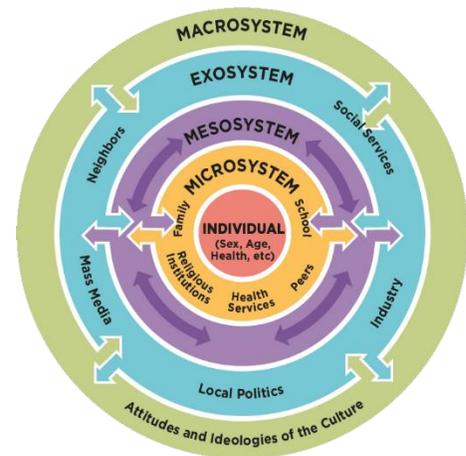
Context is the backstory of professional development experience. To flesh out context of a new situation, a teaching artist might ask: Who are the classroom teachers? Where is the school? What are the students like? What kinds of arts experiences have the teachers and students had? Context includes details about the classroom teachers' interests, their students' interests, the learning environment, prior experiences in content and/or art, and community assets. Context also encompasses information about what is expected of classroom teachers at the school, district, and national level. In short, context includes the relationships individuals have with the arts, their communities and broader society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

CHECKLIST REVIEW

- ✓ How will you learn about the place and the people involved in the professional development experience? (For example, school website, SSIR online reports, discussions with the site coordinator.)
- ✓ Based on what you have learned, what specific choices can you make about the learning targets and activities?

PURPOSE: Why is Context important to an arts integration PD experience?

Addressing context within the design of a professional development experience supports its relevance to classroom teachers who connect learning targets (see Learning Targets) with the things they care about. If teachers see arts integration as a viable way to accomplish one or more of the many tasks they need to accomplish in a school day, they may be more likely to use it. If teachers struggle in a particular area, or with a new initiative, arts integration strategies could potentially provide tools to address those struggles. Finally, contextual information assists the teaching artist in challenging classroom teachers appropriately, connecting them to their prior experiences, and activating their assets.



IN PRACTICE: Context be applied to an arts integration PD experience?

When classroom teachers gather together from multiple grade levels, schools, and experience levels, it can be difficult to create a single, coherent vision of context. In these cases, it may be worthwhile to distribute a survey (see Resources) to gather information from individual teachers. When the professional development serves a group at a single grade level, or at a single school setting, contextual information is more readily available. Teaching artists gain some contextual information vicariously, simply by engaging in the world with classroom teachers and students in mind. Public schools publish a School Status & Improvement Report (SSIR) online annually. These reports include valuable demographic information such as ELL

population, ethnic breakdown, Title I percentages, and performance on state mandated tests. Along with a school's website, these reports can convey a school's vision as well as any special curriculum frameworks they have adopted, such as Habits of Mind (Costa & Kallick, 2008).

Ideally, a site coordinator is available to discuss questions well in advance of a professional development experience, and can provide information about the context for the professional development experience. Some questions a teaching artist might ask to help develop contextual understanding include:

Finally, teaching artists who stay informed about district initiatives are equipped to incorporate the newest language, frameworks, and policies into their facilitation to build classroom teacher capacity. For example, when Common Core State Standards (CCSS) brought new emphasis on evidence, teaching artists began to build the language of evidence into interpretations of artwork. Recently, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes "developing the whole child" as one of its goals, and a PD experience is the perfect place for a classroom teacher to learn how the arts support this goal. A teaching artist makes these connections explicit to support the everyday practice of classroom teachers.

ARTS DISCIPLINE EXAMPLES

DANCE

Questions About the Students. What are the students like? What gets them excited? How often do the students engage in the arts? What are some of the learning challenges the students face? What kind of access do they have to the arts? What are their artistic assets?

DRAMA

Questions About the Classroom Teachers. What are the classroom teachers like? What is the culture of the faculty like? What do they need? How do they think about the arts? How much experience or support have they had with arts integration? What other arts resources are available at the school? What other arts or non-arts PD experiences have classroom teachers been involved in?

MUSIC

Questions About the School. What other arts or non-arts PD experiences have classroom teachers been involved in? What are the school's goals this year? What kinds of curriculum innovations are happening at the school level? How does administration think about the arts? What other arts resources are available at the school? Who are the arts specialists at the school?

VISUAL ARTS

Questions About the Community. What is going on in the broader community? How is that influencing the students at school? What does the community want from the school? What arts resources are available in the community?

VIDEO EXAMPLES

(Online only)