

Expert Feedback on the Fine Arts TEKS

Dr. Janice LaPointe-Crump

Professor emerita – Texas Woman’s University School of the Arts

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Introduction: Overview of dance pedagogy and curriculum – from then to now

As a dance educator whose career spans forty years, I began as a dancer, then teacher in the studio realm. As one of the first dance educators in the Chicago Public Schools, I realized that dance education provides unique learning and expressive opportunities different from other art forms. Dance skills are forged from an athlete’s intense yet safe preparation of the body. The dance curriculum begins with an introduction to the act of creating meaningful movement, a broad mind/body understanding of diverse aesthetic and cultural languages of dance, a foundation in composition that promotes our natural human desire to express and create. It is no surprise that creative dance and modern dance were the foundations of dance in education.

Pedagogy and studio practice were based on the primary authority of the artist choreographer and the canons of the particular genre. Dancers’ bodies were the tools of the artist. Obedience to tradition, to the philosophy of the teacher-artist, to defined pedagogical tools were ultimate values. The technique class was the place where the dancer builds and molds her/his instrument. “A successful dance technique class is one in which most students improve in movement skills (technique) and artistry.”¹

While early writers and dance educators, like John Martin and Doris Humphrey, might describe modern dance as “freedom from prescribed vocabularies . . . without arbitrary restrictions or dictation from any external code,” this was a true only to a degree.² Integrating the work of Eliot Eisner, John Dewey, James Conant, and Howard Gardner, major reforms in dance education came about. Focus shifted from solving problems by applying the prescriptive compositional models. Then along came postmodern era which democratized form and function and began to interweave popular with classic cultural genres. Hierarchical definitions of beauty and excellence have become more contextual and freewheeling. Postmodern innovator, Merce Cunningham, asked dancers to rethink space, time and energy and to focus more intently on the body as the story rather than as the narrator.

Being more personally engaged with movement and aesthetic purpose altered pedagogy, biomechanical and psychological research reorganized our understanding of technique classes, brain theory and multiple intelligences and the introduction of cultural studies which influences the curriculum. Instead of borrowing from other arts, artist-educators developed a practical curriculum and methods that invigorated dance etiquette, movement language, openness to different genres, cultural practices and divergent options, compositional strategies. Questioning at what moment is the student engaged as an artist? Answered Dan Wagoner, “It is important for me to keep my mind on the fact that no matter what the level, it’s art.”³

A fresh look at the student makes us more aware of the desire to create and perform as a universal human characteristic. Another factor is the need to study cultural dance forms from a

¹ Joan Schlaich & Betty DuPont, *The Art of Teaching Dance Technique*, Reston: AAHPERD, 1993, p. xii.

² John Martin, *The Modern Dance* in Frederick R. Rogers (ed.) *Dance: A Basic Educational Technique*. New York: Dance Horizons, 1941, pp. 68-74.

³ Dan Wagoner in Joan Schlaich & Betty DuPont, *The Art of Teaching Dance Technique*, Reston: AAHPERD, 1993, p. 13.

more authentic stance rather than sprinkling lessons with superficial and touristy information. While folk and social dance have been a mainstay for physical education dance programs, representatives of these cultures began to inform the study of dance from a more authentic historical and cultural stance. Today we travel to faraway places, view movies shot on location, see news stories and YouTube vignettes, explore the internet and technology. Televised documentaries and historical fiction provide windows to other times and other worlds.

The arts are a platform for engaging in, sharing, and shaping culture and current issues. To better represent and interpret history and cultures, students work with authentic materials, movements and rhythms, myths and rituals, music, and symbolic designs. Not merely snapshots, the experiential nature of the arts prepare us to better know, appreciate and live in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual world. In this way the arts contribute to the development of Texas.

In other words, we live in a time that values populism and shared experiences. Traditional kodo drumming is performed in cruise ship entertainment; Painters are commissioned to design postage stamps; dancers bounce in commercial advertisements; and so on. The arts curriculum balances folkways and natural techniques with the high polish of the concert hall and museum.

The environment the TEKS should represent is open, accessible, and balanced between replication and mastery of classic literature/methods and liberation/innovation. Elliot Eisner stresses that “environment shapes artistic attitudes and that art education has unique contributions to make to growing children.” In clarifying and updating the TEKS, the environment for learning and the role of the learning community to help students dialogue with their work should be strengthened at each level of study.

Eisner also argues strongly for teaching the critical and aesthetic for deeper understanding and synthesis.⁴ The TEKS are heavily invested in knowledge and analysis along with production. Proscribed performances, memorization of existing literature and an exhibition of accurate/correct use of the body instrument are important but study in the arts should not be limited to these alone.

Not so apparent is what Eisner also finds vital is how internal and external motivation fluctuates with the "ongoingness" of observation, dialogue, reflection and inspiration. At grade 6, Theatre shows how a holistic, an all at oneness, allowing the student to personalize and make practical evaluation/criticism. 117.34. Theatre (c) *compare and contrast ideas and emotions depicted in art, dance, music, and theatre and demonstrate uses of movement, music, or visual elements to enhance classroom dramatization that occurs in the building process to artistry.*

The TEKS synchronize with the National Standards for Arts Education yet only imply the stated vision and mission for students to understand and know “the fullness of our humanity;” to ensure “the healthy development of our children’s minds and spirits;” and to care about the role of the arts “to carry us toward the fullness of our humanity.”⁵

Creativity is both process and product. Section 3, Creative Expression /Performance, stated in 117.56 – 117.59 Dance, Level I - IV, only hints at dance elements leading up to creative independence and an openness to experimentation. If improvisation comes from spontaneous responses, why not define concepts that bring about innovation. At 117.58.Dance, Level III Creative expression/performance concepts privilege external criteria. For example in (A) the student “performs memorized complex movement sequences with rhythmic accuracy in traditional concert dance styles” and (D) “creates dance studies, using original movement, based on theme, variation, and/or chance.”

⁴ P. Bruce Uhrmacher 'Elliot Eisner' in J. A. Palmer (ed.) *Fifty Modern Thinkers on Education. From Piaget to the present*, London: Routledge, 2001, p. 248.

⁵ *National Standards for Arts in Education: What Every Young American Should Know and Be Able to Do in the Arts*, 1994, p. 5.

Should a composition begin with a list of composition elements or with the student plunging into motion, encoded movements, idea and emotion? According to Alma Hawkins, images, both memory images and spontaneous visions, are basic ingredients in the creative process. . . . The emergent synthesis from this process provides the germinal material for choreography.”⁶

Pamela Sofras and Eric Franklin identify several themes that encourage the student to be a sensitive, spontaneous and playful explorer:

- Exploring the ways we move
- Interacting with space, exterior space
- Exploring kinesthetic feelings through metaphors and imagery
- Exploring time and rhythm
- Exploring how force generates movement
- Making connections with the earth
- Exploring upper-body gesture

Stages of the artistic process are defined by A. Storr as “preparation, incubation, inspiration and verification.” Howard Gardner sets the stages slightly differently: “preparation, incubation, discovery, elaboration and validation.”⁷ From spontaneous exploration to inspired production, the verbs situate the learner on a pathway for creating and performing or presenting art that culminates in self awareness and critique.

Whether producing a play, choreographing a duet, composing a concerto, or designing a DART station, the ability to discuss, analyze, defend, describe, negotiate, share, and deal with others are lifelong skills. Working within society allows the artist to be make thrilling contributions to the community.

During the review process, some of the concepts supporting the strands should be evaluated and reworked using Storr’s and Gardner’s stages of artistic process as a template.

Creative Process. Learning the craft, aesthetic, and creative process builds upon ones natural potential and deep feelings, a transformational and transcendent journey. An example of inquiry-based learning, problem solving, compositional techniques, and dance skills should inspire personal expressive qualities as well as represent the intention of the dance and social status.

Contemporary practices in the arts leave spaces for student engagement, relationship building, naturalistic learning techniques, trial and error or just figuring it out. It’s a matter of opening revoicing the concepts to shed light on the personal. Let’s better balance intrinsic with extrinsic motivation by focusing also on what the dancer brings of her or himself to the dance.

Life skills. One vital skill is an ability to set goals and self-manage learning and performance. As pointed out in the University of Pittsburgh’s “Principles of Learning,” natural modes are not clean and direct but often rough and tumble. Self made challenges require us to think on our feet. We must push against the walls of emotion, fear of failure, self-doubt to succeed in our art form. Reasoning, cognizing and retaining, steps to maximize wit and intelligence, are not events tested solely on an objective basis. To make good judgments and to persevere in the face of adversity requires the student to put practice Accountable Talk®.

⁶ Alma Hawkins, *Moving from Within: A New Method of Dance Making*, Pennington, NJ: A Capella Books, 1991, p. 42; Eric Franklin, *Dance Imagery for Technique and Performance*, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1996; Pamela Sofras, *Dance Composition Basics*, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2006.

⁷ Howard Gardner and A. Storr in Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education*, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000, p. 95.

Accountable Talk is a controlled conversation in which students apply disciplinary terminology and aesthetic concepts to discuss, negotiate, and defend issues and ideas. Conversation is a remarkable way to discern functional knowledge that is a kind of synthesis of knowledge, passion, cognition, and perception.

And now to answer the questions.

1. Is a complete and logical development of fine arts concepts followed for each grade level or course? What recommendations do you have for improvement?

The TEKS differentiate how the four art disciplines are based upon unified principles and elements. At each level (grades 9 – 12 in dance) the cognitive is infused with creative thinking, art making with performance mastery, the qualitative with the objective.

Fine arts concepts are seriously represented in TEKS strands: Perception, creative expression/performance, history/cultural heritage, criticism/evaluation. The strands appear equally balanced; one not more important than another. The concepts are spelled out so that non-arts administrators and parents know the rigorous education students experience and what they must achieve to succeed in the courses.

Implicit in the concepts and outcomes language is a developmental, scaffolding framework. The developmental outcomes generally relate logically to the Four Basic Strands. Scaffolding ensures that there are age and level appropriate student expectations for mastering skills, attaining appropriate levels of conditioning, expressing ideas and feelings, exhibiting artistic qualities, composing aptly, performing independently, defining, identifying, comparing and making informed judgments. The concepts demonstrate a focus on student outcomes but only generally address diverse student abilities or alternative solutions.

Not so logically developed is student voice: Empowered student questioning and goal-setting, self-critique and personal voice. By this I mean greater emphasis on the affective domain is needed.

The student should feel the beauty of their individuality and understand how to access, illuminate, and express deep feelings. It might come in a question of what are you dancing about? Why does this movement feel right? As Jeff Slayton says, "I don't want them to try to look like me. I want them to find out how to dance with their bodies."⁸ John Ruskin says it in another way: "All great art is the work of the whole living creature, body and soul, and chiefly of the soul."⁹

Questions to generate a more complete development of concepts might begin with: How do they lead students to sincere and accomplished artistic practice? How does "emotional awareness serve as a force to bind us together in community and enable us to transcend difference?"¹⁰

The concepts for 117.58. Dance, Level III for (1) Perception and (2) Creative expression/performance identify specific bits of learning using active verbs like demonstrate, kinesthetic and spatial awareness; work respectfully, identify designs and images in natural and

⁸ Jeff Slayton in *The Art of Teaching Dance Technique*. AAHPERD, 1993, p. 49.

⁹ Theatre Curriculum Framework, CEDFA, p. 11

¹⁰ bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 114.

constructed environments; communicate using appropriate terminology; perform using basic principles; exhibit strength, flexibility and endurance; and incorporate injury prevention procedures, when exercising, practicing and performing. Is there is an underlying logic to how Perception is separate from Creative Expression and Performance? The edges between these strands appear blurred.

I recommend softening the physical development/conditioning and exercise aspects of (2). It stands to reason that psychomotor training and conditioning the body to perform movement safely are imperatives in dance. The context should not lead one to think that the conditioned and properly aligned body is a goal independent of dancing, creating, and performing.

A. Bring the Curriculum Frameworks into the process of revisioning and rewriting. When overlaid by the Curriculum Frameworks, the TEKS reveal some dated language and limited perspectives. By that I mean, today greater emphasis is given to collaboration, creative process, eclectic and individualized aesthetic forms, cultural and ethnic diversity. Advanced forms of technology and social media are standard research and performance tools in most school districts. Noteworthy is the role of technology as an expressive and performative medium.

B. Dance – the missing link in K – 8. Dance is absent during the formative years of physical development and rhythmic and lyrical coordination. With all the research that supports the use of physical movement to develop the body and mind . . . at a time when children most freely use their bodies to communicate, explore concepts, understand the world, and embody integrate the imagination with reality, it doesn't make sense for dance to remain excluded.

As a result, it is difficult to answer #1 fully, to compare the complete and logical development for Levels 1 – 4 for art, theatre and music when the dance courses begin at a different point of entry. Level 1 is based on the sequential learning from earlier years of instruction. Level 1 Dance is an introductory course.

Students have few opportunities in K – 8 unless a classroom or physical education teacher includes creative movement, folk/social dances, or rhythmic games that support academic instruction in another subject. Dance elements appear somewhat in the elementary theatre and music TEKS. Since Fine Arts instruction is mandated throughout the curriculum, shouldn't students have the opportunity to experience all four arts?

I cannot be forceful enough on this issue and use this pulpit to urge the TEA to move forward with steps to include dance in all levels of fine arts instruction. Representatives from the two Texas dance education associations (TAHPERD and TDEA) drafted TEKS for K – 8 that mirror the standards for the other three arts. The State Board of Education approval process should be initiated to adopt K – 8 TEKS dance standards and for the State of Texas to certify dance educators for all-level instruction.

C. Examine each strand. Effective and standard across the art disciplines, the strands synchronize with the discipline-based art education principles articulated by Elliot Eisner and other educational reformers. Championing the arts because they bring about a deeper understanding of the world, Eisner feels that artists experience the world deeply and interact actively since the arts move learning beyond what *was* to what will *become*. I suggest that the TEKS review place each strand alongside the core belief statements¹¹ for arts education. Here are a set of imperatives to initiate improvement.

¹¹ Same speech.

1. *Flexible purposing.* Instead of laying out a course with a fixed ending point, the artist meanders, beginning with an intention but allowing the process to recommend alternatives.

2. *Qualitative relationships and making judgments.* In the act of making art, composers and dancers manipulate qualitative relationships that satisfy a general idea or feeling. The artist needs to experience the qualitative relationships that bubble to the surface within the work as it's forming, then make judgments about them and make necessary changes. Judgments are made on the basis of somatic information, a feeling of rightness and a sense of closure. In other words, in teaching creative process and composition and performance artistry, students must experience the natural give and take between internal and external value finding.

3. *Inseparable and inseparable nature of form and content.* What a person weaves is intertwined with the choice of yarn and how the work is constructed.

4. *Alternative projects; not everything knowable can be articulated in written form.* Here Eisner recognizes that cognitive intelligence is not necessarily best represented in written or spoken forms. He quotes Michael Polenky's simple assertion that we all know more than we can say. We can do more than we can explain. Years ago John Dewey said this in a different way: "While science states meaning, the arts express meaning."

5. *Thinking within the medium.* Of course the arts are specialized forms of communication and embodied expression that capitalize on our nature as humans to see, to form, to hear, to feel, to move, to enact, to play. While the TEKS emphasize common elements, unabashedly the concepts must be fixed on the distinctive qualities and forms of the medium. "We must learn to think within the medium."

Innovative and comprehensive in their day, today we know that the strands no longer mirror contemporary learning theories or completely represent best practices. Contemporary principles of learning are more apparent in the Curriculum Frameworks (CEDFA website) for each art form. More powerfully than the TEKS, the Frameworks indicate a flow among the arts and across diverse cultural forms and practices. They correct for limited listing of cognitive concepts and eliminate unreasonable SEs. Furthermore the Frameworks distinguish learning practices like collaboration, cooperative negotiation, ongoing assessments, portfolio development. They foster the value of learning communities and personal value finding and encourage the use of current technologies in the studio and for creative projects. In Dance, video dance, choreographing on the computer stand alongside video and sound editing. Digital portfolios incorporating video, photography, design and text is now standard.

A more active form of thinking, accommodating diverse abilities and individual learning styles, encourages free experimentation, creative and critical thinking, inquiry-based learning, and personal expression.

D. Improve the Strands – Focus on Perception.

Encompassing cognition and sensation, examine how the core ideas are applied. What does perception mean in the arts? Consistently apply the term across the disciplines. Establish a consensus about the four strands. Perception is, according to Jean Ayres, rooted in the

neurological processes that organize “sensations from one’s own body and from the environment and makes it possible to use the body effectively.”¹² Perception should emphasize sensory stimuli involving the whole body. Working in synchrony, the student brings embodied experience all at once into developing skills, knowledge, appreciation. Perception integrates sensation and cognition. For example:

117.60. Music, Level I seems to prioritize acquisition of technical skills and discipline centered analysis: “The student describes and analyzes musical sound and demonstrates musical artistry.” Identify, define, and compare and contrast are the operative verbs.

117.56. Dance, Level I focuses more on somatic experiences and information. (B) “The student develops an awareness of the body’s movement, using sensory information while dancing.”

117.64. Theatre, Level I seems to have a better understanding of the category: The student “develops concepts about self, human relationships, and the environment using elements of drama and conventions of theatre.” Cognitive skills of analysis and a working knowledge of disciplinary terminology are interwoven with somatic experience.

Backed by active embodied experiences, perception “enhances students’ ability to be attuned positively to the enormous number of sensory stimuli that make of a life of adventure and fulfillment.”¹³ Therefore this strand should be rethought and scaffolded at every grade level.

In Art and Theatre I found a more thoughtful consistency and development of the cognition and sensory aspects of Perception.

In Art “Students rely on their perceptions of the environment, developed through increasing visual awareness and sensitivity to surroundings, memory, imagination and life experiences” This definitional description is actualized in Art and Theatre. In 117.32. Art, Grade 6 the student develops and organizes ideas from the environment.

Perception is enhanced through visual awareness and sensitivity to surroundings, memory, imagination and life experience. Themes from direct observation, personal experience, and traditional events are interwoven with the experiential, analysis to form generalizations about the interdependence of the art elements.

In Theatre, I found that . . .

117.34. Grade 6 includes an array of attributes that forms a creative student-centered curriculum. The student is an active agent in the world. Characterization is based on sensory and emotional recall, body awareness and spatial perceptions. The student responds freely to sounds, music, images, and the written word, incorporating movement. Emotions and ideas are expressed, using interpretive movements and dialogue. Life experience is imitated and synthesized in dramatic play.

In 117.64. Level I continues a holistic, comprehensive approach to access perception through sensory rich experiences. Perceptual awareness is the basis for making sense of the world.

¹² Jean Ayres, *Sensory Integration and the Child*, 1979/1989, p. 11

¹³ Hopper, Kenneth. (2002): “Community-wide Music Education at the Levine School.” In: Carol Fineberg (Ed.), *Planning an Arts-Centered School*, New York: The Dana Foundation, p. 54.

Students improvise, use emotional and sensory recall, develop warm-up techniques, employ stage movement to express thoughts, feelings and actions. We develop voice and diction to express thoughts and feelings; define and give examples of theatrical conventions; and analyze what they have learned.

DANCE is not addressed at the K – 8 levels, a situation that impoverishes students and the fine arts as a whole field.

Self-discovery, experimentation, free expression, should be represented. Contemporary black choreographer, Alonzo King, asserts, “The most essential thing I can say about teaching is that things have to proceed from within.”¹⁴

E. Decrease silo separation; increase collaboration among the arts. The TEKS reveal only limited cross-disciplinary relationships. Dance, for one thing, is implied most strongly in Theatre and not so much in Music or Art. Theatre elements are not apparent in Dance I – IV. It’s as though the arts have no relationship one to another, but are entirely separate. I recommend that greater continuity among the arts at each grade level and cooperative learning projects, such as exploration of a central theme or production, bring the arts together. In the real world, museums and galleries produce thematic conversations by engaging dancers to interpret art works while musicians improvise on the dynamics and rhythms they see in the art and in the dancing. In other cases, opera, dance and musical theatre are examples of cooperative and collaborative creative process.

2. Have the correct vocabulary and terminology been used? Where changes may be made to increase accuracy and/or clarity?

Throughout the TEKS, language, vocabulary and terminology are correctly and consistently applied.

But there is no doubt that the emphasis on an objective evaluative voice is skewed to a limited number of intelligences and therefore requires reworking and refinement. Reliance on analytical thinking tends to encourage a kind of intellectual distance that diminishes the value of affective elements like emotion and recognition of the ‘ah-hah’ moment. In terms of lifelong learning, the artificiality of some of the language suggests that extrinsic motivation is more important than intrinsic motivation.

To some extent, the terminology represents an era of educational theory that emphasized taxonomy of analytical and critical thinking over creative process and personal voice. Generally, student-centered goal setting and monitoring of student progress should be supported by flexibility to use natural and diverse learning styles, collaboration and peer evaluation, and thematic inquiry.

At times the vocabulary tends to distance us from the actual, the humanity of art and learning. Artificial jargon is off-putting and precious, too narrowly representing what really happens when the student connects and synthesizes psychomotor, cognitive and affective experience.

¹⁴ Kimberly Gdula, “Alonzo King: The Royal Treatment. *Dance Teacher*, (October, 2001): p. 58. Quoted in Brenda McCutchen, *Teaching Dance as Art in Education*, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Let's look at the four standards for quality arts education described by Elliot Eisner: Artistic experience, the mind/body connection, connoisseurship, and criticism. External performance is balanced with increasingly skilled sensitivity and accuracy but honors the inner journey. That journey is personal as the student discovers his/her way to refined performance.

Eisner's work awakened the cognitive aspects of learning in the arts where here-to-for an emotional response or rote repetition of skills were more important. In the early days of dance education, reflective assignments and free improvisation were not as important as the student memorizing, absorbing, and reiterating what the teacher-artist or the master dance artist did or said. Dancers learned about the *other* (master artist's style and the teacher's aesthetic), not about self.

Recommendation. In the review process, each concept should be evaluated to diminish artificial terms over plain language, to make each concept more transparent and clear. Terminology, rhetoric, and vocabulary should represent Best Practices. Avoid over preciousness and make allowances for cohesion across the arts disciplines to increase understanding and acceptance by our colleagues and administrators, educators and parents.

A final thought. In some ways the terminology and vocabulary represent Euro-American aesthetics and practices. To better represent the increasingly diverse ethnicities and cultures making up Texas, take into account different world views, beliefs, cultural forms and practices. As difficult as this may be, the TEKS will become a framework that effectively opens the door to understanding and enacting differing cultural voices with a level of authenticity. The delicacy of this recommendation is not lost on the reviewer. Nevertheless as the language and terminology of the TEKS are revisited, design a learning process that respects unique cultural aesthetics, history, and artistic practices alongside our noble traditions and classic works to enhance cross-cultural appreciation. An example for applying guiding principles to effectively study another culture is found in Historical/Cultural Heritage 117.59. Dance, Level IV the student "researches and creates a project illustrating an understanding of significant dance events or historical figures in appropriate social, historical and cultural contexts." Interweaving first-hand experience with embodied knowledge, aesthetic awareness, and attributes forged by personal research and performance is an exciting culmination to four levels of Dance.

What is missing? Has the student experienced the art form from the point of view of that culture or has the framework prioritized a Euro-American style of learning that emphasizes rational intellectual knowledge over the personal, emotional or spiritual. Focusing primarily on the ability to compare our culture with another, students may remain aloof, studying superficially by looking inside the culture instead of being inside of it. Student curiosity and a student-centered inquiry should encourage immersion into the unique learning style, aesthetic, and virtuosity.

Much improved is the scope of student interaction with culture or historical style found in the CEDFA Curriculum Framework for Dance. A cultural and/or historical study intertwines student emotions, feelings, and experience and implies openness to student decision making. Original thinking, informed by personal research and diverse forms of presentation, empower student choice, responsibility and critique. Open conversations dealing with multiple viewpoints about what is studied and synthesized include the lived experiences of the teacher and the student.

Let's take another look at the potential for improved terminology and vocabulary:

Given responsibility for personalizing the cultural/historical inquiry, the student should be responsible for forming a plan and timeline. Vocabulary should not limit the inquiry but imply diverse means and forms of expression. The format of presentations may vary but are pre-

approved by the teacher. Students may choose a traditional dance to deconstruct and create an original piece representing its tradition.¹⁵

3. Are there specific areas that need to be updated or reworked?

Emphasis in the TEKS on top-down instructional platforms and evaluation stifles curiosity, goal-setting, personal voice and satisfaction. We know that the arts power learning. Reworking and updating the TEKS should involve eight themes:

- [1] Update and intensify student expectations in relation to current theory and practices.
- [2] Enhance scaffolding, a stair-step progressive study of diverse cultural and historical traditions and practices that influence contemporary aesthetic and values.
- [3] Rework concepts to increase interdisciplinary connections, communities of learning that bridge diverse disciplines.
- [4] Use the Curriculum Frameworks to evaluate, update, and rework the TEKS and SEs to better blend the two. Internalize the general features shared by the four arts and empower learning in other disciplines. The concepts should reveal the unique ways we work as artists, lessen the reliance on jargon.
- [5] Open up the TEKS by adding another strand, Creative Process to portray such teachable attributes as authenticity, imagination, intuition, intention, invention, originality.
- [5] Increase learning opportunities with/in technology. Add alternative enrichment courses specialized to the aesthetic and expressive needs of each art form.
- [6] Increase student participation and ownership by their setting goals and appropriately accounting for process and performance through peer discussions and self-critiques.
- [7] Allow space for messy processes using intuition, “ah-hah” moments, hunches, trial and error.

Art gives meaning to life.

The student should have opportunities to explore and experiment with diverse tools and methods . . . to play. *Imagination is more valuable than science.*

Jorgé Guerra-Castro.

Albert Einstein

117.2 - K.2.B Art, kindergarten states that the child is expected to “arrange forms intuitively to create artworks.” At all levels intuition should remain an expectation. For most artists and scientists, for that matter, intuition and hunches profoundly partners with the intellect to solve problems and explore multiple solutions. Discounting affective processes by relying on more objective analysis shrouds a major tool in negotiating daily life, decision-making, and in the artistic/creative process.

In real life artists set goals, monitor progress and decide how best to achieve their intentions. As a life skill, self-assessment should be developed in all courses through various methods, such as ongoing evaluation, inquiry based questions, technology assisted reports/presentations, open-

¹⁵ Dance Curriculum Framework, CEDFA, uncopyrighted, p. 24.

ended questions based on aesthetic criteria, performance feedback, and peer responses. The student dialogues with his/her thoughts, impressions, and intentions engaging them while dancing, composing and writing outlines a unique approach to grasping what the student has learned. Accountable Talk® is another tool for self-managing learning: Applying understandings, discipline-based terminologies, and awareness in conversations about performances and projects.

The CEDFA Curriculum Frameworks represent current best practices, thus should be used in a comparative examination of expectations framed by each strand. By comparing and contrasting language and tools, the process of reworking and updating will be more robust.

Furthermore, arts educators should work in teams to engage with each other in more authentic, and creative ways. Through enrichment and insight, as realized during the 2011 CEDFA Arts Integration for Success in Math and Science project, learning themes and lessons across disciplines are shared. Integration and collaboration lend themselves to cooperative and interactive learning. Greater transparency and more open exchange among the arts and other academic disciplines will enhance the role of the arts in everyday life.

4. Are the fine arts concept/content statements grade-level appropriate? Are important concepts missing at any grade level?

The Fine Arts in Texas are oriented toward performance and critical thinking in production/designing, rehearsal/forming, performance/interpreting, historical/cultural contextualizing, expressing/evaluating. The arts exemplify active learning. With focused attention developed at every level, from K to grade 12 – rudimentary to advanced, the student cannot remain a passive vessel. Building the instrument and learning to use tools effectively in progressive steps that build aesthetic knowledge through expressing ideas, values, community and emotion is enhanced by specialization in ones preferred mode of inquiry and expression. Students are introduced to careers so that they may begin to consider their future opportunities.

Overall, student expectations are at grade level and consistent with child development principles. The content statements are scaffolded to demonstrate incremental changes from one grade level to the next. In the four dance courses, the student grows from teacher-directed activities at Level I to largely student-initiated learning with greater independence. Leadership and peer involvement are emphasized in Level IV.

I recommend that arts educators study each others strands to achieve greater cohesion among the arts.

In most cases, there is a clear development from Dance Level I to Level IV. The language and expectations are appropriate and advance in sophistication as students progress. What is lacking in Dance is a sense of overall perspective about Dance as an art form. The strand for 117.56 Dance, Level I (A) Historical/Cultural Heritage reads: “Students analyze the characteristics of dances from several diverse cultures.” Contrast this descriptive statement about Historical/Cultural Heritage with concepts for Art and Theatre in which attention to the benefits of this kind of study is central. 117.52. Art, Level I (A): Students “compare and contrast historical and contemporary styles, identifying general themes and trends.” and 117.64. Theatre, Level I: (A) Students “portray theatre as a reflection of life in particular times, places, and cultures.”

As part of the revision process, arts educators should sit together to parse the aim of each strand so that an appropriate degree of cohesion is established among the arts. Dance writers should ease back on detailed assignments to lead teachers towards overall values and the mission of the art form. While Dance seems particular and specific, Art, for example, is more open-ended and general so that the teachers and students may fulfill the objectives with a some artistic freedom.

What is missing? In some cases the Dance concepts slide away from key dance elements to be useful to other aims. At times Dance mixes practices that limit the ability to know, apply and appreciate dance concepts. A case in point is the (2) Creative Expression / Performance strand: "The student applies body sciences and fitness principles to dance." Taking up 1/5 of the expectations, we are whisked away from the central issues and relationships between the body and the art to achieve physical goals that are not directly connected to the performative nature of dance. One example is 117.58, Dance, Level III (C): "exhibit strength, flexibility and endurance in training and performances."

In the Perception strand, dance "develops perceptual thinking and movement abilities to promote understanding of self and others and allow them to interact effectively in the community." Again, the concept spirals away from essential dance elements and leads to an understanding of dance through social attributes of good citizenship within the community. Within Perception (cognition and sensation) citizenship is a byproduct not a goal. Effective interaction in a community is important but it is misplaced in this category; perhaps add a social relations strand..

In another statement about the Dance strands, "by mastering movement principles and skills, students develop self-discipline and healthy bodies that move expressively, efficiently, and safely through space and time with controlled energy." Economy of means is absent. Too many words leads to confusion. Compare the Dance statement with Art. 117.53, Level I: The student applies "perceptions, developed through acute visual awareness and sensitivity to surroundings, memory, imagination, and life experiences, as a source for creating artworks." The Art concepts more clearly focus on what students do and to what end . . . art making. More cleanly are psychomotor, cognitive and affective domains integrated into the phrases.

How then might the dance elements in the TEKS be more robustly portrayed?

The core of this art form is movement and motion in time and space to fulfill an expressive intention. Idea and emotion transcend a physical presentation. The TEKS define the body as an instrument of learning, expressing and presenting dance elements. Brenda McCutchen asserts: "Make movement the medium for learning as often as possible so concepts are embodied and practiced."¹⁶ Mastery of dance concepts and movements should be the result of "a multisensory integration of the dance elements."¹⁷

Enhance developmental cohesion. The strands should be conceptualized in statements that reflect generally the physiological, social, sensory abilities and psychological development of students at that grade level. That concepts indicate that the student dialogues with the strand should be reflected in the outcome expectations. The number of strands could be increased to account for concepts that are now misplaced and muddy or are absent altogether.

Also, the TEKS concepts should be measured by how well they exemplify diverse genres, practices and aesthetics within differing cultural perspectives.

¹⁶Brenda Pugh McCutchen, *Teaching Dance as Art in Education*, Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2006 p. 104.

¹⁷ McCutchen, 2006, p. 127.

What else is missing? Creative process; in-depth cultural immersion practices; student-centered relational experiences and leadership; production skills in dance; more student-centered evaluation and writing tasks; directed dialogues among the arts; interaction with working artists and community; discussion of body issues and safe practices for health and wellbeing, in-depth examination of dance careers, internships, and arts related careers; storytelling in dance; and options for learning in social genres like ballroom, hiphop, jazz dance, folklorico, tap, musical theatre and so forth.

The concepts should be augmented to address current brain theories and sensory integration, developing performance artistry from within the dancer's life and spiritual feelings, aesthetics and the creative processes as suggested by Eric Franklin, Sandra Minton, Pamela Sofras and inspired by the work and ideas of contemporary artists.

5. Are the Student Expectations (SEs) clear and specific?

The Dance TEKS, Levels I – IV, express student expectations using key words that represent the domains based on Bloom's theory of learning. The domains are remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

Student Expectations are generally clear and exact. However vertical and horizontal analysis reveals occasional unevenness and inconsistencies that should be corrected. Within each course, some SE's do not elaborate the Strand effectively and completely. The review team is counseled to think in terms of the vision of dance and the totality of the emerging student artist as constructed in the Strands and Student Expectations.

When specific skills are listed, they tend to fence in the area with a checklist mentality. Experimentation and flexibility is closes off. Generalizing the concepts will lead to greater accommodation, accessibility and encourage diversity by exploring innovative content and methods.

In Dance a third Creative Expression/Performance category should be added to differentiate acts of moving and expressing from creative process, composition, choreography, personal artistry, and performance. Application of fitness principles in (2) should be reframed to establish more than physical and wellness aims. True. Body science, somatics, spiritual connections, and conditioning are important to the rigorous physical and mechanical training that safely develops and nurtures a strong, lithe body. Conditioning and health-related principles should be framed to serve the art form. The dancer learns to form then maintain the body/mind instrument. Only in theatre is the body and voice of the actor represented as fully as Dance.

In Dance I (117.56. Level I) the SEs are specific, consistent in their intent, and clearly spell out various abilities encompassing each strand. For Perception: The student develops "an awareness of the body's movement, using sensory information while dancing" by (A) "demonstrating basic kinesthetic and spatial awareness with others; (B) developing sensitivity toward others when working in groups; (C) expressing ideas and emotions through movement; and (D) interpreting images found in the environment through movement."

When we move to Dance II (117.57. Level II), internal relationships among concepts do not flow as easily. Sensory rich dance elements are spliced with social and ethical practices. Students (A) demonstrate a developing kinesthetic and spatial awareness. This doesn't synchronize with; (B) demonstrating respect for others when working in groups. However (C) demonstrate effectively

the connections between emotions and movement; and (D) identify details in movement in natural and constructed environments bring clarity and specificity to understanding Perception.

What happens when Dance is compared with another art form? Dance II (117.57. Level II) with Theatre II (117.65. Level II). For theatre, Perception “develops concept about self, human relationships, and the environment, using elements of drama and conventions of theatre. Upon this foundation the SE’s expect students to (A) practice warm-up techniques; (B) employ stage movement and pantomime consistently; (C) demonstrate effective voice and diction; (D) analyze dramatic structure and genre; (E) identify examples of theatrical conventions in theatre, film, television, and electronic media; and (F) relate the interdependence of all theatrical elements.” The depth with which Perception is decoded promotes a broad examination of various human and performance aspects represented in theatre productions and classes.

In Dance student expectations are not nearly so deeply described. A broader range of dance elements and embodied act of dancing should be included. Beginning with Perception, what must one sense, develop and cognize in order to dance well and to gain a deep appreciation for the art form?

6. Is the subject area aligned horizontally and vertically?

Although at times slightly misaligned, the arts courses show a high level of vertical and horizontal alignment. In Dance, developing a wider range of key words/verbs will better scaffold introductory, simple concepts to more complex, sophisticated student expectations.

I am impressed by the care for consistency within each dance course and among the dance courses. Scaffolding progressive experiences and expectations takes the student up the scale of complexity and intensity to take on greater responsibility for setting goals, researching projects, and engaging in critique.

Over the years since the TEKS were prepared and approved, arts education has experienced a renaissance through recognition by the Department of Education, grants to support research and scholarship on curriculum and arts-centered schools and programs. In Texas the Center for Development of Fine Arts has promoted interdisciplinary curricula and many arts organizations effectively lobbied for art education as a requirement for graduation.

Because the TEKS have been used for a period of years, it makes sense that the usefulness of some of the SEs would be less representative of what actually occurs than others. Art demonstrates good horizontal alignment in the Perception strand because operational words change to depict progressive understanding in cognitive abilities. The writing team invested a lot in making sure that the subject was aligned horizontally and vertically.

In Art:117.32 Grade 6, 117.33 Grade 7, and 117.38 Grade 8, Perception is deconstructed with noticeable changes at each level. In grade 6, (B), students analyze and form generalizations about the interdependence of art elements such as, using art vocabulary appropriately.” In Grade 7 (B) is a more general expectation. Students “compare and contrast the use of art elements and principles, using vocabulary accurately.” Then in Grade 8 (B) students “define a variety of concepts directly related to the art elements and principles, using vocabulary accurately.”

In Dance the Perception strand reveals an uneven alignment. Take Dance 117.56 Level I, 117.57 Level II, 117.58 Level III and 117.59 Level IV. While concepts flow evenly from one level to the next, there is not sufficient difference between Level II and III.

For Perception, in Level I (B) students “develop sensitivity toward others when working in groups. In Level II (B) students “demonstrate respect for others when working in groups. In Level III (B) students “work respectfully with others. And Level IV students “lead peers with understanding and respect.”

I caution against over reliance on a limited list of key verbs which disrupts internal reliability because similar words cover a variety of concepts.

Dance courses show a strong connection vertically. At Level III, the ability to deal effectively with diverse repertory, variety and complex decision making is implied in plural forms and multiple aims. In 1-C students “demonstrate effectively the connection between emotions and ideas and movement.” 2-C Students “exhibit strength, flexibility, and endurance in training and performances.” 3-A Students “perform memorized complex movement sequences with rhythmic accuracy in traditional concert dance styles.” 4-A Students “describe similarities and differences in steps, styles, and traditions in dances from various cultures and social periods. And 5-A students “compare characteristics and qualities of a variety of dances.”

Diminish a Silo separation among the arts. Each art developed TEKS with little evidence that shared goals, concepts or skills were explored cooperatively. An exception is Theatre strands and concepts. Generally, to enhance horizontal and vertical stability, it is time to further develop key natural alignments to show how art, dance, music and theatre are connected. This can be initiated through a series of questions to differentiate commonalities and unique attributes. Once attributes are identified, the strands should be reworked to include meaningful interdisciplinary learning. In this way, the arts become intermeshed, a fabric that strengthens the arts education paradigm and unifies our voice to administrators, legislators/SBOE, parents and the community.

Where this makes sense, strive to connect concepts vertically and horizontally to decrease artificial silo separation.

7. Should consideration be given toward adding other courses at the high school level to provide more options for students?

The short answer is Yes.

1. In Dance, the art form remains generalized with no additional courses. As found in music, art, and theatre, a choice of courses increases student interest because specialized opportunities provide for student choice. Optional courses may better reflect the ethnicity of a community. They allow for intense artistic inquiry and an integration or collaboration among the arts. Specialized courses encourage flexibility, more in-depth instruction and achievement.

2. Dialoguing across disciplines grounds students not only in their preferred discipline but provides a broad practical knowledge about the arts. In this way the student becomes comfortable working across disciplines with other artists and engaging in creating and presenting collaborative projects, theater art, and improvisational theater.

I suggest developing the following courses:

A. Practical: Musical Theatre Production. An elective course integrating fine arts students in a culminating showcase project. The course requires students to have completed level II in their respective art discipline.

Presently a musical theatre productions brings together and introduces the art form to students from diverse disciplines. Such projects are exciting and I have been involved in local student productions. A musical asks students and teachers to bond together and commit to the shared performance goal that requires skill and performance excellence through experiencing problem solving, rehearsal, discovering personal and share meaning, and staging an elaborate, complex production. The show introduces a composite theatrical literature, serviceable music, evocative movement and popular history. Success rests upon the care, commitment, and a solid work ethic of every person involved. Students and teachers engage and strive on a more level playing field since the student is not an instrument but actively develops the production and works with real life challenges and decisions. The property exists and the goal is to envision, memorize, design, choreograph, direct, construct, and replicate the work.

There are extraordinary opportunities to blend the strands, work together and develop skills outside the student's primary interest area and comfort zone.

B. Collaboration among the Arts. Integrated Creativity in the Arts. Students may opt for this course after completing Level I in their respective foundation. The aim of this course is not upon replicating and interpreting existing literature of songs, music, plays or choreography. It is action learning through group processes and relational experiences to more freely and playfully access the imagination to create, collaborative, and produce cooperative constructions. Students wrestle with issues, challenging questions, puzzles, and passion to test their core knowledge through collegial interaction.

Years ago Paul Baker, founder of the Dallas Theater Center and the Booker T. Washington HSPVA, Dallas, TX curriculum, introduced his already renowned course based on Laban movement analysis concepts, mentoring, self-motivation with managed learning similar to what the University of Pittsburgh terms Accountable Talk®.

Integration of Abilities is a course which opens possibilities of the imagination and leads to creative growth. Dancers, musicians/singers, actors/technicians, and artists gather to solve nutty, off the wall problems and puzzles. The problem might ask the group to tackle something ridiculous and funny, a socio-politically edgy issue or a life changing moment in history or time. The questions can be simple or profound. Open-ended problems have no forgone solutions except that a presentation of the culminating project is prepared and performed. Negotiating, collaborating and defending ideas requires the one to be responsible for honing communication skills, drilling and memorizing material. Thinking and feeling merge and all are encouraged to take pride in the shared outcome.

C. Creative Theater. Creative theater encompasses a start to finish timeline that involves multi-disciplinary dialogues. Students from different disciplines prepare and produce original performative art. Simple, universal themes launch projects that bring to bear previous knowledge, opinions, and personal history. Students improvise, write, compose, choreograph, design, and interpret a culminating project. The final innovative event should exploit the latest video/computer animation, video and audio editing, be performed wherever the group wishes, and so on.

Sustained community effort is needed. Students self-manage learning and evaluate progress to achieve closure and complete their guided discovery goals. Guided discovery involves working

with core knowledge to reason and problem solve by wrestling within the team to apply storyboarding, research and composition by integrating storytelling or mythmaking, film or animation, script writing and choreography, directing, designing, and constructing sets, costumes and lighting. Most exciting it this as a student-led project involving cooperative learning processes and a unique, contemporary paradigm for student achievement.

D. Offer diverse elective courses in Dance. To equal the diversity in theatre, music and visual art, Dance should offer alternative courses to more completely represent concert, theatrical and social genres and divergent creative practices. Much as band is different from show choir and painting from photography, offering a variety of elective dance courses should begin after completing Level I and/or Level II. The student should have choice in how to pursue excellence in a preferred genre. Here are suggestions: Ballet; Contemporary Modern; Folklorico; Tap and Jazz; Social and Ballroom dance; Composition and Choreography; Dance Production - Costume and Lighting Design; Musical Theatre; dance management.

8. Do you have any other suggestions for ways in which the fine arts TEKS can be improved?

1. Relate the TEKS to standards from other states, to the recent TEA Arts Curriculum Frameworks, and to the National Standards for Arts Education.
2. Evaluate the TEKS against current arts education theories, educational reform scholarship, and best practices in the arts and the vision for the arts in American education.
3. Inform the process by inviting artist-educators representing diverse arts traditions and national voices.
4. Add a strand and develop Student Expectations to focus on creative process, student voice and personal artistry.

Current practices in each of the arts as well as art education as a whole should be considered to ensure that the improving the TEKS synchronize with current, research-based principles and theories. The Curriculum Guidelines can be the foundation for improving, updating, and revising the TEKS.

A. Invite selected native artists to inform the process and SEs. Representing diverse Texas cultures, arts, and communities, individual artists should contribute to the forming of effective student outcomes or SEs. Texas abounds with folk and ethnic artist-educators. Thus, respect for other cultural aesthetics will enable the student to access and honor their heritage by expressing from their cultural roots. The student learns to be a more flexible thinker, non-heirarchical in honoring other times and peoples.¹⁸ Fluency in alternative art practices cannot be framed from the way we've always worked, but by providing disciplined ways to be deeply involved and empathize with other world views. Finding personal connections among history, culture, technique, meaning, and expression introduces the student to the interpretive yet well researched project that artists take up. Better understood are universal and particular purposes of art in society.

¹⁸ Kimberly Staley, *Educating Through Dance: A Multicultural Theoretical Framework*, unpublished dissertation, 1993. Janice LaPointe-Crump, "Dance Education for a Changing World," *Designs for Art in Education*, January 1991.

B. Infuse critical thinking and creative process across the curriculum. Generalize concepts to make them more open-ended for teachers to teach to the needs and abilities of the student. Although performed with precision and mastery, replicating classic works, such as a pointe solo, a string quartet, a Picasso painting, or a scene from a play constitute only one part of the educational mission. Let me share a quote introducing the Art Curriculum Framework: “Rethinking art instruction involves a shift from thinking of art strictly as a production-oriented curricular area for talented students to one that encourages the development of creative problem solving and critical thinking in all students. Rethinking art instruction also involves careful examination of some current practices in art education.”¹⁹

C. Social/cultural abilities and personal artistry are a missing affective link. If the soul of education is to guide the student to demonstrate rigor and excellence in his/her creative and formal abilities, then how these achievements strengthen the spirit through effective interpersonal connections, compassion, joy and appreciation should be part of the TEKS. In the arts, the student joins a learning community. As supported by a body of research, when part of a group, the student is responsible not only for her/himself, but also to the group. We know this from team sports, the military, non-profit organizations, and in arts collectives. Learning to contribute, share positive reinforcement, deal with stress, commit, values, questions, and invests in others frames the humanity of art.

All of this should be brought to bear in reframing and improving the arts standards in Texas education.

¹⁹ New Art Programs for Texas section of the *Art Curriculum Framework*, p. 19