

FOREWORD

# Taking AIM, Reaching the Mark



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It is the experiment of our lifetimes, so we had better get it right. Thank you, Project AIM, for giving us this book to sharpen the AIM of our work—work which we believe can recreate the future.

In the hundred-plus years that the arts have held a formal place in American schools, arts educators have worked toward the same two basic goals: teaching young people to be able to create works of art, and building their capacity to enter into, decode, and learn from works of art made by others. These are worthy goals. Our team of players, arts teachers, teaching artists and other contributors, have worked diligently, heroically—usually in constrained and ungenerous circumstances—to bring generations of young hearts and minds into the rich learning which the arts provide. The arts-learning community believes in this work as a mission to ensure that every young person has his/her chance—an almost-sacred birthright—to inculcate the ancient wisdom and perennial vitality and relevance of the arts.

And now, as the arts continue the endless argument for a better place at the school curriculum table—more hours, more resources, more opportunity to transform lives, classroom communities, and school culture—the great experiment has begun. That great experiment is *Arts Integration*. There is something new under the arts learning sun. The gamble is that by bringing learning in the arts (*through* the arts) together with other subject matters, students can go further in *both* areas, and students' lives and classroom culture can be transformed in the process.

Much of the early experimentation I see misses the mark—the arts get used as a handmaiden to pep up a boring curriculum (but a curriculum that gets tested and so holds priority), without really engaging and teaching arts-essentials like personal voice, brainstorming, making creative choices and reflecting on their impact. Or, conversely, a dynamic arts project, full of good arts learning, is connected to subject matter in a literal way, but doesn't really spark students' curiosity to delve into that subject matter as raw material for their personal expression or self-motivated exploration. Project AIM consistently hits the mark, and diligently studies the following: what the mark is, how the various players can talk about it and work together to expand the target, and what constitutes successful teaching and learning practice.

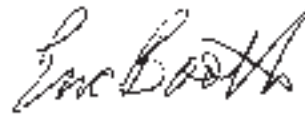
Project AIM has been rigorously dedicated to exploring the right balance. I have followed and been inspired by their work because they have been so careful, so wise, and so brave in applying themselves to the foundation work our whole field needs in order to grow.

The work presented in these pages is so important partly because it strengthens the case that the arts have earned more time in the chrono-economy that is the hardest currency in American schools. But even more, these essays, together, make the bigger case that the arts belong at the very center of schools. There are two things every revolution requires: a lot of dialogue, and examples of what liberated life looks like. My deepest thanks to the dedicated and innovative people who undertook the Project AIM experiments (and to their enlightened funders), and to our colleagues whose high-quality writing in these pages makes it possible for us all to learn from their work. This volume guides our next steps toward bringing arts learning to the center of schooling—where it belongs.

Project AIM's Art Integration Learning Spiral brings together, researches, articulates and shares the best of what our field knows in order to take the next step: the goals and practices we must use, the ways to build classroom communities that become arts environments, the ways to grow strong partnerships, and the essential processes like embedding big ideas, revising, reflecting, presenting and assessing.

The guidance from these essays builds on what we know from other experimentation around the country, such as in A+ Schools, Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE), the Empire State Partnerships, and 150 other bold and thoughtful experiments across the country from Maine to Hawaii. This is how our field can finally grow toward its transformative potential. What I particularly love about the learning shared in this volume is the way that a fierce dedication to artistic processes and language informs the whole endeavor. Thank you, Project AIM, for your vision and guidance—thank you readers for learning from their good work.

The word *culture* has long been used in arts education, largely as a justification for bringing kids into art. In the 21st century the word has connotations of elitism and privilege that belie the equity and access issues that lie at the heart of Project AIM. The original etymological meaning of the word *culture* is closer to agriculture, more like the agar-agar in the Petri dish you dealt with in ninth-grade science class than the highbrow trappings of \$200 night at the opera. The ancient meaning of *culture is the medium in which we grow*, and *AIMprint* provides us a guidebook for creating that healthy medium in 21st century schools. *AIMprint* helps us redefine the culture of schools through the culture of the arts, to grow a new generation of students with art at the heart of its learning, and thus the rest of their lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Booth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "B".