Community Engagement Lab

Vermont Creative Schools Initiative Evaluation Blueprint

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide a blueprint for the evaluation of the Vermont Creative Schools Initiative (CSI) of the Community Engagement Lab (CEL) and to create an evaluation tool that offers insight into the impact and efficacy of community-school collaborations focused on artistry and creativity. In 2015-16, the Creative Schools Initiative will represent a collaboration of 30 classroom teachers and 5 teaching artists across Vermont. Seeking to strengthen arts education and creative engagement, and strengthen student engagement, achievement, and aspirations, the initiative seeks to develop, implement, and disseminate a research-based program of professional development (PD) that equips teachers to infuse core academic instruction with artistry and creativity-focused educational experiences to support student learning (see Figure 1).
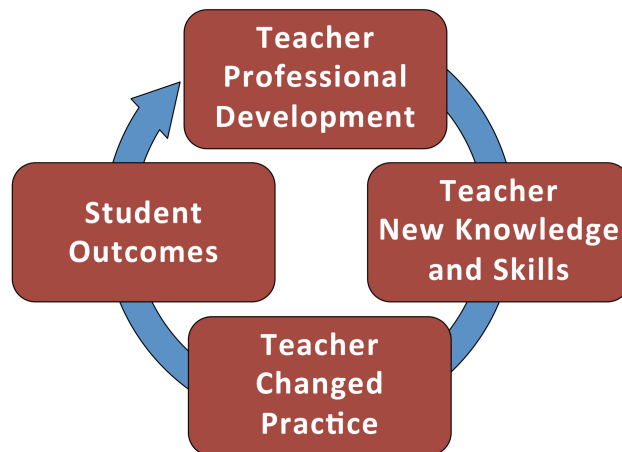

Figure 1: Simple Professional Development Logic Model

The CSI includes a summer and fall planning/training intensive on cross-content integration (Boix-Mansilla, Miller, & Gardner, 2000) as well as in-classroom coaching and collaboration during the spring teaching artists' residencies. Throughout the initiative, teaching artists partner with school-based teams of classroom teachers from different content areas to integrate standards-based artistic and creativity infused learning experiences into the core academic curriculum (Booth, 2014). The formation and implementation of these working teams are guided by an empirically supported teaching and learning pedagogy referred to as the artist-in-residency model (Burnaford, 2007, pg. 3; Rabkin, Reynolds, Hedberg, & Shelby, 2011).

The general goal of the initiative is to enhance teaching and learning through the integration of artistry and creativity and to build sustainable relationships between community partners with schools, infusing them with resources to support students' engagement and achievement which is especially important for those in low-income areas who often lack resources and instruction needed for creative work (Catterall, 2009).

In Vermont this work is particularly important as new legislation (Act 77) in which new Educational Quality Standards (EQS) were enacted has ushered in three big shifts each of which

the CSI addresses (Vermont Agency of Education, 2014). First, new standards were codified including the development of Transferrable Skills that include clear and effective communication, self-direction, creative and practical problem-solving, responsible and involved citizenship, and informed and integrative thinking. Second, Vermont schools must create flexible pathways aligned with the new Educational Quality Standards by implementing Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) especially at the middle and secondary levels. The third shift is a move from courses and Carnegie units to demonstrated proficiency by implementing a system of Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements (PBGR). School districts in the state of Vermont and indeed much of the country are now faced with the challenge of providing all students with access to the kinds of learning experiences that meet these goals. The CSI's general goal is to support teachers creating the kinds of learning experiences that address these shifts.

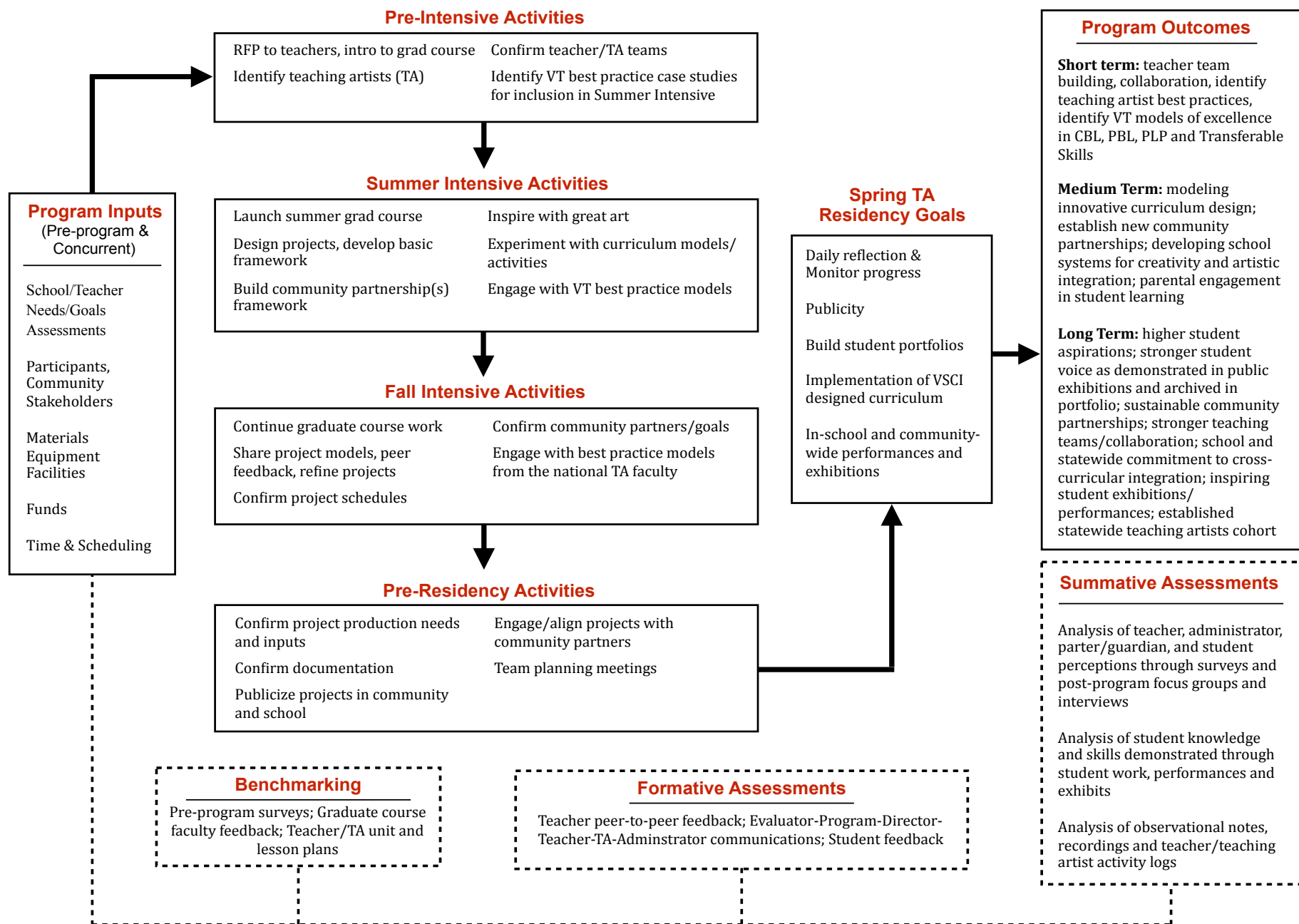This general goal suggests the following questions which will guide the evaluation design:

1. In what ways and to what extent do teachers design, develop, and implement the Creative Schools Initiative into curricula and instruction?
2. To what degree do the statewide professional development workshops and individualized training in support of teaching artist residencies prepare teachers to integrate arts learning into their instructional strategies focusing especially on:
   a. teacher capacity and motivation towards working collaboratively and creatively, and
   b. teacher capacity to develop interdisciplinary links between different areas of learning
   c. teacher capacity to implement personalized learning experiences directed toward proficiency based requirements especially the Vermont Transferrable Skills
3. Among schools within the Creative Schools Initiative, how does engagement and achievement vary with the extent of program implementation considering the following areas:
   a. Student achievement in subjects and depth of understanding of subject matter where integrated curricular lessons are used.
   b. Student self-monitoring of their own learning including ongoing assessment of progress towards standards-based learning outcomes.
   c. Student engagement including attendance and in-class participation.
   d. Student transferrable skills including capacity for creative and practical problem-solving, clear and effective communication, self-direction, responsible and involved citizenship, and informed and integrative thinking.
   e. Student understanding of the beliefs and practices embedded in artistic activities.
   f. Student motivation to engage in artistic activities outside school hours.
4. In what ways are sustainable relationships formed and maintained among school students, administrators, and staff and community members as a result of the CSI considering especially
   a. Parent satisfaction with students' educational experiences.
   b. School climate.

       c.   Community and civic engagement.

5. What implications (strengths and weaknesses) do the evaluation findings have for refining artist-in-residence professional development, program implementation, and ongoing monitoring and support?

Conceptual Framework / Collective Impact

        The theoretical foundation as reported by the CEL partners is guided by a collective impact strategy to advance teaching and learning through sustainable capacity building within and across multiple organizations as well as on the level of the individual practitioner (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Figure 2 represents a complete logic model of the CSI and the role that evaluation and assessment will play in the project.

Figure 2: VCSI Logic Model

Pre-Intensive Activities

RFP to teachers, intro to grad course | Confirm teacher/TA teams

Identify teaching artists (TA) | Identify VT best practice case studies for inclusion in Summer Intensive

Program Inputs
(Pre-program & Concurrent)

School/Teacher Needs/Goals Assessments

Participants, Community Stakeholders

Materials Equipment Facilities

Funds

Time & Scheduling

Summer Intensive Activities

Launch summer grad course | Inspire with great art

Design projects, develop basic framework | Experiment with curriculum models/ activities

Build community partnership(s) framework | Engage with VT best practice models

Spring TA Residency Goals

Daily reflection & Monitor progress

Publicity

Build student portfolios

Implementation of VSCI designed curriculum

In-school and community-wide performances and exhibitions

Fall Intensive Activities

Continue graduate course work | Confirm community partners/goals

Share project models, peer feedback, refine projects | Engage with best practice models from the national TA faculty

Confirm project schedules

Program Outcomes

Short term: teacher team building, collaboration, identify teaching artist best practices, identify VT models of excellence in CBL, PBL, PLP and Transferable Skills

Medium Term: modeling innovative curriculum design; establish new community partnerships; developing school systems for creativity and artistic integration; parental engagement in student learning

Long Term: higher student aspirations; stronger student voice as demonstrated in public exhibitions and archived in portfolio; sustainable community partnerships; stronger teaching teams/collaboration; school and statewide commitment to cross-curricular integration; inspiring student exhibitions/ performances; established statewide teaching artists cohort

Pre-Residency Activities

Confirm project production needs and inputs | Engage/align projects with community partners

Confirm documentation | Team planning meetings

Publicize projects in community and school

Summative Assessments

Analysis of teacher, administrator, parter/guardian, and student perceptions through surveys and post-program focus groups and interviews

Analysis of student knowledge and skills demonstrated through student work, performances and exhibits

Analysis of observational notes, recordings and teacher/teaching artist activity logs

Benchmarking

Pre-program surveys; Graduate course faculty feedback; Teacher/TA unit and lesson plans

Formative Assessments

Teacher peer-to-peer feedback; Evaluator-Program-Director-Teacher-TA-Adminstrator communications; Student feedback

The intervention itself builds stakeholders and momentum across the intensives, residencies, and final statewide exhibitions and performances incorporating whole communities into the educational experiences. Learning across schools and contexts allows for needed inputs to be delivered to support teachers and students in their self-designed projects. The evaluation provides benchmarks and formative responses during the intervention as well as summative reports for year-to-year improvements.

First, the evaluation investigates the impact of PD on teacher practices and student outcomes (Desimone, 2011). Previous empirical research suggests that effective PD will lead to improved teacher knowledge and practice, which will in turn improve student engagement and learning outcomes (Yoon, Duncan, Lee et al., 2007). The PD features examined in this study are the six features of high-quality PD identified in prior research: form, focus on content, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation (Garet, Porter, Desimone et al., 2001). This project also involves working partnerships embedded within the school so this evaluation will also consider the CSI as a job-embedded professional development (VTAOE, 2011, pg. 25-26). Special albeit not mutually exclusive features of successful job-embedded professional development include sustained collaboration, opportunities to learn within the work schedule, and facilitator skills (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan et al., 2010).

Second, the evaluation investigates the nature of arts integration into the core academic curriculum for teacher practice. The CSI project recognizes the vital role of the arts in a students' education, and does not seek to devalue the importance of core curriculum itself. However, the CSI also places at the center of its mission the inter-disciplinarity of knowledge and highlights creative learning experiences and products that integrate and synthesize that knowledge. The Vermont Transferrable Skills are examples of this kind of integration that focus on broad competencies that are relevant across work, social, and civic experiences. A short example might help: consider how teachers create assignments for students that will help them dig deeply into an authentic community issue such as pollution or hunger. Often teachers defer to tasks that ask for analysis in which students are required to take an issue apart, or compare and contrast it, or break it down into its component pieces. What educators often struggle with is to help students to integrate knowledge from various sources and synthesize it in new and creative ways.

In this context, the CSI proposes professional development opportunities to support teachers who create learning opportunities for students to "integrate knowledge and modes of thinking from two or more disciplines in order to create products, solve problems, and offer explanations of the world around them (Boix Mansilla, Miller, and Gardner, 2000, pg. 18). Boix Mansilla and her colleagues (2000, pg. 26) suggest that good curriculum integration requires an emphasis on knowledge use, careful consideration of each discipline involved, and appropriate interaction between or among the disciplines. Thus, teachers who participate in the CSI will be encouraged and supported "to create projects and activities rather than subjects" in which "the disciplines of knowledge come into play as resources from which to draw within the context of the theme and related issues and activities" (Beane, 1995, pg. 619).

Although there is budding growth on the development of curriculum integration across the typical core disciplines of science, math, history, and English, one area of fruitful collaboration has long been in the integration of the arts. Teachers who can integrate creativity and the arts into the core curriculum are able to express publicly the efficacy of integrating creativity and artistry for improved student learning and as a method for reforming k-12 education for more equitable outcomes in general. Moreover, educators who integrate the arts successfully envision their identity as a competent teacher of creativity and as a creative person or artist themselves. They have the capacity of advocate for resources necessary for the integration of the arts into core curriculum and the skills to make a learning environment conducive to creative thinking and production. Finally, educators who integrate the arts into the core subject areas express a keen understanding of what it means to be proficient in creative and artistic thinking.

Broadly speaking, arts integration connects content and skills from the arts with core academic subjects with the intent of promoting learning in and across multiple disciplines (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006; Ruppert & Habel, 2011; Dwyer, 2011). To make this connection, the CSI connects working artists and teacher teams to develop long term partnerships (Booth, 2011). Many of the school-based teams include district-level or school-level arts educators as well (Booth, 2013). Linking classroom teachers with working teaching artist and arts educators has proven results across multiple settings including schools with limited resources. Previous research (Rabkin and Redmond, 2004) described by Ludwig and her colleagues (2014, pg. 3) suggests six key features of good arts integration education including that the teacher-artist team link an art form and an academic discipline, the art form is central to the experience and assessment, the content includes material related in meaningful and direct ways to students' experiences, units have a balanced focus on academic content, academic skills, arts skills, and arts content, units include basic skills and higher-order skills, and units usually culminate with an artistic product that demonstrates student learning of content and skills and contributes to the public culture of the school community. In short, the second part of the evaluation is to examine the nature of good curriculum integration especially integration that occurs within cross-disciplinary settings among teachers, artists, and art educators.

Third, the evaluation looks at student learning and achievements that are unlikely to occur without arts integration into the core academic curriculum. The CSI is not just an arts integration project. New and innovative ways of thinking about creativity and forms of artistry especially within the digital age (see especially Peppler, 2013 and Sawyer, 2014) that suggest that creativity and digital learning are outcomes for investigation including such personal attributes or mindsets including autonomy, flexibility, a preference for complexity, openness to experience, sensitivity, playfulness, tolerance of ambiguity, risk-taking and risk-tolerance, intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, wide interests and curiosity (Villalba, 2009). Recent work studying the Adobe Youth Voices project (http://youthvoices.adobe.com/) suggest measures of creativity for students by examining the notion of "creative confidence" which is defined as

"the ability to harness creative skills to solve problems" and committed to measuring five dimensions of creative confidence: self-expression – the ability to express a point of view; ideation – the ability to ideate and innovate; collaboration – the ability to engage others; flexibility – the ability to adapt; and persistence – the ability to stick with a challenge through completion" (Mwalimu, 2014, pg. 10).

Further, the CSI includes the notion of design thinking especially as it relates to the digital art forms applied to real-life events and situations. Design thinking education often includes problem solving as the application of creativity, functionality, critical analysis, collaboration, and inventiveness (Lozner, 2013). Thus, this evaluation will address the ways that students identify with and demonstrate dispositions that are the essential characteristics of creativity.

Finally, the evaluation examines the nature and impact of the CSI on the development of school-community sustainable relationships. The CSI uses collaborative professional partnerships between members of the community and the school members to address real-life issues and authentic problems. The CSI also develops and promotes portfolio showings, public performances, and other exhibitions for the development to create venues that draws people together, foster trust between participants, provide experiences of collective efficacy and civic engagement, promotes a source of pride for residents in a community, provide an experience for participants to learn technical and interpersonal skills, increase the scope of individuals' social networks, and provide an experience to enhance participating organization's capacities to establish ties and learn how to work, consult and coordinate with other organizations in the community (Guetzkow, 2002, pgs. 6-7). Using a problems-based learning pedagogy that focuses on applied creative work across disciplines, CSI provides multiple opportunities for interactions with faculty, peers, and members of the surrounding community which have been shown to be effective in producing strong student learning (Wirkala & Kuhn, 2011). Additional substantive research suggests that community connections through pedagogies like service learning and community social action are also associated with academic and social benefits (Billig, 2004).

Methodology

The evaluation of the CSI will use a longitudinal, multi-method design that includes quantitative, qualitative, and survey data collection and analysis to study the implementation and benefits of the CSI state-wide. Following Guskey (2001), the evaluation will provide both formative and summative assessments of the CSI process and impact by examining participants' reactions, participants' learning, organizational support and change, participants' use of new knowledge and skills, and student learning outcomes.

The evaluation of the CSI used a multi-method design that included quantitative, qualitative, and survey data collection and analysis to study the implementation of the projects. The evaluation included teacher and artist activity logs, interviews, focus groups, surveys, video analysis, and analysis of student work.

Participants. The Creative Schools Initiative aims to serve students and schools in all regions of Vermont. An application process will determine participants in the program. Exact

school districts, schools, and locations will be dependent upon the teachers who sign up to participate in the project but special emphasis will be placed on recruiting schools who serve rural populations that have a high percentage of low-income students. Between 30% and 70% of the students in rural school districts across the state are eligible for free or reduced lunch (see Vermont Agency of Education, 2016). Regardless of location the following sets of participants will be solicited to participate in the evaluation.

A) Pre-K-High School Classroom Teachers in Vermont Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Schools
B) Artists/Designers in Residence
C) Facilitators/Faculty of the CSI programs
D) Students of Classroom Teachers participating in CSI
E) Parents/Guardians of Students of Classroom Teachers participating in CSI
F) School Administrators
G) Community members who participate in culminating exhibitions/events

Data Collection Methods. The evaluation will not only include measures from multiple stakeholders and sources, but will also use multiple approaches to understand impact of the CSI. We employ mixed methods in this study and combine the results from quantitative surveys with observations and interviews with participants across sites. This combined methodological approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989) provides an account of how people understand the origins, progression, and outcomes of program involvement. Multiple forms of data allow researchers to study the constructs of interest from several perspectives. This evaluation will approach the CSI project by providing formative feedback of ongoing responses and summative impact approaches. In addition to multiple stakeholders and purposes for evaluation, the study uses multiple research designs to gather data from for analysis. This evaluation is a non-experimental impact study in that it will look at changes in the indicators of outcomes among program participants or groups but will not include comparison groups. To do so, we will examine pre- and post-participation surveys for students, teachers, and teaching artists. Focus groups and interviews will ask students, teachers, and teaching artists to compare perceptions of their understandings, knowledge, and skills before and after the project.

During observations and video-analysis, the principal investigator will assume the role of participant-observer (Miles & Huberman, 1984), and take detailed field notes to capture a thick description of events and social interactions. These notes will record students and teachers interacting in classroom activities. Researchers will record notes on activities and participant comments. Researchers will only record first names in field notes. All names and identifying information will be altered for all published or presented materials. These field notes will be enhanced through analytic memos to record emerging themes and provide a reflexive account of the research process (Walsh, 1998).

Students and educators will be recruited for participation in the interview component of the research study through a general announcement at regular school activities. Interviews and focus groups will typically occur before or after a regular school days and class periods.

Interviews will be one-to-one with the researcher and participant. Interviews will likely be semi-private, in the corner of the program meeting room, or in the hallway and last between 20 and 25 minutes. The interviews will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription and may be video recorded with parental consent and student assent.

A set of voluntary confidential surveys will be administered by the researchers. The surveys will be conducted in the following manner:

- An announcement.
- Students, teachers, administrators, and community members will then either respond to survey questions, and turn in the survey to the provided collection box, or simply return blank surveys to the collection box with sealed envelopes.
- Surveys will take approximately 20-25 minutes.

For students, surveys will take place before the project begins in November and will require 20 to 25 minutes of school time. Post-invention surveys will occur in May after the culminating performances which require approximately 20-25 minutes of instructional time. For the interview/focus group components of the study, participating individuals will be asked to share learning experiences during a semi-structured interviews. Each interview/focus group will last approximately 20-25 minutes. The total time required will be from 1-2 hours for students.

Parents will receive post-intervention surveys that will occur in May. These surveys will be sent via email or through classroom teachers and will require 20 to 25 minutes worth of time. Parents/guardians will turn in the survey to the provided collection box, or simply return blank surveys to the collection box with sealed envelopes.

Educators and Teaching Artists will receive surveys that will take place before the project begins in the summer and will require 20 to 25 minutes of personal time. Post-invention surveys will occur in May after the culminating performances which require approximately 20-25 minutes of personal time. For the interview/focus group component of the study, participating individuals will be asked to share learning experiences during a semi-structured interviews and focus groups during out-of-school time hours. Data collection during the implementation will include bi-monthly activity logs that will take place between the planning intensive in the summer through the spring residencies. During the residency educators and teaching artists will complete bi-weekly activity logs. Completion of a single activity log will require 15-30 minutes of personal time.

Community members who attend culminating performances will receive surveys that will require 5-10 minutes of personal time.

Measures. Instruments used in the evaluation include:

- Educator Pre- and Post-Intervention Surveys, Post-Intervention Interview Protocols, and Activity Logs.
- Teaching Artist Pre- and Post-Intervention Surveys and Post-Intervention Interview Protocol.
- Student Pre- and Post-Intervention Surveys and Post-Intervention Interview Protocol.
- School Administrator Post-Intervention Survey.
- Parent/Guardian Post-Intervention Survey.

- Community Member Post-Intervention Survey.
    Data Analysis.

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all the quantitative items on the post-program surveys. Graphs and tables were prepared to illustrate the combined results for all items. Field notes will be a part of the observational record and will be used to situate themes and patterns identified in the analysis of focus group data and open-ended questions in the post-program surveys (Seale, 1998). We asked focus group attendees directly about their perceptions of the CSI (i.e., creativity, arts integration, educational impact, and transferrable skills), and also will use open prompts to allow participants to independently consider the influences on their experiences. Codes will be created for preexisting theoretical constructs, and open codes originated through onsite observation and analysis of collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). These codes will be applied to all field notes, interviews, survey responses, student work, and focus group transcriptions.

Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure the rights and welfare of all human subjects including vulnerable populations in this project such as children are protected during their participation, the evaluator submitted and received Certificate of Approval from the Champlain College Institutional Review Board on May 7th, 2015 for all assessment activities. In addition, no attempt will be made to make comparisons of any kind either within schools or among them and all data for this study will be reported at the aggregate level (i.e., parents, administrators, teachers, students, etc.).

Assessment Development

The executive director of the Vermont Community Engagement Lab reached out to Champlain College to design the evaluation components and complete the evaluation. Since the intended outcome of this project involves changes in individual classroom pedagogy, student learning, and community engagement through participation in the CSI, Champlain College and the Division of Education and Human Studies were qualified to provide the evaluation design.

John Stroup, Associate Professor of Education at Champlain College, was invited to provide guidance on the evaluation of the CSI after the project was designed in May, 2014. On November 1, 2014, a preliminary meeting was held at Champlain College to discuss the project and explore potential participation in the evaluation components. The researchers' role was to build an evaluation blueprint and execute an objective evaluation congruent with the theoretical frameworks of the CSI. An initial draft of the evaluation design was subsequently prepared by the researcher and informally approved by an Assessment Advisory Team. The Community Engagement Lab Executive Director facilitated a meeting of the Creative Schools Initiative Assessment Advisory Team on June 2nd, 2015.

The first evaluation was completed in April, 2016. The first evaluation report will be completed in August, 2016. The evaluation design will be reviewed and revised each year in an attempt to drive the research design to higher levels of rigorous evaluation (Vermont Agency of Education, 2011, pg. 30-31).

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