

Session 8 Transcript: Karen Crocco

- Hello and welcome. My name is Dr. Karen Crocco. I'm so pleased to be spending this time with you and sharing my experiences and ideas with you regarding building a foundation for your Arts Integration or STEAM Initiative in your school or district. I'm a career music educator, a band director and I'm currently overseeing a federally funded grant focused on professional development for Arts educators and integration of the Arts and Sciences at St. Lucie Public Schools in St. Lucie County, Florida. The educators participating in this grant and I have learned so much on our journey in Arts Integration, which has been a little more than two years up to this point that I wanted to share the lessons learned and some of the elements I wish we would have known prior to beginning our project. I'm hoping that through our lived experiences and lessons, you can avoid some of the challenges we have experienced or at the very least be prepared for them. I chose this, perhaps unusual title for this session because in trying to build an Arts Initiative in my district. I sometimes feel like I'm in a building that may topple down at any moment. The walls are secure, everyone in the building is doing what they're supposed to be doing but because I was unaware of what was required I did not pour the proper foundation. Combined footing is a term borrowed from construction. Generally speaking, it's used from the capacity the supporting soil cannot hold the structure or when a combination footings are needed to meet the requirements of the structure. When our project began, I was so unaware that I did not even consider what our initiative was being built on nor what elements were required. Look at this word cloud. What words in here jump out at you as you think about your Arts Integration or STEAM Initiative? I think about how many elements of this word cloud were not even on my radar and how unaware I was of the condition of the foundation on which our project was being built. We were having a wonderful project. Teachers are learning and students are benefiting but I certainly think, more attention to the foundation of this project would have gone a long way in generating a system wide buy-in and understanding. Who will help pour your foundation for your project? When St. Lucie Public Schools won this grant, honestly, it was a surprise. With the exception of the grant coordinator, there was very little consideration regarding who would be a part of this team. I was not a part of the team. Now that the team is in place, we are working hard to shore up the foundation but I would encourage anyone who's building an initiative to really consider their team before they start to build. Take a moment right now, jot down who you think you might already have in your circle of influence that could be part of your construction crew. Let me briefly introduce our project before going on. St. Lucie Public Schools was fortunate enough to win a \$1.5 million, four year PDAE grant, to fund the St. Lucie Public Schools teaching project. Winning the grant meant that we could serve half of the Arts educators in our district who opted to participate. The goals of the grant are to help Arts educators improve their professional skills, to learn about Arts Integration and begin integrating their Arts discipline with Science. It's a great project doing wonderful things but it was not as easy as I would have thought. One of the reasons I think combined footing works so well for building an Arts Integration or STEAM Initiative is because it includes such a wide variety of stakeholders. Like a combined footing, we have to serve and support all the stakeholders involved. Consider these stakeholders, where's

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their current level of development and interest in these areas? When we started our project two and a half years ago, we were so focused on teachers and building interest that we really didn't consider the other stakeholders. I didn't realize also how hard it was gonna be to get teachers interested in anything that sounded like more work, no matter the benefit to them or the children. Even though I was caught off-guard by the lack of district-wide teacher interest, if I would have a chance to do this again, I think I would invest more time with each of the other stakeholders before approaching teachers. I have learned that teachers value what their principals value and principals value what their superintendent and/or district leaders value. As we grow on this project, I think this is one of the areas that I'm still pouring a lot of energy into. I've never been met with resistance by district or school leaders, but their lack of understanding and other achievement goals have created some serious barriers that I had not considered. I also think it's very important to understand how your district works before you start pouring the foundation. Coming out of a classroom, I had not considered that. I think that our district operated like this and still kind of does, like a hierarchy. I would offer however, that for successful STEAM or Arts Integration Initiative, it needs to work more like this, a system. Because of the confusion and lack of understanding surrounding Arts Integration and STEAM, I wish we could've spent more time educating all stakeholders. This definition is from the Institute of Arts Integration and STEAM. As you can read, it's clear and specific and specifies that it is an approach to learning and teaching, not a curriculum. However, even after two years, understanding Arts Integration and creating lessons that serve both content areas equally, is still an area of focus in our project and understanding Arts Integration and how it serves students is not as clear with any of the stakeholders as I would like it to be. Agreeing on what Arts Integration is, was not a hard hurdle to clear. Surprisingly, however, identifying the markers of success was a huge stumbling block for us. Many Arts educators do not measure student growth or even consider qualitative and quantitative markers of success. It took a lot of guided exploration with Arts teachers to help them understand that measuring students' skills and identifying markers of success would not stifle creativity or the joy of art. Once participants no longer cling to the idea of measuring success, it was important to share markers with all stakeholders to help educate leaders about the importance of measuring success in the Art disciplines, as well as the core content areas that they were being paired with and what teachers and students required from district and building leaders to meet those markers. The next few slides are going to dive right into some concrete hurdles. These are all things that we have faced at their identified levels. I hope you find this information helpful as you think about how it would apply to your district. I'm placing the school and district together because depending on where you're trying to start your initiative, the needs and hurdles were very similar. I want to be very, very clear. Generating buy-in has been a challenge in this district and at the schools. I think administrators know very little about Arts Integration and are often afraid of the Arts. So, in trying to educate them on the value of connecting Arts and core content, they have very little prior knowledge and are afraid Arts Integration might take students and teachers away from testing success. Philosophically, buy-in from the school or district is crucial.

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Also as crucial is financial support. Financial support can show up in terms of teacher training and planning time, it could also include travel or bringing an expert in on Arts Integration or STEAM. In addition to money, and perhaps more important is the investment of time. It is important that teachers feel supportive with the time they need to lay the footing required. Each school and educator may require different levels of support to be ready for implementation of your initiative. Based on our experience, a year for laying this foundation is a minimum requirement. Specifically thinking about the school, I'd like to share these few lessons that we've learned. All educators participating in your project or in the initiative need to see and understand the value that their school leaders place on Arts Integration. I've seen that the level of teacher interest is strongly correlated to the level of principal interest. At the secondary level, one of the biggest hurdles that we have found in implementing our initiative, is the schedule. Ideas and solutions are beyond the scope of this session but it has been our experience that Arts Integration at the secondary level is hard to implement because students in Art classes during any given period share a few core content teachers in another period. Additionally, students in core content classes do not have shared arts backgrounds. Finally, a school-based hurdle that brushes up against scheduling is time demands on teachers. Depending on who you are including in your initiative, a team, a grade level or the whole school, what responsibilities or time demands do these teachers have that can be alleviated to free up some time for your initiative? One of the biggest issues we have found with our educators is that they do not believe that they have the time needed to rethink concepts and to collaborate, plan and engage with other Arts teachers, let alone with core content teachers in building Arts Integrated lessons. It is paramount for buy-in, that teachers understand that Arts Integration is a standards-based instruction and assessment approach to teaching and learning. In our project, buy-in from Arts educators was pretty easy because it was an opt-in project. We currently have 20 Arts educators. Remember, we could support 45. So, in my thoughts, buy-in was an obstacle for many of our other district Arts educators. When asked why they weren't participating, their answers usually ran along the lines of, "Why would I want to do more work?" or "No way, I'm just happy staying in my room and doing my own thing." Additionally, our participants had to recruit their own Science collaborator. Each participant was turned down by at least one Science teacher in their building. Most were turned down by more and a few had asked for administrative help to get the collaborating teacher. I would recommend doing perhaps role-playing or troubleshooting on all the stakeholders on all of these fronts. Remember, not everyone is going to be as excited about this initiative as you are. And thinking about how we rolled out our project and of obstacles that I didn't even see coming, I think for me, the element that I had not considered at all when developing this project and I would stress that next to buy-in, I think it should be one of the most important considerations, is the abilities of participating teachers. For the majority of our participants, their understanding of an ability to write standards-based, goal oriented measurable outcome-based lessons, was weak to non-existent. And unfortunately for Arts educators, that's not quite unusual. Some of our participants had poor classroom management skills as well as poor time

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management and planning skills. Participants in our project have come a long way in each of these areas, it's truly rewarding and exciting to see. However, as we did not build in a planning year, the educators were put under a lot of stress trying to up their game in their own discipline by learning about Arts Integration. That would certainly be something I think that I would deal with if I had the chance to do it over again. If you are not an Arts educator, I think it's important for you to consider that most Arts educators in the building are one-of's. So, they're not used to having collaborators. Some might be welcome to it, some not so much. Additionally, most Arts courses are not tested courses, meaning standardized tests. So, very often teachers of those courses do not often receive the scrutiny, supervision and sometimes support of the teachers in tested courses. We have spent a lot of time and resources getting Arts educators to think about and execute planning, instruction and assessment that is linked to state standards and is measurable. Finally, but certainly not least, in laying the foundation for an AI or STEAM Initiative are the students. Even with the limited application of Arts Integration lessons this far in our study, the evidence for learning is wonderful, certainly notable. So far, these are the few things that we have learned about what our students think about Arts Integration. In addition to needing a little more set up time for Arts Integration and STEAM lessons, we have learned that all principles, tools and attention given to creating a traditional engaging safe instructional space for student learning certainly applies to Arts Integration. Teachers have also reported that students felt like they learned more from their AI lessons because outcomes and criteria were clearly stated before the projects began. Students express that, quote, "Sometimes projects feel like busy work, but this AI lesson was fun and everyone participated." End quote. So, for project-based learning, understanding the criteria and setting that up ahead of time was really important for our participants. Those are the main things that I see as hurdles that I would like to tip you off to as you get to get ready to build your own Arts Integration or STEAM Initiative. I don't know what will happen with our district as a whole following the end of our project, but I can see the participants and their science buddies possibly creating a grassroots movement for Arts Integration. Remember, Arts Integration is an approach to teaching and learning. It doesn't have to be a huge rollout from the school or district. I mentioned this to see how far our project will reach and the impact it will have on professional growth with the teachers who aren't in our project. I'm confident that student learning will be enhanced because with careful planning and skilled execution that's what happens with Arts Integration and STEAM. Even if your district does not look like mine, I hope there are ideas percolating for you. I cannot guess how Arts Integration or STEAM will be received in your unique situation, but I do know that you cannot pour this foundation on your own and the larger your circle of influence, the greater your potential for success. Take a moment if you would to look at the handout. I would have loved to have made this a 3D handout. This handout shares the information presented today, but it's very linear. I would like to have presented it as a mobile because everything interacts with each other and the speed of one part moving influences how the other moves. Try to remember that as you refer to this handout, when developing your own checklist and plans to grow your initiative. An Arts Integration initiative can be ignited from

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anywhere in your district. But for it to be an initiative beyond an individual classroom, there must be time spent building a foundation that could support the quality teaching and learning required for Arts Integration and STEAM. I hope sharing what we've learned on our building of an Arts Integration Initiative makes your building process easier and your initiative stronger. We already see how Arts Integration benefits teachers and students and see a lot of potential for growth in our district. Thank you for your time. If you would like further conversation, please feel free to contact me at the email listed. We can talk about what you're doing. I can give you more insight to what we've done but sometimes it's just nice to have the ear of someone who understands what you're trying to build.