

January 2015

From the Director of Fine Arts:

Welcome to the Fine Arts page of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Website. My name is Tom Tobias. On January 5, 2015 I began working for DESE as the Director of Fine Arts. Essentially, my role as director is to help teachers and districts develop more effective instruction in music, theater, dance and visual art. For the past 32 years I have been actively engaged as a visual arts teacher, and have taught students from elementary school through graduate level in college. My goal is to actively seek ways to discover common ground among our disciplines and to unite us in such a way that our instruction has the potential to become seamlessly cross-curricular.

Actually we have a number of things in common, and we share some obligations. You have probably heard it said that all of us are language arts teachers. Of course that is true, and I want to help us to more effectively use standards to creatively and imaginatively increase engagement in the arts and literacy among our students. It does not stop there though. The arts disciplines share a structure of elements and principles that overlap. The more we familiarize ourselves with those connections, the more unified our instruction becomes. Knowledge and fluency within and across our disciplines also leads to greater opportunities for our students to develop cultural literacy and increased awareness of beauty around us and meaning in our lives.

During my lunch break today, I stepped out of my office building in search of a metaphor to drive my point home. I found it in our State Capitol Building here in Jefferson City. The seat of our state government is an imposing edifice that communicates symbolically the ancient democratic principles of the Greeks and Romans. Its central plan and the circular rotunda reflect the potential of perfection that is just always out of our reach. There was a group of people singing gospel songs in the rotunda and in the House chamber there was the drama of the swearing in of the new legislators. Within the half hour of my visit there was the potential for a unit of instruction that touches all of our disciplines. As fine arts specialists we are always on the look out to find new and innovative ideas for instruction that will capture the hearts and minds of our students. We are in the business of creating life-long learners. Exploring the arts with our students keeps them interested, keeps them engaged, and excited about learning and school.

Check this page regularly for updates about events, ideas and opportunities that will help you grow professionally, as well as to streamline and improve instruction.