



**BIG THOUGHT**  
Institute

# IN FOCUS



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## The Art of Instruction – A Partnership to Build Teaching Artistry

Individuals majoring in the visual and performing arts aim to translate their deepened skills and knowledge into a career practicing their disciplines. In 2007, **Big Thought Institute** (BTI) partnered with Southern Methodist University's Meadows School of the Arts (SMU/MSA) to create the First-Year Arts Community Experience (FACE) program. The goal of the program was to introduce students to teaching artistry as a potential career path and provide opportunities for SMU/MSA students and faculty to engage in meaningful community programming. BTI supported the program by bringing teaching artists from all disciplines to campus to demonstrate their work and share their experiences with students. In recent years, BTI has worked closely with the SMU/MSA Dance Department to develop a teaching artist curriculum focused on physically integrated dance.

### The Opportunity

SMU/MSA fine arts majors receive a rich education in their discipline, with opportunities to practice and develop their talents in a challenging yet supportive environment, using innovative facilities and technology. Graduates of SMU/MSA deeply understand their art form and often pursue careers as working performing artists. Throughout its history, Big Thought has dedicated itself to leveraging the power of the arts to enhance learning in K-12 and community-based settings. Big Thought connects youth with experiences such as performances, workshops, and residencies delivered by qualified teaching artists, fostering their imagination and creativity.

Teaching Artistry is not always a career choice that arts majors are exposed to or see as an opportunity during their education or as emerging professionals. However, Teaching Artistry can provide artists with another avenue to hone their skills, engage with, and positively impact their community, as well as supplement their income. To excel in this role, young artists must blend their artistic talents with another critical competency – the art of instruction. FACE became the laboratory where SMU/MSA students could acquire these relevant skills.

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## The Solution

At its heart, FACE is comprised of three phases of learning. While the program has varied year to year, these elements, curated and facilitated by BTI, are core to success.

### 1 Phase 1: Building Understanding

SMU/MSA students are introduced to Big Thought's youth programming where teaching artists play essential roles. This includes after school, summer learning, and teen youth development programs that incorporate the arts. These experiences provide SMU/MSA students the chance to explore the role of arts and teaching artists in youth development. Through FACE, first year arts majors also gain tools necessary for the 21st Century artist to market themselves and advance their careers. This includes learning about creating a personal brand and identifying opportunities for employment beyond the artist's studio or performance stage. Additionally, BTI curated panels featuring multi-disciplinary artists within the Dallas community. These panels allowed artists to share their journeys to becoming a teaching artist, and how this work complements their professional artistic pursuits.

### 2 Phase 2: Understanding to Practice

The goal of phase two is to provide SMU/MSA students with an opportunity to experience teaching artistry firsthand through workshops, including a physically integrated dance workshop in collaboration with the Dance Department. The workshop allows students to explore space thinking about imagery, attunement, sound, internal versus external motivation and other neurodiverse ways of communicating through movement. Additionally, students learn about effective instructional practices such as social and emotional learning practices, building positive culture and climate, pedagogy of scaffolding lesson planning, and engaging in positive dialogue.

Originally, the capstone of this phase involved groups of SMU students assisting Big Thought personnel with a Spotlight Musical Theater production, produced under the auspices of Highland Park United Methodist Church's Belong Disability Ministry. In this practicum, SMU/MSA dancers demonstrate theater skills such as movement, pronunciation, singing and choreography to the production players.

During the COVID19 pandemic, BTI and SMU/MSA adapted by creating a virtual community arts class. Subsequently a year later this class translated into a month-long class for older youth and adults in Belong Disability Ministry's Community Classes. SMU/MSA students are divided into three distinct groups: Observers, Teachers, and Participants. This structure allows students to gain different perspectives each week and understand how to apply their learning teaching artistry.

### 3 Phase 3: Reflection & Debrief

Students are asked to write a reflection on their experience by answering prompts such as "What does community engagement mean to you? What are some ways you can engage the community around you? What did you share artistically/humanly in this process? What were your apprehensions before starting this project?" Students receive feedback and debrief on their experience, discussing how they will apply their learnings in their future work as artists exploring performance, movement therapy, or teaching artistry. Participants in the community arts class also take time after each session to debrief and share their experience through a reflection based on movement, gestures, drawing, or other visual arts creations. In the last session, students often shared their joy at being in class and their sadness that the project has ended.

**I thoroughly enjoy working with Big Thought every year. It is a highlight in my teaching experience.**

## The Results



In the 15+ years of partnership, it is estimated that over **SMU/1,200** MSA students have been exposed to the field of teaching artistry



Between **15-40** Belong Disability Ministry participants are served annually by SMU/MSA students during their practicum experience



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