

## Chapter Four

### A Vision of Arts Integration and Knowing The Creation of Lesley's First Arts-Based Graduate Programs

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The spirit and methods of *arts-based knowing* and *academic integration* permeated everything we did when establishing the Institute for the Arts and Human Development at Lesley in early 1974. Programs were informed by a philosophy which embraced the whole of expression, the intelligence of creative imagination, and the interplay between artistic and psychological inquiry. Although these ideas were not new, Lesley was the first institution to thoroughly join all of the arts in graduate training programs focused on therapy, education, and cultural institutions within an overall context where these domains were thoroughly integrated with one another.

I will briefly describe the environment of the early 1970's that led to the creation of the Institute for the Arts and Human Development and then focus on the foundations for integrated arts in education programs and their close tied to the arts in therapy.

#### Arts in the Service of Others: The Formative Context of 1970-1973

As many have emphasized, the growth of Lesley University over the past four decades can largely be attributed to how the institution gave people opportunities to initiate programs that could not be developed within other colleges and universities. My start was arguably the most irregular of Lesley initiatives. Bill Perry, the Dean and Vice President of Graduate Studies at Lesley, said that he found me selling newspapers in Harvard Square and I asked if I could engage the school in the arts; that he took me to lunch at the Harvard Faculty Club, which he did often do, and gave me a job (McNiff, 1981, p. 2). In his clever fiction Bill described the unlikely way we started.

After leaving law school in 1969 to commit myself to art and social service, I found myself four years later teaching and starting graduate programs at Lesley. During this time I had received the support of Rudolf Arnheim, Professor of the Psychology of Art at Harvard; Christopher Cook, the Director of the Addison Gallery of American Art at Phillips Academy in Andover; William Goldman, MD the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health;<sup>1</sup> and others for the work that I was doing in

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<sup>1</sup> I was a member of Dr. Goldman's advisory committee that tied all new training funds to multidisciplinary practice. Goldman, a national leader in community mental health from Northern California, was appointed by Governor Francis Sargent (1969-1975). A Republican, Sargent made appointments in Corrections, Youth Services, and Mental Health that were designed to bring major, arguably radical, change to these chronically institutionalized systems. Goldman questioned professional silos and encouraged psychiatrists to work seamlessly in teams with psychologists, nurses, social workers, and what he called "expressive therapy" which included all of the arts therapies. As one of the few arts therapists who had ever worked within the Department of Mental Health, I represented this "potential profession" in a committee together with deans and faculty from the Heller School at Brandeis, Harvard Medical School, the Boston University School of Nursing, and others. Lesley became a partner in The Greater Lawrence Mental Health Training Consortium, funded by the Department of Mental Health to offer a multi-disciplinary education for psychologists, social workers, and expressive therapy. Joan Klagsbrun, who later became a Lesley faculty member, was hired as the Coordinator.

establishing expressive arts therapy in the Commonwealth via the program I initiated at Danvers State Hospital. I was working closely with the Goddard Graduate program where I discovered my life-long commitment to self-designed learning, first as a student and then as a field faculty member, and became aware of the great interest in how the arts could be used to serve others.

It was a remarkable time, an era of progressive experimentation when barriers of every kind were questioned, when values of revolutionary transformation and turning the tables on ingrained attitudes were pervasive. Through Arnheim and Christopher Cook, a conceptual artist who had just spent a year directing the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston *as a work of art*, I became involved with John Hagerty who founded the Massachusetts Prison Art Project as a Harvard student. I served on the board of the prison project and collaborated with a group of former MCI inmates in the Goddard masters program. In addition to Arnheim, I was mentored by Truman Nelson, the historical novelist and friend of Malcolm X who wrote many books dealing with abolitionist and revolutionary themes (Schafer, 1989).

I focused from the start of my Danvers State Hospital experience on how the arts can liberate human expression and understanding. Oriented to the whole person and human dignity in an era of institutionalization, we demonstrated how withdrawn and incapacitated people could express themselves with depth and intelligence in various forms of artistic expression.

Through my collaboration with Karen Gallas, a 1972 graduate of Lesley's Open Education Masters program directed by Cynthia Cole, I began to apply the same principles to children with learning difficulties. I was introduced to Lesley through Gallas and in 1973 offered the first art therapy course in the experimental January Program. The class was over-subscribed and I was invited to continue teaching courses on art therapy and learning disabilities which drew large numbers from Lesley's new Special Education graduate program directed by Jill Hamilton.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the graduate school had no pre-existing arts departments allowed us to freely integrate the arts with one another and other disciplines (McNiff, 1981).

It was Peter Von Mertons, the youthful Assistant Dean of the Graduate School, who in 1973 encouraged me to "think bigger" than my original idea of linking expressive arts therapy and special education. He said, "You should create an arts center" at Lesley. Peter envisioned more of a crafts and studio facility that would serve as an educational resource center but his "anything can happen here" attitude challenged the imagination. My exhibition, Art Therapy at Danvers, was traveling to the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard and Peter took Bill Perry to see it. Deeply moved when looking at the patients' art, and the parent of a child with special needs, Bill was receptive.

When given the opportunity to establish a center for the arts, my inclination was to link creative expression to the Lesley educational mission and the evolving area of therapy. My experiences at Danvers, the Addison Gallery, the collaborative work with Gallas in public schools, studies with Arnheim, and interactions with a progressive community of colleagues in the early 1970s, thoroughly reinforced the necessity of bringing something new and radically different into the world.

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<sup>2</sup> Graduate studies in Special Education at Lesley burgeoned in response to the Commonwealth's now historic passage of Chapter 766 and were a primary growth engine for other graduate programs as well.

## **Establishing the Institute for the Arts and Human Development**

The entrepreneurial atmosphere of Lesley’s graduate school together with its tradition of field-based professional training offered a unique opportunity to develop the experimental work that I did at Goddard into more formal courses and programs. Lesley was also oriented to children and I felt that an expressive arts therapy program required a solid basis in child psychology.

In March of 1974 the Institute for the Arts and Human Development was established and it quickly became known as the Arts Institute. My original scheme, starting alone with an administrative assistant before hiring core faculty, focused on creating two separate but interrelated graduate programs, one committed to the assimilation of the arts in therapy and the other integrating the arts in education, special education, and cultural institutions. If I was to establish a “community” of artists, the Institute had to be inclusive and open to a variety of art forms and disciplines. By the end of two years we had enrolled 70 full time graduate students and the programs were just beginning to grow.

While other graduate programs in the creative arts therapies and education developed prescribed and relatively uniform courses of study for students, we took a more liberal approach, offering common core courses in both education and therapy but then encouraging students to individualize their studies. Both programs required courses in more than one artistic discipline and I was especially impressed by how artists with an MFA in visual art might focus on dance and vice versa, or how a poet explored all of the arts. I believed that every person integrates experience in unique ways and needs the freedom to combine areas of interest. In contrast to smaller programs functioning as cohorts following a single course of study, which were the norm in the creative arts therapies, we became a college within the college, offering many courses. Our philosophy was in sync with Lesley’s orientation to growth.

In the first years of the Arts Institute, the therapy and education programs were thoroughly integrated. It was a time when people thought much more about commonalities than differences. Of course we celebrated variety and the uniqueness of every person and expression, but this emphasis took us to a transcendent sense of humanity. In keeping with our art-based<sup>3</sup> methods, differences were embraced as elements contributing to a common pulse; an understanding of universal needs; and cross-cultural elements of creation, healing, and learning (McNiff, 1979; 1984, 2009b).

At first the Integrated Arts in Education Program attracted artists who were more involved with community arts and cultural institutions rather than schools.<sup>4</sup> However my personal vision, kindled by the collaboration with Gallas, was always concerned with classrooms, and I kept saying, “That’s where the children are.” The silos of professions and regulations, inside and outside Lesley, made the realization of true integrated arts in education difficult.

We asked: How might the visual arts and storytelling further reading, writing, and mathematics learning for young children? What core experimental practices can

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<sup>3</sup> My definition of “art” and art-based methods includes all arts disciplines and artists.

<sup>4</sup> This orientation was influenced by our relationship with Christopher Cook at the Addison Gallery. Cook and I were also involved with *The Art Museum as Educator* project (Newsome & Silver, 1978) coordinated by the Council on Museums and Education in the Visual Arts.

characterize both science and the arts? How might a fuller appreciation of the body and its movement enhance self-confidence and motivation to learn? Can musical improvisation help children listen more sensitively and focus attention in all areas of school experience? Elements from all of the arts were similarly related to particular educational outcomes across the whole school experience.

As with the continuities of progressive education, we examined the problem or issue at hand, utilizing whatever disciplines and modes of inquiry informed learning. We also believed that the creative imagination was an essential intelligence that is most effectively cultivated through the utilization of the full spectrum of a person's and community's resources (Cobb, 1992).

When formulating a vision and methods of arts integration in the early 1970s before coming to Lesley, Karen Gallas was my primary partner. As I mentioned earlier she was studying in Lesley's Open Education Graduate Program while I was setting up the Danvers expressive arts therapy program. She introduced me to the work of Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963) and Elwyn Richardson (1964) that pioneered the comprehensive integration of the arts in the early childhood classroom. We emphasized the similarities between what I was doing with adults and her work with young children, the interplay between therapy and education, and the need to approach learning with psychological understanding.

I visited Gallas' K-3 classrooms and we explored how to integrate the expressive arts therapies into school settings (McNiff & McNiff [Gallas], 1976). I covered the more artistic and therapeutic aspects of the work-- arts media and the psychology of art-- and she became expert in the practice of integrating the arts with math, science, reading, writing, and other school subjects (Gallas, 1991; 1994; 2003).

Arnheim was the major contributor to the shaping of my image of art-based knowing prior to coming to Lesley. Beginning in 1971 he affirmed my tendency to see the arts as primary modes of psychological inquiry rather than just objects to be analyzed. Cynthia Cole and others at Lesley during the 1970s were immersed in the writings of Jean Piaget and especially the idea that learning was informed by actions in the material world. Although I supported these developmental and cognitive studies, I felt that the arts were also tied to depth psychology, Gestalt psychology, and their own distinct ways of knowing. No one theoretical tract could hold the whole and our programs reflected this openness.

I kept returning to the formative experience of creative expression as the source for the various applications of the arts to be made by educators and therapists. Arnheim would always say that we had practical experiences with the arts that he did not have and this acknowledgement of practice stayed with me. I realized that every person needs to work from what I later called "the authority of experience" (1993). This immersion in the "art-basis" of the work has always been the key to its transformative power, clinical application, and adaptation to educational outcomes.

When discussing my plans for the Institute for the Arts and Human Development Karen Gallas said to me, "You have to go after Norma Canner" who she had recently met in an institute run by the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development at Tufts. Norma started as an adjunct instructor and she was the first core faculty member that I hired during the second year of the graduate program. Ultimately, the entire Tufts team followed--Paolo Knill, Iris Fanger, Mariagnese Cattaneo, and Elizabeth McKim.

In suggesting that my first priority should be recruiting Canner, Karen Gallas instinctively knew that the work I was attempting to do had to be based upon the best possible experience of the creative process. As a young, philosophically inclined visual artist who was closely associated with the Boston conceptual art community, I needed a senior partner who could provide a complementary mastery of creative improvisation in the performing arts. Norma was skilled in working with large groups and she played a vital role in establishing the spirit of creative community that permeated the Arts Institute. Paolo Knill, and his unique way of making music with wind instruments and spontaneous sounds, became the third lead contributor to our collective expression. Quality art experiences provided the basis for psychological reflection, learning, research, and applications to the broad spectrum of situations where people work with others.

All of the Arts Institute faculty members supported one another and our students in embracing uncertainty and the discomfort it often generates, as a fundamental quality of creative discovery. New advances tend to emerge from a crucible that dissolves ingrained and habitual way of acting.

We strove, as Gallas later wrote, to move imagination from the periphery to “the center of the educational process” (2003, p. 11). Her books on art-based classroom methods, including *Languages of Learning* (1994) and *Imagination and Literacy* (2003), fulfilled the early educational strivings of the Arts Institute. In the 1991 symposium on Arts as Education published by the *Harvard Educational Review* Gallas describes how the arts help children to “transcend the limitations” they encounter and “regardless of their differences, to participate fully in the experience of education” (p. 50). She exhorts teachers to “expand” rather than continuously “narrow” educational narratives (1994, p. xvi), to see how “children do not *naturally* limit the forms that their expressions take” (p. xv), to appreciate how meaning is always “built into” the expressions of children (p. xiv), and to sustain these innate intelligences that are too often overlooked by adult ideologies and systems of communication.

This expansion of expression and learning was at heart of the original Arts Institute mission. We constantly emphasized working with everything we have, opening all sensory channels of understanding, and approaching the arts as essential ways of knowing that need not be reduced to the prevailing orthodoxies of education-related research.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> As I review the first things that I wrote about the Arts Institute programs, I am taken aback by how early articulations of our purpose have been upheld over the years. In a 1975 guest editorial for *New Ways*, the Newsletter of the Educational Arts Association, I encouraged support for “*all* of a person’s expressive powers” if art is to open itself to the fullness of experience (p. 15). I also spoke of how concerns for individualized learning require the integration of educational and therapeutic ways of using the arts. It was in these early exchanges with Gallas, Arnheim (1954, 1971, 1972), and Paolo Knill, my theoretical partner within the Arts Institute, where I began to formulate the principles of art-based inquiry and knowing that ultimately led to the coining of the term “art-based research” and my 1998 book on this subject. The receptivity and growth of interest in art/s-based research has been one of the most surprising and pleasing outcomes of our experimentation at Lesley.

## Children, Adults, and the Full Range of Human Experience

One of the institutional tensions during the early years at Lesley was the gap between the college's almost exclusive focus on childhood, something I viewed as an asset as described above, and the way I envisioned the Arts Institute dealing with all people. In calling our center the Institute for the Arts and "Human Development" rather than "Child Development," I subtly tried to suggest that every stage of life was essential. However, in creating the first brochure for the Institute I pointedly made images adapted from the art of young children.



The early faculty members that I recruited for both the education and larger therapy program were almost exclusively involved with the arts and child development---Canner, Knill, Fanger, Cattaneo, McKim, Peter Rowan, and Jared Kass. John Langstaff was one of many prominent adjuncts who offered child-related arts courses. I was the only one of

our group who had been involved in the full-time practice of expressive arts therapy within a psychiatric context for a number of years and with adults. On the expressive therapy side of the Arts Institute we hired Shep Ginandes, a psychiatrist who ran an arts-based therapeutic center for adolescents in Concord, MA, called *The School We Have* (1973). Shep, together with Peter Rowan, gave our faculty more clinical balance, and his “school” which moved to the Cambridge campus reinforced ties to Lesley’s education focus.

I was consciously trying to build a faculty that would signal to the larger Lesley community that we were immersed in the arts as they related to child development. A number of years after I came to Lesley, the institution prominently developed a new mission logo emphasizing programs that served “the world of children.” In addition to my caution about triggering a mission conflict,<sup>6</sup> we wanted to address the child-oriented interests of many students at Lesley.

To the extent to which the Lesley mission now embraces all age groups, these early under-the-radar experiences with adults were a significant part of moving from a “Graduate School of Education” to what later became “The Graduate School” including education and other fields. My strategy was that as long as we were prominently involved with programs serving children, we would be just fine within the institution. This was not a difficult choice for me and the faculty since we were all committed to the full range of human experience. As our courses engaged adults in experientially based learning, the Arts Institute quietly but forcefully became a center that utilized the arts as vehicles of transformation for all ages and sectors of society.

### **Growth of Integrated Arts in Education Studies**

Iris Fanger was the first Coordinator of the Integrated Arts in Education Masters Program. As a child drama teacher and dance critic Iris reinforced the early focus of the program on community arts. She taught both expressive therapy and education students and made many contributions to the Arts Institute’s overall mission of integrating therapy and education.

In an effort to engage classroom teachers in the Integrated Arts in Education Program I developed Lesley’s first off-campus master’s degree program in cooperation with the Attleboro, MA public schools in 1976 before many of the early faculty were hired.<sup>7</sup> I did this because we were not attracting teachers in Cambridge. However, it was challenging to operate the off-campus cohort program without organizational structures and staff. After graduating the first group, the model could not be sustained

Still trying to do more with classrooms and curriculum, we hired Nancy Langstaff in the early 1980s. Expert in the area of arts integration, Langstaff had supervised

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<sup>6</sup> Even with progressives like Cole, Hamilton, Perry, and Lenore Parker, the head of Elementary Education who became a close colleague on the Graduate Council, there was a general understanding at the time that Lesley was an institution focused on childhood studies and professions. <<Finish this thought>>

<sup>7</sup> Attleboro had established a national reputation for its art education and sensory learning programs led by Don Brigham whose work was championed by Rudolf Arnheim. The Assistant Superintendent of Schools in Attleboro, Bart O’Connor who taught curriculum and drama for Lesley, was Brigham’s partner in delivering this experimental program which undertook a comprehensive integration of the arts into every aspect of the school experience. The program realized many ideal methods of arts integration.

Gallas's student teaching at the Cambridge Friends School. She understood the cognitive dimensions of the arts and their application to learning, and helped realize the goal of excellent teacher training on the Cambridge campus.<sup>8</sup> However the program stayed small, especially in comparison to the rapidly expanding expressive arts therapy domain.

The single-most burst in growth for arts in education at Lesley occurred in the late 1980s when Vivien Marcow Speiser returned from Israel and became Assistant Dean of the Institute for the Arts and Human Development. Marcow Speiser was responsible for the first major expansion of Arts Institute programs in 1979 via our affiliate in Israel which was followed by similar programs in Scandinavia (Phillip Speiser) and Switzerland and Germany (Paolo Knill). Even though Speiser's Scandinavian institute promulgated integrated arts in education, the affiliate students who came to Lesley to study all focused on expressive arts therapies.

At the time of Marcow Speiser's return to Cambridge, the Integrated Arts in Education masters degree had just been approved for delivery via Lesley's National Outreach Program developed by Dean Richard Wylie who had come to Lesley from The University of Colorado Denver to be the head of the Graduate School. As contrasted to our experience with the Attleboro pilot group, the new national programs and the infrastructure established by Wylie's office provided systems for supporting large numbers of students and the ensuing programmatic multiplication.

Fortuitously, this new sphere of programming was given to Marcow Speiser as part of her new role. Adept at program development, Marcow Speiser brought the skills she honed in Israel to the arts in education program. Rather than replicate the approaches we took in Attleboro and Cambridge, Vivien infused the off-campus cohorts, then primarily in Colorado, with expressive arts therapy faculty and methods for furthering creative expression and placed primary emphasis on the students' direct experimentation with the arts.<sup>9</sup> The dramatic growth of arts education studies, now taking place in 23 states, emerged directly from this orientation to teaching.

When teachers were given the opportunity to engage the creative process in various media within a supportive environment, the enrollments soared. This program realized my personal vision of arts integration with a wide variety of professional disciplines more than any other that we initiated at Lesley (2009a). In spite of its considerable international success and influence, the expressive arts therapy program has not yet achieved this kind of cross-disciplinary participation.

When I moved onto the faculty in 1989 I focused part of my teaching schedule on the off-campus arts in education program because it was so personally rewarding to help teachers from all grade levels and subjects, administrators, counselors, and other educators discover their creative potential. I was taken aback when I worked with art, history, and foreign language teachers from the high school that I attended. When the teachers encountered their fears, resistances, uncertainties, and vulnerabilities regarding artistic expression, they consistently said, "Now I understand how the students feel."

Because teachers are so conditioned to plan everything at the start, they resisted artistic activities where the end cannot be known at the beginning. We discovered that the

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<sup>8</sup> A teacher licensure tract was also offered in cooperation with the Education Division of the Graduate School.

<sup>9</sup> Vivien also began a partnership with Fritz Bell and his Creative Classrooms program at Walnut Hill in Raymond, New Hampshire that led to offering off-campus programs in New England.

force of the resistance tended to generate a proportionate sense of liberation when participants were able to stay with the work and let it carry them to new understanding about themselves and teaching. These experiences inspired my book *Trust the Process: An Artist's Guide to Letting Go* (1998).

I concluded that the dramatic growth of the off-campus program resulted from giving learners firsthand knowledge of the creative process, and then supporting them in making their own connections to classrooms and other work settings. Since this was not an initial licensure program, all of the students tended to be experienced professionals with varied areas of expertise and we could avoid many of the restraints that exist within entry-level professional training, including expressive arts therapy.

Robert Coles was a frequent Arts Institute guest in the mid 1970s and supporter of our work.<sup>10</sup> He said at the time, “too little attention is paid to the drive for self-expression and affirmation of one’s artistic sensibility” (McNiff, 1976, p. 2). We helped each person experiment with the creative process within an affirming group environment. People realized that they could take risks, encounter their fears and resistances to expression, and not only emerge intact, but thoroughly transformed. They learned the ways of creative expression and brought the benefits to others.

### **Sustained Advocacy**

In the early years of the Arts Institute we did everything possible to combine the arts and therapy with special education. I served with the original National Committee, Arts for the Handicapped at the Kennedy Center in Washington and was the first Massachusetts State Chair in 1976-1977. We brought the Very Special Arts Festival to the Commonwealth which was coordinated by Maida Abrams, a Lesley graduate and art teacher in Newton.<sup>11</sup>

I persist in encouraging close collaboration between the arts therapies and special education (1997). But the specialized interests of both areas and the regulations they establish hinder this potential that helped establish the arts at Lesley. The Expressive Therapies and Creative Arts and Learning programs that emerged from the original vision of integration have grown exponentially and have had a significant social impact, but they are ironically, to this date, distinct entities, and both are separate from Lesley’s programs in special education.

Where I originally saw expressive arts therapy, as established at Lesley, integrating all of the creative arts therapies, the different arts specializations have established separate status and expressive arts therapy has paradoxically become a successful and expanding “discipline” (McNiff, 2009a). This is an outcome that I neither predicted nor supported, but I accept it with a smile, and what may be the necessary role of disciplinary silos, which I nevertheless continue to challenge.

I can also report that the Institute for the Arts and Human Development came to an end in the early 1990s as part an effort to consolidate Expressive Therapies with Counseling and Psychology, and Creative Arts and Learning with Education-- I

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<sup>10</sup> Coles, a child psychiatrist, had won the 1973 Pulitzer Prize for his *Children of Crisis* series of books and later received a MacArthur Award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the National Humanities Medal, and a Lesley Honorary Doctorate.

<sup>11</sup> Abrams founded Very Special Arts Massachusetts in 1980 and served for many years as President.

supported both in keeping with principles of integration that could benefit students and the people we serve, even if it meant the end of the Institute that I founded. However, the programs continue to be separated many years after these changes were made. Creative Arts and Learning, now called Integrated Teaching through the Arts, has recently moved to the School of Education to once again explore cooperation with other spheres of teacher training.

Even though the Arts Institute no longer exists, all of its original programs continue to prosper as separate domains, and perhaps with less tension since professional specializations owe their constancy, not necessarily to the creativity I advocate, but to strong forces of self-preservation that I respect.

Although I have not yet realized my beginning goal of integrating the arts therapies with special education, I remain hopeful since this is so clearly in the interest of Lesley graduates seeking socially significant careers, and of course it will benefit children, adolescents, adults, families, schools, communities, and professions.

The most essential and original principle of all Arts Institute programs--the arts are primary ways of knowing verified throughout human history--has flourished. Within the inevitable strictures of professional disciplines, the philosophy and methods of art-based inquiry, understanding, and healing are being appreciated and independently discovered today in all sectors of education, social science, health, and the arts.

The unrealized goals and setbacks encountered since the inception of the Arts Institute have been more than offset by unexpected expansions. Lesley doctoral students in both Educational Studies and Expressive Therapies are advancing arts-based epistemologies and research and their work deepens the studies that were first initiated at the master's level. I am especially encouraged by the many traditional age and adult undergraduate students at Lesley College who are pursuing degrees in areas pioneered by the Institute for the Arts and Human Development. We now have a community of learners from the bachelor's degree through the doctorate who are preparing to serve others and further human understanding through the arts. It appears that the end of the original Institute for the Arts and Human Development as a center of creation has enabled other sectors inside and outside Lesley to adopt its vision as their own.

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