

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF ARTS IN EDUCATION RESEARCH PROJECT

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Introduction

Background

Since 1999, the South Carolina Arts Commission, the South Carolina Department of Education, and later the Arts in Basic Curriculum Project (ABC) have co-sponsored the Arts Education Research Project to track the progress and effects of arts education reform efforts in various ABC schools across the state. The specific purposes of the Arts Education Research Project were to (a) document the arts instruction in place prior to reform implementation, (b) determine the effects of increased, modified, or integrated arts instruction, and (c) identify potential influences that promote, inhibit, or sustain changes in schools that implemented arts reform.

ABC schools are public schools that received assistance from the ABC Project. The ABC Project is a statewide collaborative initiative directed by the South Carolina Arts Commission (SCAC), the South Carolina Department of Education (SDE), and the College of Visual and Performing Arts at Winthrop University. The project began in 1987 with the goal of ensuring that every child in South Carolina has access to a comprehensive, quality arts education. Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the ABC Project completed a blueprint for arts education in 1988. With the assistance and support of state agencies and universities, the ongoing effort of ABC project is to assist in the development of innovative standards-based arts programs in South Carolina public schools and provide professional development courses for arts and non-arts educators.

Evaluation

The evaluation of the Arts Education Research Project is based on (a) observations of arts classes (music, visual arts) and general education classes (ELA, Science, and Math), (b) surveys of teachers, parents, and students, and (c) interviews of teachers and administrators. The focus of the observations includes the physical condition of the school and classrooms; classroom management; student behavior; classroom supplies and equipment; school and classroom displays of artworks and performances, and instructional content and approach. Topics for the surveys included teacher, parent, and student attitude towards (a) the school and community, (b) the school arts program, and (c) the role and impact of arts education on the school in general, on student achievement, and on student behavior. For the interviews, the questions emphasized the teachers' and administrators' perception of the arts programs' impact in their schools. Additional information regarding the scheduling of arts classes and fund allocation for arts programs was also obtained. Finally, school enrollment figures, discipline records, and student achievement based on the non-arts state mandated standardized assessment were also obtained for evaluation purposes.

This publication is a summary that contains key findings and recommendations based on the four-year Arts Education Research Project. Yearly reports and additional information of the Arts Education Research Project can be obtained at <http://ope.ed.sc.edu/aerp.htm>.

Types of Arts Education Reform

Each school in South Carolina that is implementing arts education reform with the assistance of an ABC Project grant is required to have a five-year arts strategic plan. The strategic plans are written by the arts steering committee members of each school and are designed to address the unique needs of the school with regard to school environment, budgeting, and student population characteristics. Consequently, the researchers observed a variety of arts education reform initiatives being implemented.

The types of arts education reform can be classified into three general categories: *Arts Enhancement*, in which the goal is increased opportunities in arts for all students, with a modification of the arts curriculum to emphasize standards; *Arts Integration*, which emphasizes the integration of the arts into other content areas, and the integration of other content areas into the arts; *Arts Immersion*, with the central focus of the school on the arts, which combines elements of both Arts Enhancement and Arts Integration. Based on observations, the researchers stipulated that specific types of arts education reform being implemented may contribute to different levels of impact on schools. They believed that the types of arts education reform should be considered when conducting comparative studies of arts education reform impacts. Further understanding of the differential effects of arts education reform types may assist educators in implementing arts education reform.

Effects of Arts Education Reform

Based on a meta-analysis of available data on the effects of arts education reform, six primary themes emerged. The six themes identified here are the result of a synthesis and analysis of findings from the four-year studies of arts education reform.

Standard-Based Curriculum and Content Changes

In terms of the quality of arts instruction, researchers observed changes in the teaching approaches of the arts teacher who had participated in the professional development courses. Those changes included additional efforts to implement arts integrated curriculum, use of classroom assessments, and alignment of instructions to the state visual and performing arts standards. The integration efforts, however, were mostly observed in arts classes.

The impact of professional development on students' arts achievement was not investigated due to the lack of available standardized arts assessments. Without being able to objectively compare students' arts achievement, evaluation of the quality of those arts programs was limited to anecdotal reports of teachers and administrators and

subjective criteria set up by the evaluators. In addition, arts teachers reported that their measurement of student arts achievement has been based primarily on a combination of observed student participation and classroom performances.

Equitable Learning Opportunities

Arts education reform increased arts learning opportunities for students. Teachers and administrators indicated that they believe that the arts provide students with increased opportunities for authentic learning experiences. Notably, at the schools with limited resources, students' positive attitudes toward the arts and school still continued to increase. Through the addition and increase in learning in the arts, those students were motivated to learn and improve their performance at school. Because adequate resources are crucial for transitioning art-immersed schools seeking to provide equitable learning opportunities, the assistance provided by ABC Project is still notable. Especially in schools with low socioeconomic status, the requirements such as strategic plans enforced by the ABC project can effectively provide students with equitable learning opportunities in the arts and can successfully transition to being arts-immersed schools.

Parent Attitude and Involvement

Over the years of arts education reform implementation, parents who were concerned about the lack of time for non-arts subjects due to increased time for arts have changed their attitude. In addition, parental support for arts-immersed curricula has increased. Reasons for increased parental support are enhanced student interest, motivation, and creativity, and greater opportunities for parent involvement in arts and arts related activities. Increased parental support also resulted in parental involvement in art performance events and activities at school.

Teachers and Administrators Attitude

An increase in teacher enthusiasm for the arts as well as a collaborative effort between arts and general teachers was reported by the observers. Arts teachers and classroom teachers have become increasingly positive about the integration of arts into other subject areas and also the instruction of arts as separate subjects. Arts teachers and administrators reported a positive attitude change towards standardized arts assessments after participating in the South Carolina Arts Assessment Program (SCAAP) field tests for the 4th grade music and visual arts assessments. Some general education teachers, however, did not believe that untalented students should receive low grades in arts.

Improved attitudes among the classroom teachers and administrators provides additional evidence that implementing arts education reform has deepened teachers' and administrators' appreciation and understanding of the value of the arts. Many classroom teachers believe that arts-immersed curricula programs encourage students to expand their world view, and promote stable learning environments with high student motivation and increased student achievement.

Transformation of a School's Learning Environment

Implementing arts education reform resulted in an improvement of overall school climate. Researchers observed a physical transformation in the appearance of many school buildings due to student participation in creating and decorating their learning environment. Students' artwork, such as murals and tapestries, were displayed to enhance school appearance.

Well-Rounded Education

In the early stages of transition to an art-immersed school, parents showed concerns about the possible effects on general education achievement. Some parents reported that they were not convinced that arts-integration would have any noticeable effect on non-arts related subjects. In addition, parents and administrators were also concerned that the arts might lower test scores, because students would spend more time in the arts and less time on other subject areas. The study of the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT) score trends demonstrated, however, that increased time spent on arts instruction did not lead to lower test scores in other subject areas. Moreover, a slight increase in students' non-arts areas achievements, although not statistically significant, was observed in most schools. Some educators also indicated that by providing students with arts education, students can have a well-rounded education and greater access to high levels of achievement in general.

Challenges and Recommendations

Several challenges confronting schools transitioning to arts education reform were identified by the researchers. Those challenges include a lack of

- (a) time and opportunity for collaborative planning,
- (b) professional development in classroom management, understanding of the arts, child development, and assessment,
- (c) arts assessment tools,
- (d) parental involvement,
- (e) financial support,
- (f) administrative support, and
- (g) effective behavior management skills.

Moreover, most teachers reported that the over-emphasis on the state mandated assessments for the non-arts areas have also been a barrier for an effective implementation of arts-immersed curricula.

The implementation of arts-immersed curricula should be viewed as a work-in-progress that requires continuous effort. Full commitment from all constituents is necessary to ensure effective collaboration, effective utilization of resources, and the overall organization of the arts education reform system within the school. The researchers recommend schools and stakeholders consider the following five areas when implementing or funding arts education reforms to ensure successful transitions from traditional curricula to arts-immersed curricula.

Leadership and Advocacy

Several studies have shown that a key factor in successful schools and programs was adequate leadership. This study reaffirms research on the role of the principal as the primary leader. Principals create the expectations and climate in schools and hence, directly affect the success of their schools. The role of the principals as the leaders that support the effort of arts education reform is, therefore, essential. In addition to the principal, parents and community leaders are also important in sustaining the implementation of the arts-immersed curricula. Parents and community leaders not only provide financial support and actively participate in student art activities but also serve as influential advocates for arts programs.

Realistic and Endorsed Expectations

A successful implementation of the arts education reform is primarily based on the clear and realistic expectations that are set by the administrators and leaders of the effort. Those expectations include goals and timelines required of the teachers and staff to complete the transition from traditional curricula to arts-immersed curricula. In addition, those goals must be communicated to and endorsed by the teachers and staff. Ensuring that teachers and staff are fully aware of the process involved and the time required will enhance the effectiveness of the arts education reform efforts.

Mutual Respect and Appreciation across Disciplines

Because arts education reform efforts require the collaboration of arts teachers and non-arts teachers, mutual respect and appreciation across disciplines is essential. Through effective and clear communication among the administrators, arts teachers, and non-arts teachers, relationships should be built to foster an understanding of, respect for, and appreciation of one another as professional educators and of individual roles and expectations. In addition, administrators should foster this relationship by providing adequate resources for collaborative opportunities. Teachers often reported that collaborative planning time was the key to developing and implementing arts-immersed curricula. The continuous effort in developing relationships and respect among teachers will improve the learning environment for students, and hence provide a stable foundation for the sustained effort in the establishment of arts-immersed schools.

Resources

Professional development opportunities have been the most requested resource, especially by non-arts teachers. With limited knowledge of the arts, non-arts teachers feel inadequate to implement an arts-immersed curriculum. Additional understanding of standards-based arts education will also result in the non-arts teachers valuing of arts education. Some teachers have also requested access to information on best arts-integration practices, lesson plans, and curricula. A mechanism such as a website or listserv for arts educators and other teachers to share resources will enhance the quality of the arts reform efforts.

Communication and Feedback

Communication among stakeholders, administrators, and teachers should remain open for successful implementation of arts education reform. Open communication will ensure that expectations are being met and conflicts addressed. Moreover, the communication among the constituents should include feedback that will help the schools to modify and improve the implementation process. Information collected from evaluation of the program or assessment of student achievement should be used as diagnostic feedback. Currently, the availability of evaluation tools to assess the instructional content required for successful arts-immersed curricula is limited. Similarly, the current standardized assessment of student achievement developed by the South Carolina Arts Assessment Program (SCAAP) is limited to elementary music and visual art assessments. The development of the appropriate evaluation tools for arts-immersed school is, hence, highly recommended.