

**Arts in the Middle (AIM)
A Project of Inner-City Arts**

**Interim Evaluation Report
December 2007**

**ASSESSING ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT
AND ARTS LEARNING**

Overview

The three-year Arts in the Middle (AIM) Project is a project of Los Angeles Unified School District 4 (District 4) working in partnership with Inner-City Arts, a non-profit organization providing arts learning services to students of the LAUSD, and The Regents of the University of California's (UCLA) Graduate School of Education and Information Studies (GSE&IS). The Project will make for the expansion and rigorous evaluation of an innovative, cohesive model for delivery of arts-based instruction to remedial Middle School English learners. The Project's strategy will extend community resources to under-resourced urban Middle Schools in order to supply standards-based arts education otherwise unavailable within the school that is effective in improving academic performance among English learners by integrating standards-based arts education within the core Language Arts curricula of Grades 6-8 students via a specialized, inter-disciplinary Language Arts/ Drama instructional program fostering improved ELD levels and art skills among remedial English learners; strengthening the place of the arts as a core subject in Grades 6-8 within urban public Middle Schools that otherwise lack resources to provide instruction in the arts; and improving student English Language Development (ELD) levels and art skills as relate to national and state standards for education in the arts.

The evaluation component will increase amount of information on effective models for arts education that is nationally available, with attention to value of arts learning in reaching academically at-risk English learners; Value of interdisciplinary Language Arts / Drama instruction in positively impacting ELD levels among remedial Middle School English learners; Value of core subject arts learning among academically at-risk students (measure of improved art skills, based on state/national grade level standards); and to foster improved instructional practices within under-performing schools.

Brief Summary of the Evaluation Design

The project design intends to assess the impact of the AIM program on English Language Development and arts learning as a result of the five and/or seven week AIM program. Generally, 60-80 students will attend the seven-week AIM program during their school year. An additional 60-80 students will act as a control group and will not be participating in any of the AIM programs (referred to as control group A). At the end of the seven weeks, participants in the AIM program will be invited to attend a five-week intersession program at Inner-City Arts. Twenty of the volunteers will be randomly selected to participate and the remaining volunteers will attend the school's intersession program (referred to as control group B) along with control group A students. Generally, all instruments will be administered at the beginning and end of the seven-week program and again at the end of the five-week program, creating three time points of data collection in addition to the collection of standardized test results (i.e., CELDT scores). Additionally, because Los Angeles schools have a year-round school year, it affords a data collection cycle from three separate cohorts, collecting information from over 360 evaluation participants.

Project design and instruments are property of the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Sciences. The AIM project has received permission to use these instruments for the purposes of this project.

Progress towards Goals

The AIM project provides opportunities in the arts to the students of Los Angeles' inner-city schools, where the harsh conditions of economic disadvantage create barriers to achievement. Focusing on using the arts to assist middle school students excel in reading and writing, the *Arts in the Middle* project is for

6-8 grade middle school students who are failing to meet minimum standards of literacy in their grade level, identified by their school as in need of additional remedial instruction. The arts offer opportunities for AIM project students to enhance their ability to perform both creatively and academically in challenging environments.

While the remedial instruction for AIM sixth-eighth grade students is offered during their "inter-session" weeks when these students are not in school, the AIM fourth/fifth grade program operates during the 7-week in-school sessions, functioning as an essential component of the school-based curriculum.

In addition to both intersession and in-session programs serving students, similar to EARLI, AIM project activities facilitate school wide improvements to instructional practices through targeted professional development and outreach measures.

During the reporting period the AIM program has served 589 sixth - eighth grade students from Berendo Middle School. These students were bussed to the Inner-City Arts teaching complex 5 days each week for 5 weeks during their intersession break that occurs on the year-round school calendar, receiving a 3.5-hour session of instruction daily. Con-currently, Middle School teachers received training, which prepared them to engage arts-based strategies when delivering instructional programs to low-performing Middle School students. Project activities directed to 4th/5th grade students targeted the lowest performing among English-learners in elementary schools that serve as feeders to the project's Middle School. These students traveled to the Inner-City Arts complex during the instructional school day for a 7-week, twice-weekly course of instruction that is an integral component of their regular academic curriculum. The students received instruction in the arts designed to improve English-proficiency, self-esteem, and learning outcomes in all areas.

Teaching Approach and Literacy Development

The AIM Project is principled on the idea that arts-based learning provides English Learners the opportunities they need to succeed in school, expanding their ability to use their creativity in all academic areas of study. In the arts-integrated classes, students are creative thinkers and doers, constantly required to use their minds in a variety of ways. Their ideas, perceptions and thoughts are integrated into the curriculum of arts-infused knowledge that they can learn. An arts-integrated classroom offers students the freedom to explore creative experiences that develop all of a child's ways of knowing. In an arts-integrated classroom speaking, writing and calculating are emphasized whenever possible in connection with the various arts. As students learn skills specific to a given art form, they are also developing the academic skills that will apply to everything they learn and do in life. When the arts are merged with the study of language and other core academic studies, learning is enhanced.

We have found that engagement in the learning process is a key component for success in both language development and in expression of concepts learned. In the art classes, students process the information presented by hearing new vocabulary, seeing new words and vocabulary on the board, and verbally responding by talking about their work and the artwork of peers. They then are encouraged to write about their experiences, sometimes in the art studio, and always in the classroom. Students are first engaged through their own creative process, and then connections are made to the writing and speaking processes.

In all classes, students develop and explore their own creativity. Created with sequential lessons, the classes assisted students and their teachers to engage in the creative process, and then assess each experience, as it related to their overall goals in the classroom. Integrated arts lessons focused on ways to help students make connections between art form concepts and between the arts concepts and other subject areas.

Both students and teachers together were able to develop portfolios of work that were reflected upon in each session. Teachers learned to utilize the tools that students were experiencing in the art studio to further enhance teaching methodologies back in the classroom.

Evaluation

To measure any increase in skills, specifically in the arts, language arts, verbal and written language, we are broadening our approach to gather data and measure the effects of the programs. After initially measuring language skill growth through other testing instruments (2001-03), we wanted to broaden our approach to evaluation and look at both language development as well as arts learning. In partnership with the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Sciences, evaluators James Catterall and Kylie Pepler have developed instrumentation and are currently assessing the impact of the programs on English Language Development and arts learning as a result of attendance in the five and/or seven week program.

During the reporting period, the UCLA evaluation team began planning for evaluation implementation by meeting with key personnel at Berendo Middle School and Inner-City Arts in December 2006, establishing target control groups for the testing components of the evaluation and a schedule for collecting evaluation data. Evaluation data collection began in January 2007 and focused on the 5-week intersession programs at Inner-City Arts and Berendo Middle School.

At the end of each seven-week school arts session at Inner-City Arts, participating students were invited to attend the five-week AIM intersession program at Inner-City Arts. Twenty of the initial participating students were selected to participate, and the remaining students attended the school's intersession program (acting as the control group). All instruments were administered at the beginning and end of the five-week program sessions to both the participating and the control group, creating two points of data collection in addition to the collection of standardized test results (e.g., English Creative Writing scores). One exception to this design is the use of CELDT Scores and Proficiency levels, which will assess the impact of the programs' impact on English Language Levels for all five- and seven-week program participants. (The results of the CELDT test scores are not generally available until nine months after the tests are administered, thus creating a delay in reporting the results of these tests. Consequently, the UCLA evaluation team is still working with the school to access the standardized test scores.)

UCLA was able to collect information from over 70 participating students from January to June 2007 in three successive cohorts of participants. At the time of reporting, baseline data has been collected for measuring improved Language Development levels and improved art skills, and has been analyzed for improved Language Development levels. Analyses for measuring improved art skills are currently underway. Additionally, standardized test scores for the study's participants will not be available until February 2008. Data analysis began mid-July 07 for the following two strands of the evaluation, excluding the standardized CELDT test scores. The first strand will assess English Language Development and the second strand will assess Arts Learning:

English Language Assessment Instruments

- **Standardized CELDT Scores and Proficiency Levels:** Student scores and proficiency level on the national standardized exam, the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), will be compared to examine the unique contribution that the Inner-City Arts program plays in the development academic English language. Data will become available to the UCLA evaluation team by December 2007.
- **English Creative Writing Prompts/Classroom Writings:** In order to assess student gains in English writing ability, evaluators administered a standardized writing prompt at the beginning and end of the five-week intersession programs. In addition to this information, there was a weekly collection of classroom writings that will be evaluated further in the upcoming year. All English Creative Writing Prompts essays were scored according to the Writing Arts Concepts Assessment (WACA) assessment guidelines. The WACA provides a direct measure of the whole growth of student language fluency in a writing-to-prompt assignment in English. The key assessment areas are concerned with content and form. Each student writer is measured for her/his ability to mentally compose and write a complete and detailed imaginative piece with all formal usage parameters in

place (punctuation, capitalization, etc). Results from the first three rounds of data collection indicated that students in both the AIM and the control group did not perform as high on the post-assessment as on the pre-assessment, suggesting some instability in the assessment instrument and/or scoring rubric. This was possibly due to the repeat administration, students' lack of interest or distractibility at the end of the term, or for other unknown reasons. In sum, no gains were measured for either of the groups. Consequently, the evaluation team has chosen to discontinue the administration of this instrument in upcoming rounds of data collection. The focus of their assessment will instead be on the weekly collection of classroom writings, which are a more accurate reflection of the students' writing abilities and not subject to the same levels of disinterest.

- English Listening-Speaking Assessment/Academic English Language Proficiency (AELP) Instrument: This instrument assessed English listening and speaking ability of 6 separate domains of English oral language, based on current research in arts and theatre learning. Uniquely designed to assess the AIM program, this instrument includes five prompts, which will be read aloud to the students. At the end of each prompt, students will be asked three simple comprehension questions and one to two extension questions, inferring an answer based on the information in the prompt.

Across all three rounds of data collection, 64 percent of intersession students made gains in their English Language Development levels, as evidenced by the results of the AELP interview assessments. After round one of data collection, the evaluation team documented that the Inner-City Arts AIM program significantly contributed to students' academic English oral language development. When comparing the distributions of student gains in listening, by site for rounds 2 and 3, 56 percent of AIM students gain in listening comprehension scores, while 50 percent of Berendo control group students gained in this same area. Additionally, 66 percent of AIM students gain while only 43 percent of Berendo students made gains in their speaking accuracy and productivity. When comparing total gains for the AELP measure, 88 percent of AIM students gain while 57 percent of Berendo students made gains. These comparisons all favor the AIM program. Moreover, the AIM program significantly contributed to students' listening comprehension and the ability for students to use advanced language constructs when speaking (such as the ability to summarize, critique, and define terms). By comparison, the control group demonstrated non-significant overall gains in listening comprehension and students' ability to use advance language constructs when speaking due in part to a small sample size.

These results are subject to change as further data are collected but provide strong initial evidence in support of the AIM program's contribution to Academic English Language Development. The big picture surrounding all of this information is that the differences are in fact small between groups, they were positive for everyone, and that they favor the AIM program. At this point, we hesitate to make too much of this as the next couple of rounds will help us to know more about these differences.

Arts Assessment Instruments

There are four categories to the arts strand of the evaluation, inspired by the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education's (CAPE's) Standardized Evaluation of Arts Learning (SEAL) assessment categories. Over 70 pre and post-interviews have been conducted during the first three rounds of data collection with both the AIM and control group students. The UCLA evaluation team is currently revising the scoring rubric and creating a publishable version of this assessment instrument, which will be made available in the upcoming year. Initial data analysis is underway and is estimated to be completed by February 2008.

- ****Observation of Student Performance in the Arts:** This observation rubric is based on the individual instruction and goals of the participating arts teachers. Participating students will be videotaped on the first and last day of arts instruction doing similar activities. With the help of professional artists, evaluators will score arts learning based on collected video data.
- ****Student Reflections on Videotaped observations:** Participants will view their performance/work at the beginning and end of the program and will be asked to reflect on their learning in an oral interview.

- Student Responses to Professional Artwork: Students will view short theatre segments and pieces of visual art and respond to the work of each art form through an oral interview.
- Arts Inquiry Questions: These questions are aimed at student understanding and use of vocabulary in each of the art forms and data will be collected through an oral interview.

***Students not participating in the AIM program and are part of a control group will not take part in these two arts learning assessment measures.*

Summary

At Inner-City Arts, children are first. The AIM Project offers opportunities where students can develop and explore their own creativity. We believe the arts are vital for personal and cultural development and connect the individual to the larger world. Through creative exploration, the arts offer opportunities for these children to believe in who they are. This belief becomes the seed from which personal and academic growth explodes, allowing students to excel both creatively and academically in challenging environments.

These learning experiences taking place at the Inner-City Arts site and within the studio classrooms provide in-depth instruction in the arts, while serving to enhance the ability of classroom teachers to infuse instruction in other content areas with arts-based activities and strategies. Our philosophy is that by validating the creative impulses and uniqueness of each student, we provide a bridge between the artistic experience and the development of the whole child, which contributes to increased academic achievement.

Inherent in our programs is our capacity to serve the “whole” child, which includes involving teachers, parents, and community members in the education of each child’s creative learning experiences.

The funded project provides for in-depth programs, which are student-centered, and focus on student needs. The program offers a differentiated instructional approach, in which the diverse student needs and different learning styles of each student are taken into consideration in the teaching of the arts. Emphasis is placed on the integration of creativity and creative approaches to teaching back in the classroom, into all academic subjects.