

Using Arts/Literacy to construct classroom community and to develop adolescent literacy

Topic area:

Cross-disciplinary areas related to each other: Art Education (performing arts), Reading Education, and Secondary Education

Short title:

ArtsLiteracy Study

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Work-in Progress Report and Proposal for Future Research **Using Arts/Literacy to construct classroom community and develop adolescent literacy**

Presentation Summary

The presenter will introduce and summarize the programmatic aspects of the Arts/Literacy Project, a project of the Education Department at Brown University. She will describe briefly the professional development program that serves as the heart of the Arts/Literacy Project.

She will describe the specific alignment of the program with an adolescent literacy framework and will share the research designed to explore the effects of the program as an intervention to improve adolescent literacy and student performance in inner city high schools with diverse populations. At the time of the presentation, the study proposal will have undergone an internal review (required of all research using human subjects) and early results from the piloting of assessment tools will be available.

Background

The Arts/Literacy Project grew out of a grant that was obtained five years ago by Eileen Landay, Clinical Professor of English Education at Brown University. With Kurt Wootton, a graduate of Brown's graduate program in education, Ms. Landay developed the concept for Arts/Literacy.

The Arts/Literacy Project is not a traditional drama program that replicates plays for audience consumption. Neither is it "process drama" work, which uses role-play to deepen participants' understanding of content or to develop skill in perspective taking. While it combines elements of both approaches, A/LP's major focus is to construct a classroom community in which adolescents develop the skills and habits of mind to convey meaning through -- and recover meaning from -- a range of symbol systems, most explicitly, print text.

The program has both professional development and curriculum development components. These two components are linked by an ongoing research and design effort. AL/P draws on research in language development, literacy, and arts education that suggests that the multisensory learning involved in theatre work -- acting, speaking, writing, planning and organizing for a performance -- is a powerful tool for improving students' engagement in school, and especially in literacy activities. The project leaders bring to this work research and practice in the fields of English Language Arts, theatre, literature, and teacher education.

From <http://www.artslit.org>

Funders of the project include the National Endowment for the Arts, The Rhode Island Foundation, and the Providence Journal Charitable Foundation. The NEA recently funded this project for a third time.

More recently, Brown University's Education Alliance, a sister department at Brown University, developed a framework for planning and implementing adolescent literacy across content areas. The framework and numerous resources are available at <http://knowledgeloom.org/adlit>. The developers of the support framework identified two promising programs that exemplified the literacy instruction they described in their framework. They were WestEd's Strategic Literacy Initiative (see <http://www.wested.org/stratlit/welcome.shtml>) and Brown's Arts/Literacy Project.

Study Questions

The investigator proposes two inquiry questions:

What are program results around two important practices from the adolescent literacy framework: 1) Intensive, collaborative, and sustained professional development and 2) Student literacy as metacognition and deep understanding.

- ← What did the teachers, artists, and mentors do, and how did their practices change?
- ← What did they do to improve student engagement and performance on higher order thinking and writing tasks?
- ← What evidence is there that they succeeded?

Student Assessments

To explore the areas of inquiry, she proposes to develop and/or use measures for four student outcomes and will gather demographics about students as follows.

- ← Free or reduced lunch
- ← Parents' education level
- ← Parents' birthplace
- ← Ethnicity, first language or language spoken at home

The four measures of student outcomes:

1. Engagement surveys (re: level of engagement and participation in class activities) - Pre- and post- forms
 - Completed by students
 - Completed by mentors about the same students
2. Reading and writing for deep understanding - pre-test and post-test writing samples with the same prompt about favorite character; development of a rubric from the writing samples
3. Independent reading as an extension of work with text (logs of quantity, quality of reading) - mentors develop small libraries with specific materials that students want
4. Pre- and Post-testing of students' instructional reading levels - Degrees of Reading Power , pre- and post testing of Arts/Literacy students and comparison groups

Teacher Assessments

To learn about teaching outcomes and the quality and effects of professional development, the investigator has developed protocols to use with professional development participants:

- Teacher interviews and focus groups about
 - Their expectations of ArtsLiteracy professional development and whether expectations were met
 - What effect the ArtsLiteracy professional development has had on their career vision/plans
 - How ArtsLiteracy has changed their instructional practices
- Mentor notes on teacher practices, responses from beginning to end of the professional development
- Administrators who can comment on changes they have seen in any teachers who have completed the ArtsLiteracy professional development