

Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education's Research and Evaluation Series
Contributions to Arts and Learning



**A Final Report:
Developing Early Literacies
through the Arts**





The **Developing Early Literacies through the Arts (DELTA)** project, made possible through an Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination Grant from the U.S. Department of Education, consisted of a three-year collaboration between Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE). DELTA applied the CAPE model of improving schools through arts integration, teacher professional development, teacher/artist collaboration, documentation and reflection, and formal research. The DELTA project focused on increasing the contribution of arts learning to literacy development with all teachers in grades 1, 2, and 3 in three schools, with each school collaborating with both a visual artist and a performing artist.

They found that integrating art into the literacy curriculum not only affected student learning, but also improved classroom dynamics and student behavior.

Art-Making

Four primary strategies were developed by the teacher-artist teams:

- **Bookmaking Projects** that developed students' narrative thinking skills and understanding of story structure and sequencing through acting, story writing, and illustration. Particular attention was given to understanding character motivation, conflict and resolution, and attention to narrative detail.
- **Painting and Drawing Projects** that engaged students in visual explorations of vocabulary words, personal feelings, actions, and complex relationships, requiring learners to interpret and write about each others' visual expressions, and to plan large scale collective visual arts projects.
- **Music Reading and Songwriting Projects** that enhanced phonemic awareness, word fluency, and reflective thinking skills by challenging learners to decode musical symbols and to understand syllabification and rhyming by writing lyrics that matched musical rhythms.
- **Dance Projects** that explored the kinesthetic dimension of literacy concepts, developing children's ability to embody expressions of character and story from both a personal and social point of view.



Measuring Teacher and Artist Growth

Literacy instruction and arts integration practices at the case study schools were assessed through observation protocols, pre- and post-surveys, and in-depth interviews.

Results showed that throughout the DELTA project, both teachers and teaching artists increased their understanding of how arts learning processes and products enable students to work at a higher level. Collaborating teachers and artists understood that the DELTA units allowed arts learning processes to function as an alternative mode of development of early literacy skills. The artistic processes that emerged from the DELTA projects that most impressed the classroom teachers were those that (a) promoted learning from mistakes ("it's ok to make a mistake as long as you learn from it"); (b) used arts learning as a tool for developing story telling and writing skills ("arts can be used not just as a form of self-expression, but as a tool to focus on expressing narratives"); and (c) melded arts learning into the context of literacy instruction for the purpose of motivating learning ("I think once they've created images for their book, kids really try harder to write well because they want their story to succeed"). Thus, when students in the DELTA project look at a word and then associate it with their storytelling, illustration, or song lyric, reading comprehension and writing skills draw on a broader frame of reference and experience.

Through this project, teachers came to believe that arts integration can improve overall academic achievement, including language literacy, and should become a priority in their teaching practices.



Measuring Student Growth

CAPE staff, research team members, and teaching artists created an instrument to measure achievement in the arts: Snapshot of Early Arts Literacies (SEAL). SEAL was based on a tool used by the Chicago Public Schools to measure literacy development in the lower grades. SEAL is an important new tool for tracking students' developing aesthetic thinking over time. The SEAL, designed to measure growth of artistic thinking processes across all four disciplines in the project (visual arts, dance, theater, and music), is a four-part assessment that involves:

1. Observation of students engaged in art making.
2. Student responses to questions about art and artistic processes.
3. Student responses to a piece of artwork by others.
4. Student reflections on their own artwork.

The SEAL instruments were piloted in the second year and revised and administered as pre- and post-tests during year three of the DELTA project, involving four randomly selected students from all classrooms in grades 1, 2, and 3 in the three case study schools. In addition, artworks, videos of performances, and text literacy artifacts were collected from all students in the study cohort. The data was scored by an independent team of research associates using rubrics developed by the Principal Investigator, Larry Scripp, Ed.D.

Multimedia Documentation Templates and “Layered Research”

“I was able to collect work samples of where they started to where they ended, and I saw a behavior and academic change all the way through.” – Teacher

The DELTA project utilized CAPE’s “layered research” approach, in which teacher and artist teams investigated their practice in classrooms, teacher and artist teams shared their reflections across schools, and the formal research team guided and studied the practitioner action research. This layered research approach was greatly assisted by CAPE’s creation of a multimedia documentation template – a digital portfolio system that organized the action research, provided data for the formal research team, and assisted in the dissemination of best practices. PDFs of the documentation can be downloaded from www.capeweb.org/cldelta.html.

Challenges

“The first year was more vocabulary-based and sentence drills that did not connect well with our work. The second year was more about learning stories and retaining information and inference and problem solving.” – Artist

During the DELTA project, the Illinois State Board of Education unexpectedly changed how it measured literacy skills in lower grades. So although CAPE successfully developed, field-tested and implemented the SEAL instruments, CAPE could not use state-gathered data to compare measurement of early arts literacy to literacy skills in lower grades. This development resulted in the research team giving greater attention to the analysis of student work, to conducting in-depth interviews, and to stepping up teacher and artist documentation.

The Arts as Literacy Interventions

All DELTA classrooms were observed for the presence of sound early elementary literacy instructional practices. The DELTA teacher/artist collaborations were designed as interventions to improve literacy instruction.

Practices Used to Improve Literacy Skill Acquisition	DELTA Support for Effective Instruction
Teacher finds ways to encourage student reading beyond the school day.	The DELTA units encourage activities (in units that feature the playground, etc.) and storytelling on TV, listening to stories.
Teacher includes social science, science, math, art, and other content materials within reading and writing lessons.	DELTA arts-integrated units and fundamental concepts both music and language, use of historical figures in units.
Teacher makes sure that each student has a clear idea of his/her own progress/success in learning.	DELTA units furthered student and products mandatory; learning across disciplines; systematically their own projects through multiple projects.
Teacher documents observational information about students during teaching.	With collaboration teaching by the classroom teacher, documentation are assumed.
There is frequent assessment of what is taught.	With DELTA arts integration to be captured on videotape.

Reaching Difficult Students

“I had students who had behavior situations, and when I told them, ‘I’m going to let you work on the accordion book’ the behavior problem was gone.” – Teacher

DELTA classrooms across the three schools repeatedly reported positive new participation from students with behavioral challenges, who began demonstrating unanticipated capacities for reflective thinking and critical judgment. DELTA’s arts-integrated approach consistently constructed and sustained an environment of group participation and collective action that invited students with behavioral difficulties into the classroom community and the learning process.

Increasingly Sophisticated Student Inquiry across All Arts Disciplines

Results from the scoring of the pre-post student interview responses showed that the level of student inquiry into the nature of art and art-making increased in sophistication over time, moving from a focus on impersonal, concrete questions (What

are an artist's tools and materials?) to exploring philosophical questions (What is art? Where do ideas come from?), and to communicating personal meanings (What can I express through art?). Measurable gains in reflective awareness and understanding of artistic processes indicate an impressive degree of effects of the DELTA program across all three case study schools through all four art forms.

Effective Text Literacy Instruction

Help students to find ways to engage literacy processes outside of normal classroom. Encourage mural projects, public performances and exhibits, study of vocabulary used on stage, and explore alternative forms of literacy media outside of print media (such as storyboards, audio recordings for lyrical content, drawings to illustrate word meanings, etc.).

Arts by definition include other subject areas in order to explore 'parallel processes' shared among disciplines (such as art making and bookmaking, musical syntax in drama). Encourage the inclusion of social and history context in art projects, science of color matching, and the creation of art works, etc.).

Encourage student awareness of their own progress by making rich documentation of process through journal writing to help students self-assess their work in reference to their learning. Encourage the use of DELTA work folders and portfolio presentations to help students observe their progress; and by ensuring student ownership of the DELTA arts-enriched literacy instruction on various occasions for creative choice and imagination.

During arts practices in place, DELTA offers more time for literacy learning to be observed and discussed while the arts activities are being led by the teaching artist; and responsibilities for instruction are shared by both the classroom teacher and teaching artist.

During lessons, informal assessment happens continuously and reflectively and is more apt to be used in journals as part of the DELTA portfolio documentation methods.

Results

"I just think it's necessary for language literacy to grow out of problem-solving tasks in the theater activities." – Artist

The DELTA study demonstrates how arts learning promotes interrelated understandings of multiple symbol systems – a path of literacy development that depends more on creative response, imagination, experimentation, and aesthetic experience than do methods of learning that emphasize formulaic responses to rule-based literacy instruction:

- Literacy intervention through the arts served as a catalyst for cognitive, meta-cognitive, aesthetic, and social-personal dimensions of learning largely ignored in conventional approaches to literacy instruction, in which teachers feel limited by testing requirements that define literacy skill through isolated measures of a student's ability to decode words and sentences.
- Literacy intervention through the arts engaged multiple modalities of thinking and expression, changing students' perceptions of their own abilities, even among some of the most challenged learners.
- Literacy intervention through the arts impacted the dynamics of entire classrooms in ways that veteran teachers recognized as unprecedented in their previous experience of teaching.

"I am no longer dictating to them what to draw or what to write about. I'm able to let them do freely what they want to do. Create your own story. Use your own characters. Now I get better results because I don't dictate what to do." – Teacher

Selections from Interviews

"The problem we were trying to solve was that the students were not interested in writing. When they did write, it was dull and almost impossible to read. I was determined that by working with this artist I would find a way to make writing more interesting for my students, and to find a way to make teaching writing more exciting and satisfying for myself." – Teacher

"Getting to see how a playwright thinks right there on the blackboard helped the students know they could do it. We worked on increasingly complex and sophisticated stories, and found that the students met the new challenges easily, developing their abilities to make good inferences." – Artist

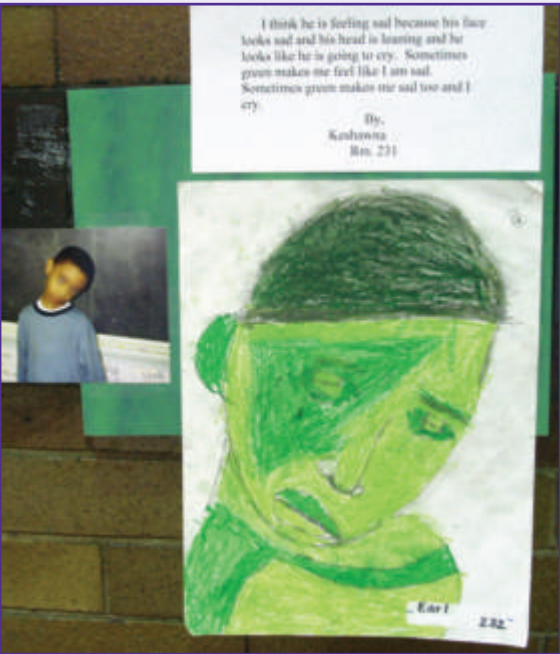
"We transformed students who were really not interested in anything, who were having a hard time reading, and we were able to pull out of them some of the strongest skills that they probably didn't know they had." – Teacher

"It's just amazing how kids were able to give examples of why certain things did not make sense, or why the story did not make sense, or why the story could not go in a certain direction, or vice versa, why it did go in a certain direction. To see that change from the beginning of the program to the end, it's just...it was just great!" – Artist

"If you walked into my classroom two years ago before DELTA and now walked in two years later, you would see a difference. More engaged learning. More cooperative work being done...and students have more patience with themselves, because before I might say, 'Why can't you understand?' but now... I always try to make the room supportive, and always centered around student learning." – Teacher

"This year I had students come in to me and say, 'I really appreciate what you did with the school year, reaching out to me' – and these are 3rd graders! It shocked me that they expressed the sort of thing I have never heard before since I've been teaching." – Teacher

"Now I have something to look forward to because of what I have learned." – Student



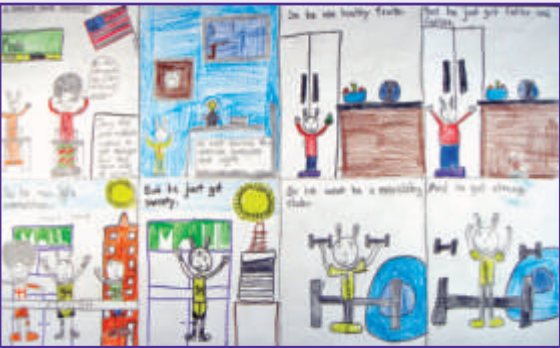
CAPE's Mission

CAPE advances the arts as a vital strategy for improving teaching and learning by increasing students' capacity for academic success, critical thinking and creativity.

CAPE's Vision

CAPE works toward a future in which:

- students are valued as creators of culture in our society;
- teachers, artists and students work collaboratively to develop and share innovative approaches to teaching and learning in and through the arts in our public schools;
- teachers, artists, school administrators and parents recognize the arts as a key element in transforming schools into vibrant, creative and successful learning communities;
- professional colleagues and partners regularly communicate and share their practices and research in order to continually improve and evolve the field of arts in education; and
- policy makers, business leaders and all citizens value the arts in education as essential to a just and equal society, a thriving economy and an inclusive democratic culture.



CAPE's Position

Improving Teaching and Learning through the Arts

CAPE convenes and guides a network of schools, artists, and arts organizations in co-developing and implementing innovative and effective approaches to teaching and learning in and through the arts.

Solutions to Educational Challenges

Generating New Knowledge about Effective Schools

CAPE is a learning organization, a living laboratory, in which teacher and artist practitioners partner with each other and with scholars and researchers to develop solutions to educational challenges in their schools, while they simultaneously study and document their practices to contribute new knowledge to the field of educational improvement at the practice, pre-service and policy levels.

Critical and Creative Thinking

CAPE's approach engages the arts as an essential pathway for developing the critical and creative thinking skills needed by learners for success in the 21st century.

Leading Innovation

CAPE's logic model (which includes long-term partnerships, arts learning integrated across the curriculum, and practitioner reflection on effective practice in partnership with formal researchers) contributes to the local, national and international discourse on re-visioning the role of the arts in effective public education.

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The CAPE Research and Evaluation Series contributes new knowledge developed by CAPE programs in Chicago Public Schools to the field of arts and learning. These abstracts bring to the fore how arts integrated education, utilizing CAPE's methodology, can positively impact student, teacher and artist learning, and that the collaboration between the three imbues all participants with values that have effects extending beyond the classroom and their time in class.

CAPE's recursive methodology develops self-awareness in its participants – student, teacher and artist, alike. Because participants are more aware of what they are doing (and what they hope to achieve), they are able to adjust their practice as they work through the curriculum unit.

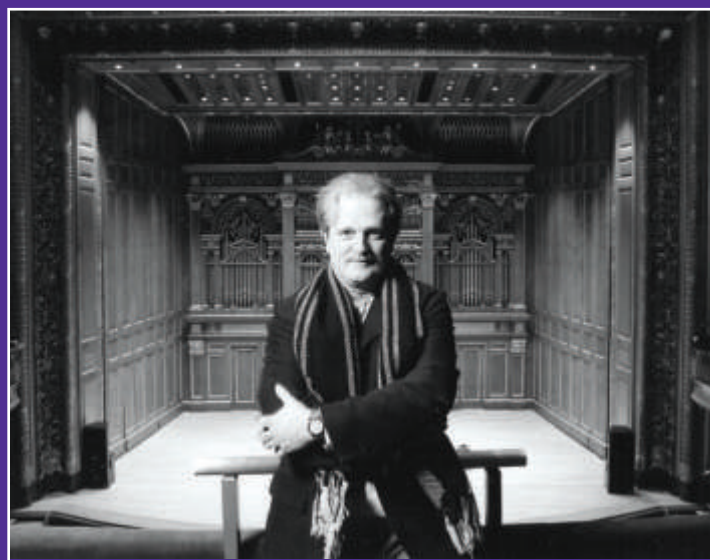
Through their collaborative efforts in melding core curriculum with artistic expression, the participants' whole minds (and often hearts) are engaged in class, and critical thinking and creativity no longer are treated as opposite modalities.

Students, teachers and artists become empowered during this process. The exhibition/performance output of CAPE's logic model allows students the chance to display their work in front of their peers (often the entire student body) and sometimes at-large in the community. Teachers are able to direct their own practice, and team-teaching with an artist allows them the freedom to expand their capacities as teachers. Artists are forced to examine their practice, and display and communicate it from a much more critical stance. This, in turn, enables them to approach their own work from a freshened perspective.

The formal research validates the action research participants' energies and outcomes, and when research results are communicated back to teachers and artists, offers them additional insights that further enrich their practice.

The Research and Evaluation Series is also being published to stimulate educational policy makers to re-envision the role of the arts in schools, to create truly effective public education that graduates life-long learners who excel in critical and creative thinking.

The full version of *A Final Report: Developing Early Literacies through the Arts* is available for download at www.capeweg.org/deltarpt.pdf in PDF file format.



Larry Scripp, Ed.D., is an accomplished musician, educator, researcher, school founder, program developer, publisher, and administrator.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Music from Boston University, Larry Scripp spent his time as a performing musician and entrepreneur, conducting chamber orchestras and contemporary music groups, jazz ensemble, and composing music for dance, film, and musical theater.

Dr. Scripp combined his interests in teaching and research by becoming a faculty member in theoretical studies at New England Conservatory and a cognitive psychologist of music and researcher at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Beginning in 1988, he published articles on the development of music theory programs and skill development from the perspective of professional training in music and as a researcher in the field of arts, literacy, and human development at Harvard Project Zero, where he contributed to numerous publications investigating young children's symbolic development, musical perception, music reading skill development, and the development of computer-supported curricula in the arts and humanities.

Currently, Larry Scripp is Founding Director of the Center for Music-in-Education (CMIE), where he is responsible for the creation and administration of a music-in-education concentration/guided internship program, the Research Center for Learning Through Music, and the NEC's "Journal for Music-in-Education." In addition, Dr. Scripp now is a founding director and principal investigator for the Music-in-Education National Consortium, a coalition of schools of music and arts education organizations that support program development and research focused on the evolving role of music and the arts in American public schools.

Recently Larry Scripp has published many articles on music's evolving role in education (see journal.music-in-education.org) including his acclaimed essay on the current status of research on music learning and its relation to academic achievement and social development, (*An Overview of Music and Learning*) appearing in the *Critical Links Compendium* (aep-arts.org).