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HOW MUCH ART, AND HOW OFTEN?

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ARTSBRIDGE aims to provide regular, on-going arts education. From the beginning (with a requirement of 16 hours in 1996) to now (25 hours) the duration of ArtsBridge projects has been conceived to provide a distinct advantage over short-term arts experiences, such as occasional visits to plays, dance concerts, and museums, or brief in-class lecture-demonstrations. Because ArtsBridge scholars work side by side with classroom teachers on a relatively long-term basis, it is possible to offer pupils complete “hands-on/bodies-in” arts training programs.

But a single ArtsBridge experience (e.g., 25 hours of drama), while superior in quantity and therefore quality to shorter programs, will probably not have a significant impact on the child. A 25-hour course may very well trigger latent artistry and open the door to the vast world of art, but unless there is continuing opportunity for the child to follow up the discoveries and inspirations gained in that first class, any positive effects will wear thin in a very short time. This is not merely an assumption; the best research shows that a child benefits most from four years of arts education, not only by developing artistic skills and appreciation but in gaining collateral rewards evidenced by significant across-the-board improvement in SAT scores. *

Establishing four years of arts. UCI ArtsBridge is dedicated to creating four-year projects at selected schools. Because teachers elect ArtsBridge voluntarily, we do not have the authority to require four-year commitments from all the teachers of a select school. Nevertheless we must try to develop partnerships of shared goals and mutual understanding so that we can rely on a certain number of teachers who will support a four-year plan. The direct benefits to the children participating in these classes are known. Of even greater value, however, is the research opportunity provided by a four-year model—to be compared side-by side with schools that do not have a four-year arts program. UCI has now established an arts research center—C.A.R.E., a collaboration between UCI’s Department of Education, the Claire Trevor School of the Arts, and internationally renowned researchers in arts education—that can draw important lessons for future arts education. *If we can set up a stable four-year model, we can test and possibly define the dynamics that generate significant pupil improvements in all core subjects—thus giving legislators and school district officials indisputable grounds for funding the arts in all K-12 schools.*

* The College Board, Profile of College-Bound Seniors, National report for 1999, 2000, and 2001. See MENC: The National Association for Music Education at www.menc.org/.

Why this is difficult. UCI ArtsBridge tried over the past two years to provide four years of art to three partner schools in Santa Ana—at Diamond, Heninger, and Martin Elementary Schools. The four-year rationale was discussed in Email and conversations with the principals of each of these schools, and with some of the teachers.

During the first year, 2000-01, most of the teachers at these schools, grades two through five, chose to sign on for ArtsBridge. When some teachers balked at the requirement of 25 hours per round, ArtsBridge compromised by permitting teachers to split some projects, so that several classes received only 12 to 13 hours. At the time of deciding to allow short projects, ArtsBridge cautioned that this was to be only a temporary measure to allow teachers a period of adjustment, permitting them to anticipate the full time requirement in the second year.

At the start of the second year most of the teachers were eager to continue ArtsBridge. At one of the three schools, nearly all teachers entered into the second year of the four-year plan. But in order to make this happen, ArtsBridge waived the requirement that each teacher must make an individual application. It was seen as a convenience to teachers to allow the principal or a staff coordinator to act as the intermediary in setting up teacher-scholar teams. The four-year plan fell apart at the juncture between the first and second rounds of ArtsBridge in 2001-02. At this point, too few teachers from any of the three partner schools chose to continue ArtsBridge.

While the suspension of these hoped-for ArtsBridge projects had the salutary effect of releasing scholars to many schools on our waiting list, the loss of the four-year plan was a blow to our research structure. We have studied the reasons given by various teachers for not continuing ArtsBridge, and we can see three prominent problems: (1) Teachers are not equally inspired to include the arts in their classrooms; (2) some teachers want an art that is not scheduled for their grade level; and (3) teachers find it difficult to set aside the number of hours required by ArtsBridge, particularly in the spring when they must present their pupils for state testing in core subjects that do not include the arts.

Point one, teacher enthusiasm. Not everyone appreciates the value of the arts, and this is as true of teachers as it is for the general population. Early on, ArtsBridge learned that the individual teacher's eagerness for a project was essential to the success of a project. The motivated teacher spends more time with the scholar in discussing and preparing the arts lessons and is more flexible in scheduling time for the project. The arts-keen teacher keeps the scholar's lessons alive for pupils between the scholar's visits, often spending time each day reviewing portions of the scholar's lessons or drilling pupils in dance or music exercises. Pupils pick up on the teacher's interest and are more receptive to the arts experience.

In order to make the four-year plan a reality, ArtsBridge broke its own requirement that only teachers who make direct on-line applications to ArtsBridge may receive projects. By the start of the second year almost half of the projects assigned to the “four-year schools” were awarded to teachers who had neither applied nor expressed interest in continuing ArtsBridge. Teachers at the four-year partner schools were given priority over many eager teachers at other schools *simply by allowing themselves to be named by a principal or staff coordinator as “willing” hosts*. The collapse of the four-year plan has re-opened our eyes to the wisdom of our old requirement that all teachers must make a personal application. From now on, no project will be assigned unless asked for by a teacher. No teacher should feel that a project is *imposed* on his or her class.

Point two, the choice of art. Because we wanted to give all the children in grades two through five a full year in each of the four arts, we had to decide on one discipline per grade level. Only in this way would it be possible for a child to receive all of the arts as he or she progressed from one class to another. Thus we established studio art for grade two, music for grade three, dance for grade four, and drama for grade five. The rationale for phasing the arts in this sequence is straightforward: the first art lessons—in one or more visual arts—prepare a child conceptually to understand the particular ways in which artists perceive the world. After the first year, each child proceeds through the three branches of performing arts. Music comes first, in grade three, because it lays a foundation for Dance in grade four. Drama is at the end of the train because Drama incorporates all of the other arts. Other rationales might have been applied equally well, but it was incumbent on us to choose one, and this sequence has a compelling logic.

Some teachers have preferences for one art over another and were unhappy being told what art they should have. While this is understandable, it would have been impossible to satisfy each teacher’s wishes and guarantee that a child would receive all four arts. We received criticism from about six teachers claiming that one or another art was “not so important,” or that the children at a certain grade level “do not have the attention span” for a particular art. In such cases, the underlying issue was clearly a matter of the teachers’ personal taste, as there is near unanimous agreement among responsible arts educators that all the arts are of value and that there is no age handicap when it comes to learning any of the arts. Still, teacher resistance *for whatever reason* means a lack in the enthusiasm we need to make a strong project. It is the responsibility of ArtsBridge to make a clear and persuasive case for assigning a particular discipline to each grade level.

Point three, lack of time. Of all the stated problems, teachers’ concerns that they do not have time for the arts, particularly when state testing looms in the spring, constitute the greatest obstacle. No matter how well we promote arts education, teachers know that they will be evaluated according to how well their pupils score in language arts, social science/history, math, and science.

We have two new ways of resolving the time problem for teachers. Beginning in 2001-02, ArtsBridge scholars in elementary classes were required to integrate the teaching of their art with a core subject area, using their art as a pedagogical tool. In this way we reinforced and complemented the teachers' goals in teaching core material. Another change was to assign certain scholars for a year at a time, for fifty hours to be distributed over a nine month period, rather than to require teachers to fit twenty-five hours into only three-and-a-half months.

We did not abandon our attempt to create a model four-year program. Our focus turned towards partnering with a single school, a new charter school, El Sol Elementary in Santa Ana, with our director and faculty mentors working on a more personal basis with each of the teachers at the chosen school. The new school currently offers instruction only in kindergarten and first grade, and we have been sending scholars to offer "sampler" arts programs to the young pupils. Beginning this year, this school will inaugurate classes for second and third graders, and our aim is to create a four years arts program slowly, expanding in step with the school's expansion. By establishing closer working ties and shared goals with the teachers, coupled with 24-hour "home phone" communication, we believe we can anticipate and resolve all of the problems that have previously emerged.

Addenda

The Step Rationale is the way in which UC Irvine ArtsBridge aims to offer four year programs in select schools.

1. Studio Art – 2nd Grade
2. Music– 3rd Grade
3. Dance – 4th Grade
4. Drama – 5th Grade

The Goal: One art leads to the next. ArtsBridge thus offers an introduction to each of the disciplines with no break in continuity; phased growth from one form of art to the next.

- Visual arts lead child to think conceptually without over-personalizing criticism. Control of medium.
- Music lays foundation for movement and rhythm as ends in themselves and also to underlay dance and drama. Control of medium and of self.
- Dance draws on music while leading children to full body expression. Control of self. Characterization and abstraction through gestural expression.
- Drama (acting) draws on music and dance in characterization, and drama (design) draws on visual arts. Control of self. Characterization through body and voice. Control of medium.

Arts students outperform non-arts peers on the SAT, according to reports by the College Entrance Examination Board. In 2001, SAT takers with coursework/experience in music performance scored 57 points higher on the verbal portion of the test and 41 points higher on the math portion than students with no coursework or experience in the arts.

Sources: The College Board, Profile of College-Bound Seniors National Report for 1999, 2000, and 2001.

Course Title	Verbal Mean Scores			Math Mean Scores		
	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
Acting/Play Production	543	542	541	532	532	531
Art History/Appreciation	518	517	518	517	518	518
Dance	514	514	512	508	510	510
Drama: Study or Appreciation	534	534	534	521	522	523
Music: Study or Appreciation	538	538	539	534	537	538
Music Performance	530	532	533	531	534	535
Photography/Film	526	526	527	524	526	526
Studio Art/Design	525	524	525	527	528	528
No Arts Coursework	477	477	476	492	496	494
Honors Courses			565			564

Years of Study	Verbal Mean Scores			Math Mean Scores		
	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
More than 4 years		543	544		543	545
4 or more Years	538	536	535	537	532	530
3 Years	515	516	518	513	517	518
2 Years	506	506	506	511	513	513
1 Year	498	497	497	508	510	510
.5 Year or Less	487	486	485	499	500	500