



Evaluation of the Student-Centered Arts-Learning Environments (SCALE) Project 2013 Report

The SCALE Project focused on professional development (PD) and technical assistance (TA) provided by the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) and the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra (WVSO) that enabled teachers to integrate arts into other curricular areas through cross-discipline collaboration. Teachers from 16 high-poverty elementary schools helped students plan and implement an arts-based cross-curricular project, and prepared them to attend a theme-related concert performed by the WVSO.

Method of study. We conducted surveys of teachers and PD/TA providers to collect data about the quality of the PD/TA provided; the fidelity of implementation at each of the schools; and in a pretest/posttest survey, changes in student engagement, school climate/culture, and improvements in lesson design.

Findings. PD was well attended and received remarkably high overall ratings. In most schools, the SCALE Project was well implemented. Overall, schools saw the greatest level of implementation for student engagement in the arts and the lowest level for improving lesson design. Implementation was far from even, however. For schools with lower levels of implementation, the most common challenges included (a) forming a team; (b) holding regular team meetings; (c) providing PD for school staff in arts integration; (d) involving content areas other than the arts; and/or (e) involving only some, not all, of their classrooms. Across all schools, small improvements were noted for (a) students staying on task, and (b) student motivation. Looking only at schools new to the program, we found small improvements in student behavioral and cognitive engagement—especially, higher levels of students staying on task and believing they were learning in their classes—as well as increases in collaboration with community members and more use of dance/movement strategies in lesson planning. Teachers from high-implementation schools reported higher overall behavioral and cognitive engagement among students—especially students (a) staying on task, (b) preferring more challenging assignments, and (c) following instructions—and less integration of creative writing instructional strategies, and more use of dance/movement instructional strategies. Non-arts teachers also reported more use of dance/movement strategies, and more collaboration with arts teachers.

Limitations of study. All data are self-reported and thus subject to various threats to validity, such as social desirability bias (when respondents provide overly positive responses to a survey or questionnaire due to their desire to be viewed favorably) or nonresponse bias (when respondents who elect not to participate in a survey differ in a meaningful way with those who do).

Recommendations. Based on these findings we recommend the following: (a) continuing this project; (b) working to sustain initial excitement so that schools with previous experience can continue to realize benefits; (c) encouraging and supporting full implementation of all components of the program; (d) making sure participating schools build in sufficient common planning time to support the necessary collaboration; and (e) developing strategies to ensure that once the school project concludes, the faculty does not return to business as usual.

For more information, contact coauthor Patricia C. Hammer, Office of Research (phammer@access.k12.wv.us), or download the full report at <http://wvde.state.wv.us/research/reports2013/EvaluationoftheSCALEProject2013Report.pdf>

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