

Start with the Art: Early Results from a Study of Arts-Integrated Instruction for Young Children

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Abstract : A substantial and growing literature has demonstrated that arts education benefits young children's socioemotional and cognitive development. Less is known about the capacity of arts-integrated instruction to yield benefits to similar domains, particularly among demographically and socioeconomically diverse groups of young children. However, the small literature on this topic suggests that arts-integrated instruction may foster young children's socioemotional and cognitive development by presenting opportunities to 1) engage in instructional content in diverse ways, 2) experience and regulate strong emotions, 3) experience growth-oriented feedback, and 4) engage in collaborative work with peers. Start with the Art is a new program of arts-integrated instruction currently being implemented in four schools in a school district that serves students from a diverse range of backgrounds. The program employs a co-teaching model in which teaching artists and classroom teachers engage in collaborative lesson planning and instruction over the course of the academic year and is currently the focus of an impact study featuring a randomized-control design, as well as an implementation study, both of which are funded through an Educational Innovation and Research grant from the United States Department of Education. The paper will present the early results from the Start with the Art implementation study. These results will provide an overview of the extent to which the program was implemented in accordance with design, with a particular emphasis on the degree to which the four opportunities enumerated above (e.g., opportunities to engage in instructional content in diverse ways) were presented to students. There will be a review key factors that may influence the fidelity of implementation, including classroom teachers' reception of the program and the extent to which extant conditions in the classroom (e.g., the overall level of classroom organization) may have impacted implementation fidelity. With the explicit purpose of creating a program that values and meets the needs of the teachers and students, Start with the Art incorporates the feedback from individuals participating in the intervention. Tracing its trajectory from inception to ongoing development and examining the adaptive changes made in response to teachers' transformative experiences in the post-pandemic classroom, Start with the Art continues to solicit input from experts in integrating artistic content into core curricula within educational settings catering to students from under-represented backgrounds in the arts. Leveraging the input from this rich consortium of experts has allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the program's implementation. The early findings derived from the implementation study emphasize the potential of arts-integrated instruction to incorporate restorative practices. Such practices serve as a crucial support system for both students and educators, providing avenues for children to express themselves, heal emotionally, and foster social development, while empowering teachers to create more empathetic, inclusive, and supportive learning environments. This all-encompassing analysis spotlights Start with the Art's adaptability to any learning environment through the program's effectiveness, resilience, and its capacity to transform - through art - the classroom experience within the ever-evolving landscape of education.

Keywords : arts-integration, social emotional learning, diverse learners, co-teaching, teaching artists, post-pandemic teaching

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