

# Arts for Learning Lessons Project Description

## **The Purpose**

The Arts for Learning Lessons Project's purpose is to significantly increase student literacy by developing arts-based instructional strategies for use by elementary school teachers.

## **Objectives**

Literacy objectives in Grades 3-5, as assessed against local and state standards, using established measures as well as other measures teachers and schools find valuable. The literacy focus will be on reading and writing, with attention to skills for and learning by listening and speaking.

## **The Product**

The Project will create "Lesson Units" that include classroom-ready, arts-integrated lessons, materials and references for classroom use and related professional development supporting implementation that is supplemental to the "main" literacy program. The lessons will be designed for implementation by a classroom teacher without the assistance of teaching artists, arts specialists, professional performances, arts venues, or extraordinary media. "Extensions" (that are residencies provided by teaching artists that "extend" the Arts for Learning Lessons) may suggest ways to effectively engage such resources when they are available. Up to fifty lessons or 5 Units will be developed over two years; at least 120 Lessons over six years. Lessons may integrate content from other subject areas, such as science or social studies.

Lessons will be targeted to "sweet spots" in the reading/writing curriculum—areas to which the arts make natural and significant connections for learning. Dance, music, theater, and visual arts help students learn by making abstract concepts concrete and visible through the use of images, sounds, movement, language, body, and voice. By their very nature, arts processes can extend students' engagement with reading and writing--requiring them to observe, analyze, synthesize, create, revise, and evaluate. Some examples of "sweet spots" between the reading/writing curriculum and the arts include learning the concept of writing with character and voice by engaging in improvisations or developing vocabulary by creating actors' dialogue or song lyrics.

## **Learning Theory**

Working with learning theorist Dr. John Bransford (The Learning Sciences Group at the University of Washington), the Project will develop theories and methods that will enable teachers to apply the concept of "leveraged learning" to develop student literacy. Leveraged learning refers to the use of previously learned concepts and skills to "leverage" new learning. Specifically, the Project focuses on how working with arts processes, skills and products can help students leverage what they already know for further learning. Lessons rely on three "leveraging" strategies: 1) reinforcement of prior learning, 2) extended applications of prior learning, and 3) developing new learning that builds on prior learning. Leveraged learning can be used with groups of students or differentiated for each student. It joins differentiated instruction for individuals with pursuit of common standards and leverages individual differences for achievement of shared standards.

Integration of the arts for learning of literacy will be an important factor in raising students' achievement toward standards for proficiency or mastery by a) extending and intensifying their engagement in learning activities, reinforcing and making more fluent what they have learned in their "main" literacy program, b) motivating them to strive for learning at higher levels, c) providing multiple strategies for learning and expression, and/or d) creating opportunities for them to learn new material or skills more rapidly or with more confidence.

Similarly, leveraged learning strategies will be applied to the design for teachers' professional development. Teachers' prior knowledge of the language arts curriculum will be "leveraged" to help them understand how learning through the arts can benefit development of literacy.

### **Design/Development**

Lessons will be created, tested, and refined by a design/development (D/D) team drawing on experience and expertise as well as feedback from field trials in local communities. The team includes a lead organization responsible for design, development and revision of the lessons and field-practitioner organizations responsible for providing advice and feedback during the D/D process. In addition, D/D teams will create plans for professional development to prepare teachers to implement the lessons. The lessons will fit a common conceptual framework and format.

A central team of YAI national staff, Dr. Bransford's group and consultants will lead the entire D/D process.

Local YA chapters serving as field practitioners will partner with school districts to align lessons with local needs and to build commitment through the D/D process for promotion and implementation in their service areas. These chapters will serve as resources to others in the nationwide YA network for local adaptation of the lesson packages.

Formative evaluation will be built into the entire D/D process. Feedback on the lessons will be provided from multiple sources (e.g., reviews by reading teachers and classroom teachers, hothouse tests in classrooms).

### **Professional Development for Teachers**

Classroom teachers, reading specialists, and principals will participate in a professional development workshop designed to prepare them to implement the arts-integrated lessons. YA chapters trained by YAI national staff will lead this professional development. The initial workshop will be designed for a single day, or equivalent time. YA chapters will consider opportunities for offering ongoing support to teachers involved in the implementation.

### **Research and Evaluation**

The Project will examine gains made in student learning, with reference to the learning theory outlined above.

Growth in student literacy will be determined through measures such as standardized reading tests, Student Pre and Post Literacy Assessments and Attitude Surveys, Embedded Assessments within the Lessons Student Notebooks, and other indicators of achievement. Intermediate indicators of effects will be examined (such as student attitudes toward reading and writing and teachers' views of increased student engagement or meta-cognitive capabilities they apply to learning and using literacy). In addition, YAI along with its consultants and affiliate staff will conduct informal research using instruments and protocols aligned with the more formal study. Findings will be shared as they develop.

Specifically, the Project will examine if and how the arts create conditions for "leveraged learning that: 1) reinforces and extends knowledge and skills in reading and writing, 2) helps students learn new information and skills more rapidly, 3) develops deeper understanding that students can use, 4) motivates students to strive for higher levels of learning, 5) capitalizes on student variability/differences, and 6) provides a variety of ways for students to be successful.

Project outcomes have been statistically significant and provide strong evidence that school districts should increase their financial and curricular commitments to learning through the arts.