

Program Evaluation Report

Artful Citizenship Project

Year 3 Project - Executive Summary

The Wolfsonian, Inc.



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Three-Year Project Report

Executive Summary

Artful Citizenship is an arts-integrated social studies curriculum project designed to provide third- through fifth- grade students and teachers with the tools necessary to:

- develop visual literacy skills;
- implement social science content across academic content areas;
- create opportunities for integrated artistic response.

Artful Citizenship is a pilot educational program funded by the US Department of Education, Arts in Education, Model Development and Dissemination Grant Program. It was developed by The Wolfsonian-Florida International University (FIU) in partnership with Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), Visual Understanding in Education (VUE), a non-profit organization that develops learner-centered methods that use art to teach critical thinking and visual literacy, faculty from the FIU College of Education, and a team of independent education researchers and evaluators from Curva and Associates, a private research and evaluation firm.

The Wolfsonian and its partners recently completed the three years of funded activities that included development, field testing, implementation, evaluation, and dissemination of Artful Citizenship as part of the core social studies and language arts curricula in the third, fourth and fifth grades at three Miami-Dade County public elementary schools. All three schools have high percentages of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who are at risk of academic failure. An additional school with similar demographics was included to serve as a comparison group for evaluation purposes.

The evaluation addresses the central objectives of the program: teaching visual literacy in order to influence children's character and social development, and, ultimately, to improve academic achievement, as measured through norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced test (Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test). The psychosocial dimensions included in the evaluation were Art Self-Concept, Art Enjoyment, Academic Self-Concept, and School/Civic Orientation.

The project focused on the following evaluation questions:

- Question 1: To what extent does participation in the Artful Citizenship program affect students' ability to interpret visual images?
- Question 2: Do students who participate in the Artful Citizenship program have greater gains in psychosocial measures (e.g., self-efficacy, civic orientation) than children who do not participate in the program?

Question 3: What is the association between visual literacy and psychosocial measures?

Question 4: What is the association between visual literacy and student achievement in reading and mathematics?

The significant findings were as follows:

- **Students who received the Artful Citizenship program for three years had significantly higher growth rates in visual literacy than comparison group students.**

The Artful Citizenship program was effective in developing visual literacy skills. The growth rate of the treatment group over the project period was demonstrably higher than the growth rate in the comparison school – comparison group students experienced virtually no growth in visual literacy. In contrast, students who received the Artful Citizenship program gained nearly a full point (on the ten-point scale) over the three-year project.

- **There was a strong relationship between growth in visual literacy and growth in student achievement in both reading and mathematics.**

In the three treatment schools, growth in visual literacy strongly correlated with three of the four measures of student academic achievement – two for criterion-based achievement and one for norm-referenced achievement. Correlations between growth in visual literacy and achievement were between .35 and .40, extremely high figures for variables associated with student achievement. These relationships did not manifest themselves in the comparison school.

- **The psychosocial scales were not trustworthy.**

There were five psychosocial scales in the original design. The researchers collapsed selected items for two scales into a combined scale. Even then, reliability coefficients were below acceptable levels. Additionally, predictive and construct validity were not evident in their associations with other variables. For example, there was no relationship between participation in the program and changes in the four psychosocial measures, nor between psychosocial measures and student achievement.

A second part of this evaluation was a formative assessment of how the Artful Citizenship program was delivered by teachers in the classroom. By observing and interacting with art and classroom teachers, the researchers were able to gain insights into details in the curriculum that worked well in the classroom and those that would benefit from revision. Researchers also got to see how the support of principals in schools was a crucial dimension in the quality of program fidelity – how closely teachers adhered to the curriculum.

In order to collect data from the field, site visits were conducted at the three elementary schools participating in the project over the three-year period. A qualitative assessment tool was developed by the evaluation team for use in the site visits in grades 3, 4 and 5. The visits encompassed two-days in each school, during which time interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators, and observations were made of the teachers

in their classrooms. Researchers assessed student dynamics, project products, and school and classroom climate. The results were transcribed and content analyzed in search of common and contrasting themes.

The implementation findings were as follows:

- **Learning Visual Literacy led to the development of students' critical thinking skills.**

Students in the Artful Citizenship classrooms demonstrated critical thinking skills through their use of evidential reasoning – the ability to provide logical and factual support to their statements. Using the Visual Thinking Strategies® (VTS) method, students quickly learned to support their assertions with evidence, frequently using “because” statements in their responses.

Critical thinking skills were not limited to art and social studies. Teachers and administrators told the evaluators that Artful Citizenship filtered through to other areas of the curriculum including language arts, mathematics, and writing.

The curriculum fostered collaboration among students by facilitating a process of building on the ideas of others. Students readily adopted the logic and language of the VTS® method, with its emphasis on linking and synthesizing student ideas.

- **The curriculum promoted good citizenship skills, cooperation, respect, and tolerance for the views of others.**

The visual literacy portion of the curriculum encouraged participation by all students, regardless of cultural background or language ability. Students felt free to express themselves without fear of being judged right or wrong. The consistent observation across classrooms, grade levels and schools was a healthy exchange of ideas and respect for the opinions of others. The Artful Citizenship social studies and artistic response curriculum, with its explicit focus on the positive aspects of family, community and culture, complemented and built upon this result.

- **The curriculum was effective with Limited English Proficient students.**

Teachers and administrators commented that the Artful Citizenship curriculum seems well-suited to students new to English, helping to improve their vocabulary and writing skills. Students with limited English felt more comfortable in the Artful Citizenship setting, with its emphasis on respecting the ideas of other students.

- **Teachers found Artful Citizenship curriculum materials to be effective, easy to use, and developmentally appropriate for their students.**

While using an art-based approach was new for most classroom teachers, they were impressed by the results they saw in their students. The curriculum offered them sufficient flexibility to select materials that were relevant to their particular settings and student needs. Teachers reported that the following curriculum activities worked exceptionally well: keeping travelogues, constructing dioramas, and researching of community events or traditions.

- **All teachers were under extreme time pressure simply to stay up with the required general curriculum. As a result, implementation of the social studies component of the curriculum was uneven across schools and classrooms within each school.**

Teachers found that insufficient time to deliver the curriculum was the biggest challenge in the implementation of the project. Other teachers had trouble properly spacing and sequencing the lessons. More importantly, another contributing factor on teachers at the participating schools has been the increased pressure to improve school and student performance on the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT).

- **Continuous feedback in the evaluation process worked to improve all aspects of the Artful Citizenship curriculum, training, and instruction.**

Artful Citizenship was a work-in-progress over the course of the project. Curriculum changes were influenced by teachers' feedback to project staff. Training in VTS® techniques, project meetings, and on-site technical assistance were refined over three years. Project staff, teachers and evaluators developed open channels of communication and each group was influenced by the others.

Conclusions and Discussion

The Artful Citizenship curriculum is remarkable in many ways. The vision of the program is that in learning to be more visually literate, students will also improve their critical thinking abilities, which will, in turn, lead to a wide array of improved outcomes: achievement in other subject areas, self-confidence and self-esteem, respect for the opinions of others, and a stronger understanding of community and culture.

The association between growth in visual literacy and growth in reading and mathematics achievement, as measured on Florida's high-stakes standardized tests, is an exciting finding in many ways. It is a vindication of the claims of many art educators that critical thinking learned in art classes extends to other subject areas as well.

It was surprising that the association between visual literacy and reading and mathematics achievement was obtained only in the treatment schools, the three schools that received the Artful Citizenship program. One would not anticipate this finding. Rather, one would expect that a student who progressed in visual literacy in the comparison school would enjoy the same achievement gains as well. What this anomalous finding suggests is that it is not the level of visual literacy on an assessment instrument that matters, but instead it is the process of learning visual literacy through Visual Thinking Strategies® that made the difference.

In other words, perhaps of equal importance as the artistic dimension are the methods in VTS® that encourage the use of evidence in argument, the attention to the opinions of others, and the respect and interest in other cultures that offer different contributions to the social environment. It is not just being visually literate, it is becoming visually literate in a particular way that encourages the critical thinking that was clearly observed in the site visits, and was measured in the standardized achievement tests. As Housen and Yenawine explain it,

Over time, students grow from casual, random, idiosyncratic viewers to thorough, probing, reflective interpreters....They are first encouraged to find meaning based on past experiences (legitimizing what they know), and to become grounded storytellers....The process first depends on group interaction and works toward individual problem solving motivated by personal interests. As students develop their connection to art, they exercise a wide variety of cognitive skills that are useful in many contexts. Indeed, in all locations where VTS[®] has been tested, both classroom and test performance has been seen to improve, and the effect in all cases has been attributable to VTS[®]. (VUE Web site: <http://www.vue.org>)

It was disappointing not to find a programmatic impact on psychosocial variables such as art self-concept, academic self-concept, school orientation, and others. The measurement of these constructs was flawed, lacking both reliability and validity. It will be important in future research to align these outcome variables to the specific curriculum. Measuring student gains in areas that were not explicitly covered in the curriculum does not explicitly assess the effectiveness of the program.

This evaluation study shows that integrating art in the curriculum is not just “Art for art’s sake,” but clearly contributes to students’ critical thinking and measurable academic achievement as well. In fact, it would not be surprising to find that such curricular “enhancements” may be the best test preparation the schools can provide.