

Arts Corps

Program Evaluation Report

Summary, Year Four, 2003-2004

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Since its inception in 2000, Arts Corps has produced a report of each year's activities and evaluation findings. This document reflects the fourth such report and focuses on agency activities between September, 2003 and June, 2004.

Arts Corps values systematic data collection and the process of critical reflection to inform program management decisions. This report reflects an internal program evaluation process that benefited from the input of external evaluation consultants, and focuses on highlighting positive evaluation findings and findings that suggest avenues for program improvement. Evaluation findings are interpreted in the context of a literature review on effective practices in youth development and out-of-school time programming.

about ArtsCorps

Vision: To develop a healthy, compassionate, and innovative community by helping young people tap into their own creativity and power through art.

Mission: To provide all young people access to excellent arts education opportunities.

Arts Corps is a non-profit arts education program located in Seattle and serving King County. Founded in May 2000, Arts Corps provides quality, after-school arts education classes free of charge to youth. The program recruits and places experienced teaching artists in a variety of existing after- and in-school programs where they provide structured art instruction for young people in grades K-12.

Arts Corps creates strategic alliances with existing after-school programs to provide art classes during fall, winter and spring quarters. During the 2003-2004 school year, Arts Corps partnered with 30 sites to provide 109 classes to 770 young people. Because 47% of these students enrolled in two or more Arts Corps classes during the year, 1,238 distinct enrollments in arts classes were recorded during this period. Classes convene in neighborhoods where targeted young people live - typically in facilities such as community centers, youth organizations, and schools. Classes are held only in sites where at least 50% of the students served qualify for free or reduced lunch.



Arts Corps classes are offered in a wide variety of disciplines including dance, drama, music, visual arts and poetry. Classes meet two to three hours a week, typically for a total of eight weeks. Class sizes are limited, ranging from 6-25 students depending on the subject area and site, with a typical class limit of 15.

Community exhibitions are an important component of Arts Corps programming. Arts Corps regularly sponsors or participates in performances and exhibits at local theatres or museums. This year, Arts Corps sponsored or supported 48 such events at the neighborhood facilities as well as Seattle arts institutions.

evaluation activities

Arts Corps set out to accomplish four major goals, as follows:

- Positively Impact the Lives of Young People
- Model a Different Approach to Education
- Energize and Unite Communities
- Bring Recognition and Support to the Value of Art in Life

The emphasis of this evaluation is placed on the first goal, since impacting the lives of students is core to Arts Corps' mission. In 2003-2004, organizational records, a pre/post-term student survey, teaching artist surveys, facility coordinator (the primary contact at each neighborhood facility) surveys and parent surveys were used to measure success towards this goal. While each survey generally assessed the same topics, they varied in format and wording depending upon the target group or the age of the student. Topics addressed include:

- self confidence
- empathy and compassion
- problem solving skills
- independent thinking
- participation in new activities
- communication skill
- emotional control and self discipline
- writing habits
- classroom participation

This evaluation produces two major findings:

- Arts Corps provides a number of essential developmental assets for its youth participants.
- Arts Corps impacts academic and social outcomes by improving writing, self-confidence, empathy, and problem solving skills.

The following describes these findings in more detail.



positively impacting the lives of students

This evaluation suggests and demonstrates that Arts Corps provides a number of essential developmental assets for its youth participants.

“Problem free is not fully-prepared” is the mantra of youth development advocates. Young people need more than simply an absence of crisis. They need skills, values, and opportunities to grow into healthy, productive adults. The Search Institute has surveyed over two million youth across the United States and Canada, and identified 40 specific positive experiences and personal qualities essential to raising successful young people, which are called developmental assets (Search Institute, 2004).

This list of 40 developmental assets includes external assets, or positive experiences young people receive from the world around them, such as support and empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and positive and constructive uses of time. The list also includes characteristics and behaviors that reflect positive internal growth and development, such as positive values and identities, social competencies, and commitment to learning. These are all are considered critical to influence the choices young people make, and help them to become caring, responsible adults.

Studies suggest that developmental assets play a significant role in students’ academic achievement (Search Institute, 2003). In fact, developmental assets appear to influence



I want my child to take another Arts Corps class because . . . Ever since she started the current class, she’s become a better kid.

— Parent of Arts Corps Student

student achievement as much as or more than other demographic factors. Thus, building developmental assets has great promise as a strategy for boosting student achievement.

The following sections describe the essential developmental assets that Arts Corps provides.

Arts Corps provides a valuable and constructive use of time for young people through after-school arts education.

I want my child to take another Arts Corps class because... she enjoys it and is occupied. It is the only thing she is motivated to do.

— Parent of Arts Corps Student

Arts Corps consistently provides after-school arts education to hundreds of students in the King County region each year. In 2003-2004, Arts Corps:

- offered 109 classes
- held classes at 30 sites, representing a year-over-year expansion into nine new sites

Asset development research indicates that constructive use of time is important to youth. In particular, three or more hours per week in a youth program at school or in the community is considered advantageous (Search Institute, 2004). After-school programs improve academic performance, decrease youth delinquency and other high-risk behaviors, and help young people grow into healthy, successful adults (Miller, 2003; Newman et al., 2000; Pittman et al., 2000).



Arts Corps furnishes an essential external asset that is hardest to obtain.

Research into youth programs indicates that arts education in particular can have a lasting, positive impact on the educational and life outcomes of youth typically hardest to reach (Fiske, 1999). In 2003-2004, Arts Corps offered arts classes in:

- dance
- drama
- music
- visual arts
- poetry

The course selection represents global cultural influences with course topics including African Dance, Capoeira, Brazilian Drumming, World Rhythms, and Hip/Hop and Spoken Word, as well as courses including ceramics, digital photography and video production.

Creative activities, or regular participation in lessons or practice of music, theater or other arts is considered an asset distinct from other youth programs and uniquely beneficial. In fact, creative activities is the asset that is experienced by the lowest percentage of young people, with only 20% of the 6th through 12th graders surveyed reporting participation in such activities (Search Institute, 2004).



On Arts Education

Arts Corps is the only real solid enrichment activity that the kids have. Because of diminishing funds, we're not able to offer dynamic arts ... The Arts Corps classes are the only well-taught, cohesive arts classes that we can offer right now.

— Steve Sack, Facility Coordinator,
Concord Elementary

Arts Corps programs allow for the breadth, depth, and intensity of participation to positively influence youth development.

I want my child to take another Arts Corps class . . . to learn about music, art, dance—the things he might not learn about in school.

— Parent of Arts Corps Student

On Arts Corps Classes

. . . they really loved the class. Every Tuesday and Thursday they would be like “there’s art today, right? There’s art! There’s art!

— Mary Myslewicz, Facility Coordinator,
Madrona K-8

In 2003-2004 Arts Corps classes were:

- held for two to three hours a week
- available throughout the year, with fall, winter and spring terms available at most sites
- so appealing that 47% of students registered for at least one subsequent class
- offered at 21 of the 27 sites from the previous year (a 78% retention rate)
- delivered in partnership with 30 existing after-school programs, thereby expanding the breadth of program offering for youth participants

Research into after-school programs indicates that the most effective programs are available continuously over time, and not limited to one semester only (Miller, 2003); some consider three hours a week a minimum threshold for demonstrating positive impact (Search Institute, 2004). Effective programs must attract and retain students long enough to influence their development.

A small but growing research base indicates that participation in a wide range of activities, such as arts and sports or multiple forms of art, improves outcomes for youth (Chaput, 2004). Participation in three or more different activities is associated with higher grades and academic test scores, while participation in more than one distinct after-school program is associated with academic achievement and lower drug use.

Arts Corps contributes after-school programming to those who benefit most from such programs.

Arts Corps provides quality after-school arts education:

- free-of-cost
- in the places where low-middle income youth spend time after school

Evaluations of after-school programming indicate that arts programs make a bigger difference for those students who need help the most, have the fewest options, and have limited access to effective programs. Thus, greatest impact is obtained by prioritizing accessibility to those students who live in low-income families, do not perform well in school, live in chaotic, dangerous neighborhoods, or live in non-English speaking families (Miller, 2003).



On After-School Programming

This is a very diverse school, a very diverse population . . . we want to get diverse kids exposed to something they may not be exposed to during a normal school day.

— Ron Davis, Facility Coordinator,
Denny Middle School

Arts Corps ensures that the program is delivered effectively by qualified staff.

On Teaching Artists

He makes connections with the students and relationships with the students . . . some of the kids can be challenging, and he never gives up on them and he's always positive.

— Lori Hopper, Facility Coordinator,
Cascade View Elementary



This year, Arts Corps:

- employed 28 teaching artists who provided over 2,122 classroom contact hours with 770 distinct students (and chose to spend an average of six additional hours working with students outside the classroom environment during each eight week course)
- hired only professional artists who are also experienced teachers, demonstrate an ability to teach curricula that is both culturally relevant and of intrinsic interest to youth, and can model creative risk taking, personal exploration and integrity
- supported teaching artists through quarterly assessments, an annual retreat, regular meetings and workshops designed to reinforce teaching strategies and techniques that represent effective facilitation in an array of diverse environments
- awarded financial support for teaching artists who sought professional development opportunities beyond those provided by Arts Corps
- supported teaching artists with 84 teaching assistants and volunteers who spent time in classrooms assisting in class work and modeling active participation

Staff practices are a critical determinant of the success of an after-school program intended to foster positive youth development. Staff must promote youth as partners, create safe, fair environments, foster supportive relationships, encourage personalized participation, and create learning opportunities and intentional skill-building (The Forum for

Youth Investment, 2003). Asset development indicates that a supportive relationship with a non-parent adult is an external asset that contributes to positive, healthy youth development (Search Institute, 2004). Through careful selection and ongoing support and professional development of teaching artists, Arts Corps creates a program that is consistent with best practices in after-school programming.

Arts Corps programming creates opportunities for youth to demonstrate a new competency and for adults to value these youth performances and creations. Community exhibitions beyond the classroom are an important component of Arts Corps programming. In 2003-2004 Arts Corps:

- sponsored three showcases in Seattle museums and theaters
- supported 35 exhibitions and performances at the neighborhood facilities and 10 other youth exhibitions
- helped 459 students participate in performances or exhibits outside of class
- attracted 14,590 community members who attended an exhibition or performance, thus demonstrating their value of youth

Asset development research highlights the importance of young people's perception that the community values youth, and that adults hold high expectations of them (Search Institute, 2004).



My child tells me that . . . She has been having a great time and that her art teacher really encourages all children.

— Parent of Arts Corps Student

Arts Corps programming fosters a sense of purpose and a positive view of the future.

I want my child to take another Arts Corps class . . . to learn about music, art, dance—the things he might not learn about in school.

— Parent of Arts Corps Student



In 2003-2004, Arts Corps staff:

- linked 42 students with learning opportunities that enhance their art interest, such as time spent in a professional recording studio
- referred 4 students to higher education opportunities
- hired 5 students as youth mentors or teaching assistants

A sense of purpose and a positive view of the future are each internal assets that are correlated with positive youth outcomes (Search Institute, 2004). Arts Corps intentionally fosters these internal traits by actively linking students with higher learning opportunities and opportunities to further pursue their art.

This evaluation suggests that Arts Corps is impacting academic and social outcomes by improving writing, self-confidence, empathy, and problem solving skills.

Arts Corps asserts that arts education will make a difference in the lives of young people. This assertion is supported by research into the positive impact that arts education can have. In 1999, The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) invited leading educational researchers to examine the impact of arts education on young people. The resulting paper, *Champions of Change: The Impact of Arts on Learning*, details multiple studies that examine why and how young people are changed through their arts experiences. In summary, researchers found that engagement in the arts results in higher levels of academic achievement (Fiske, 1999). In 2002, the AEP released *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development*, a compendium of sixty-two recent, strong studies of the academic and social effects of learning in the arts. This report reflects a sizable effort to catalog and describe the numerous effects of learning in the arts on academic and social skills (Deapsy, 2002).

student survey

On Self-Confidence

When we first started I knew nothing about breakdancing. But now I'm an expert. I'm more confident in myself because of this class. I felt good when we did the show. I would love to take this class again because I could learn even more moves. Jerome was good at showing the moves so we would know what to do.

— Paris, High School Student

This year's evaluation ambitiously pioneered an examination of student changes that occurred during time in Arts Corps classes. Program staff hypothesize that by providing excellent external supports and opportunities for young people, Arts Corps fosters positive changes in internal qualities such as social competency and identity. This year, Arts Corps staff developed and utilized a pre/post-term survey to document student changes.

Each quarter students were provided the opportunity to complete a pre-term survey during the first week of class and a post-term survey during the last class of the term. These surveys were provided in two formats, one for younger students (typically 5 – 11 year olds) and one for older students (typically 12 – 17 year olds). Survey questions were designed to query indicators of five target qualities/skills: self-confidence, empathy, emotional control, independent thinking and communication skills.

Paired pre/post-term surveys were obtained from 84 younger students and 126 older students. Paired samples t-tests¹ did not reveal any statistically significant changes in younger student responses to the survey. Paired samples t-tests revealed statistically significant changes in older students during their time with Arts Corps. Specifically, students described increased levels of confidence, participation in more new activities, increased levels of writing, and positive changes with regard to problem solving skills and empathy after their time with Arts Corps.

Details of these results are described below.

¹A paired sample t-test indicates the probability that the difference between the two means is caused by chance. It is customary to say that if this probability is less than 0.05, that the difference is 'significant'. In other words, the difference between the means is assumed to be not caused by chance. If this probability is more than 0.05 but less than .10, it is customary to say that there is a 'trend' suggesting a difference between the two means that is most likely not caused by chance. For the details of these analyses, please request a copy of the full evaluation report.

Survey of older students suggests **increased levels of confidence**.

Three questions asked students to report their sense of self-confidence:

- How confident do you feel about sharing your artwork with other students?
- How confident do you feel about teaching another student to do or make something?
- How confident do you feel in starting conversations with people you don't know?

Average responses to all three questions revealed a statistically meaningful increase from the beginning to the end of the Arts Corps term. Responses to the first two questions revealed that after participating in an Arts Corps class, students reported significantly higher confidence than they did before participating in the Arts Corps class. Responses to the third question regarding confidence revealed a trend towards higher confidence levels after participating in an Arts Corps class when compared to responses to the pre term survey.

Older students report **more participation in new activities** after their time in Arts Corps. One question asked students to indicate which of the new activities they have tried in the last month, and provided a list of four options (art class, dance class, new sport or team, new food). Students reported significantly more participation in new activities after involvement in the Arts Corps class. It may be that the activities provided by Arts Corps are themselves the new activities, but nonetheless, this confirms that Arts Corps helps expand experiences among its students.



I want my child to take another Arts Corps class because . . . participation in Arts Corps gives her exposure to other areas other than science and math.

— Parent of Arts Corps Student



On Communication Skills

We nailed the reason why his reading and writing level jumped from 1st to 3rd grade—and it's because he is writing for pleasure, he is writing to express himself, and it's raised his reading level, and I know it's because of his involvement in the hip-hop/spoken word class.

— Tracie Wells, Facility Coordinator,
African American Academy

Older students report **increased levels of writing** during their time with Arts Corps.

One question asked students in the last two weeks did you write down some of your ideas or stories?

After participating in an Arts Corps class, students reported significantly more writing than they did before participating in the Arts Corps class. This demonstrates that the alternative communication skills learned during Arts Corps classes are applied outside of classes. It is reasonable to assume that writing for pleasure could lead to increased school achievement as well.

Older students demonstrate **positive changes in problem solving skills and empathy** during their time in Arts Corps classes.

Two survey questions provided students with a scenario, and five choices of actions. The scenarios read as follows:

- If you were in a conversation that you had strong opinions about and the conversation changed in a direction you disagreed with, which would you most likely do?
- If you feel others in your class were making fun of someone, which of the following would you most likely do?

In both questions, two answers were considered good choices:

- ask someone for help with this problem
- talk with the person you disagree with/talk with those making fun of that person

Three answers were considered poor choices:

- get upset and cry
- get angry and yell
- keep quiet about the problem

Responses were coded in a binary fashion as good or poor. In response to both scenarios, a significantly larger percentage of students indicated good responses after participation in Arts Corps classes than before.

On Empathy

The teaching artist really guided them in a way where they were able to learn how to be empathetic of each other and let go of their own egos and help each other in order for the group to be able to raise to a higher level, and they did and it was great.

— Steve Sack, Facility Coordinator,
Concord Elementary



teaching artist & facility coordinator survey

Teaching artists completed a survey at the end of each of the 109 classes to report their perceptions of the class's impact on participants. At the end of the year, a representative of each neighborhood facility completed a survey with a section dedicated to the perceived impact of Arts Corps classes on participants. Twenty-two facility coordinators completed this survey, representing 73% of the facilities.

Five survey questions asked these adults to report anecdotes that illustrate changes among students specific to the following qualities or skills: self-confidence, empathy or compassion, problem solving or independent thinking, communication skills, and emotional control or self-discipline. Teaching artists and facility coordinators were consistently able to report perceived examples of these qualities or skills among their students. These responses are tallied in Figures 1 & 2

Figure 1. Teaching Artist Reports of Student Changes

Student Quality/Skill	Percentage of Classes with Reported Student Changes	Sample Quote
Self-confidence	84%	<i>Randi was shy at first and didn't seem confident. By the end of class she was the first to express herself in a critique session</i>
Empathy or compassion	78%	<i>A student supported another student who was afraid to perform</i>
Problem solving or independent thinking	80%	<i>Students were able to figure out a mutual problem independently</i>
Communication skills	70%	<i>Wendy became better able to describe her art and the emotions behind it</i>
Emotional control or self-discipline	69%	<i>Nathaniel is much better at controlling his anger when allowed to draw his feelings</i>

Figure 2. Facility Coordinator Reports of Student Changes

Student Quality/Skill	Percentage of Facility Coordinators Reporting Observed Changes	Sample Quote
Self-confidence	82%	<i>... very self-conscious, shy kind of individual ... she changed her personality, because when you have to express yourself, you feel your voice is being heard and you're important and you're valued</i>
Empathy or compassion	64%	<i>We had a student with a learning disability ... the group in general gave him a lot of support and just encouraged him</i>
Problem solving or independent thinking	73%	<i>... putting it together to create a dance ... I think that was great for them in terms of being able to work together ... problem solve and strategize ... so they were thinking independently and cooperating</i>
Communication skills	68%	<i>He just communicated through his art. And he's normally so close up that I think it was a good way for him to let out some of that sadness or anger</i>
Emotional control or self-discipline	77%	<i>He was gaining the ability to manage his behavior and think about direct links between the situation and the consequences</i>

Since my child started taking Arts Corps classes, I have seen ... more self-confidence, in school and in extra-curricular activities.

— Parent of Arts Corps Student

parent survey

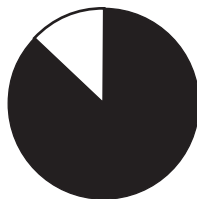
At an Arts Corps showcase held in June, a total of 50 parent attendees agreed to complete a survey, which included three yes/no questions, responses to which are detailed in Figures 3, 4 & 5.

Since taking Arts Corps classes, my child . . .

- has become more outgoing since his acting class.
- is more involved and schoolwork has improved.
- is performing more at home.
- is happier – wants to go to school every morning!
- has emotional control, compassion for others.
- is talking with me more and wanting to do more activities.
- is more confident in social situations and on stage.
- is improving steadily in art. She has art posted all over the house!
- is better in school, expresses her individuality.

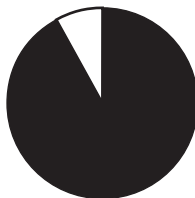
— Parents of Arts Corps Students

Figure 3. Have you seen positive changes in your child since s/he started taking Arts Corps classes?



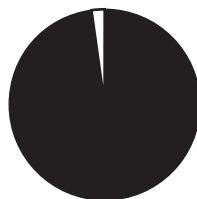
Most parents (87%) report observing positive changes in their child since s/he started taking Arts Corps classes.

Figure 4. Does your child talk about Arts Corps classes at home?



Most parents (92%) indicate that their child talks about Arts Corps classes at home.

Figure 5. Would you encourage your child to take another Arts Corps class?



The vast majority of parents (98%) would encourage his/her child to take another Arts Corps class.

conclusions

Evaluation data suggests that Arts Corps positively impacts the lives of the young people it serves. Organization records indicate that Arts Corps provides support, empowerment and constructive uses of time to students, developmental assets that have been linked with positive impacts on academic and social development. Student surveys demonstrated positive changes in self-confidence, writing, problem solving and empathy while participating in the program. Parents, teaching artists and facility coordinators surveyed all reported positive changes in students participating in Arts Corps programming



recommendations

Evaluation

The 2003-2004 evaluation represents the most sophisticated research design employed by the organization in its four year history. However, the updated evaluation plan left a number of unanswered questions.

- **Database.** Improve the organizational database that tracks students so that demographic data, enrollment, attendance and other important evaluation data can be easily tracked and compared across years and across terms, and can be used to assess difference in program impact between distinct sub-groups of program participants.
- **Eliminate Younger Student Survey** Changes in student qualities were not demonstrated among younger students in this year's evaluation. This might be attributed to the difficulty associated with designing a survey that is understandable to young readers. Eliminate the survey for students prior to 4th grade, and consider using observations and/or interviews to evaluate impact on younger students.
- **Revise Older Student Survey.** Teaching artists report that students of all ages found the survey frustrating. Unfortunately, such negative attitudes can impact survey responses, and may have contributed to unanswered questions and low response rates. Youth should be involved in survey development, and can help ensure that the wording of questions is developmentally and culturally appropriate, and that the formatting is appealing and clear. Surveys should be piloted and revised prior to use.
- **Measure Student Perceptions.** In the process of moving beyond participant satisfaction surveys to documenting youth outcomes, evaluation questions regarding student opinion and perceptions were left unexamined. For program planning, it is important to assess student perception of teaching artists, the classroom atmosphere, and the subject. Future evaluations could be enhanced by exploring student perceptions of their value in the eyes of adults in their community, and their perceptions of the expectations adults hold of them.
- **Revisit Parent Survey.** Take time to explore the qualitative data collected from parents over the past four years. Use this as the basis for developing a measure that captures the most important types of information that parents can provide.

Program

- **Revise Program Goals.** Program goals should be revisited at regular intervals as necessary. Recent advances in evaluation design revealed a lack of clarity around the five internal qualities or skills of interest. A subset of organizational goals overlap, and are measured through the same indicators. These should be revisited and clear definitions of each should be established.
- **Set Student Learning Goals.** Changes in student motivation, knowledge or skill in relation to the art they are taught should be a program goal, and should be evaluated.
- **Set Student Participation Goals.** Intensity (the amount of time youth participate during a given time period, such as hours per week), duration (this history of participation, such as the number classes across multiple years) and breadth (whether participation is focused or includes a variety of activities, such as exposure to one or more media) represent useful measures of student participation in after-school programming. Research indicates that each impacts student outcomes. Arts Corps should set targets for participation with all three of these measures in mind.
- **Create Youth Evaluation Team.** It is considered an asset to create useful roles in the community for youth. Youth could be a valuable resource as Arts Corps refines its evaluation.



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