

ARTS FOR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT:
Case Study Sites Cross-Case Analysis

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PREPARED FOR
The Minneapolis Public Schools

BY

Kyla L. Wahlstrom
The Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement
College of Education and Human Development
University of Minnesota
612-624-0300

Executive Summary

The overall goal for the Arts for Academic Achievement: The Annenberg Challenge in Minneapolis project (AAA) seeks *to change the ways in which teachers teach and students learn in order to increase student achievement*. In order to obtain a more detailed view of the activities that are occurring in the schools involved in AAA, the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota selected six schools, out of the 43 participating schools, as case study sites in order to study the process more fully. The schools selected as case sites include three elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools. CAREI has been engaged with the members of the AAA teams at each of the six schools for the past two years, 1998-2000.

The methods of data collection included attending monthly AAA team meetings; classroom observations; informal interviews with teachers, students, and artist partners; and attending AAA project-related performances. Individual members of the CAREI evaluation team linked with certain schools so that a sense of familiarity and continuity between the school staff and CAREI developed as the data were collected over time. The CAREI staff produced written accounts for each site where they were working, describing the activities, ideas, and modifications as they have evolved during the past two years. The cross-case report reflects the analysis of findings and common features among the six school sites. Findings will not be reported for single schools due to assurances of anonymity.

Implementation Issues

Leadership

The following are findings about the dimensions of leadership in the six sites as differentiated by formally designated role:

School Principal

The school principal plays a significant role by:

- Being actively, directly involved in the AAA Project.
- Elevating the level of importance of the project by actively, openly supporting the AAA coordinator.

Changing principals from year to year tends to cause uncertainty in the Annenberg team and may have had a deleterious effect upon program continuity.

School Annenberg Coordinator

The successful implementation of the arts into the school's curriculum and instructional practices is significantly dependent upon the leadership of the school's AAA coordinator. Among the six sites, there emerged notable characteristics of the

coordinator whose role, function, and behaviors were instrumental in supporting changes. These characteristics include:

- Having clearly articulated authority from the school principal to convene and lead peers.
- Convening regular team meetings at least monthly in the first year.
- Having a plan to incorporate teachers who have more recently joined the AAA Project.

The findings also reveal that most school AAA teams have grown from being dependent upon one or two individuals in the school deciding most actions, to becoming comfortable with many teachers in the group, and with group processes shaping the planning. The Annenberg Project has enabled many teachers to emerge as leaders. Having effective teacher-leaders is known to be a critical component of having effective schools.

Changes in Teacher Practice and Student Learning

As participants have gained experiences in arts-infused instruction, teaching and learning has been re-shaped. Teachers have reported the following:

- Increased awareness of the broad spectrum of learning styles of the children.
- Improved strategies to work with English Language Learners (ELL students).
- Greater ease in being a learner alongside the students.
- More positive social dynamics among the students.
- The development of “professional community” among the teachers.
- Feelings of emerging self-efficacy among the teachers.

Challenges

The frequent transfer or departure of teachers and/or the principal from an Annenberg site has caused feelings of standing still or moving backward as the team attempts to rebuild again for the next year. Having a group of colleagues who are now professionally capable at different levels of arts infusion poses serious staff development challenges.

Another challenge has been the shifting role of the AAA site coordinator. Usually in Year 1, the coordinator role is one of organizing. In Years 2 and 3, the role often shifts to interpersonal issues of ‘who works better with whom?’ and ‘what to do about teachers or artists whose actions have a broader impact on other AAA team and school members?’ Most teachers are uncomfortable with differentiating themselves from their peers in any hierarchical manner. The coordinators need support and encouragement to do this when needed.

Summary

The “theory of action” in the AAA endeavor believes that changes in teacher practices will have a positive impact upon student achievement. Since three years’ worth of student achievement data is needed in order to draw any reliable conclusions about academic impact, those conclusions are yet to be drawn. In the meantime, the

information provided in this cross-case analysis provides mounting evidence that changes in teacher practice and changes in how schools are organized for instruction are happening. Many Minneapolis teachers report having been positively “changed forever” as a result of the Annenberg experience and they believe their future students will forever be the beneficiaries of that.

Background

The overall goal for the Annenberg Arts for Academic Achievement Project seeks *to change the ways in which teachers teach and students learn in order to increase student achievement*. There are forty-three schools in the Minneapolis School District participating in the Arts for Academic Achievement (AAA or Annenberg) Project. In order to obtain a more detailed view of the activities that are occurring in the schools involved in AAA, the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota selected six schools as case study sites in order to study the process more fully. The array of schools as case sites includes three elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools. CAREI has been engaged with the members of the AAA teams at these six schools for the past two years, 1998-2000.

The overall goal for the project targets behavioral changes in teaching and learning; the evaluation plan calls for data that will specifically relate to those changes. Therefore, the methods of data collection include attending monthly AAA team meetings; classroom observations; informal interviews with teachers, students, and artist partners; and attending AAA project-related performances. Individual members of the CAREI evaluation team are linked with certain schools so that a sense of familiarity and continuity between the school staff and CAREI are present as the data are being collected over time. The CAREI staff have produced written accounts for each site where they have been working, describing the activities, ideas, and modifications as they have evolved during the past two years. This report reflects the analysis of findings and common features among the six school sites. Findings will not be reported for single schools due to assurances of anonymity and in order to maintain the trust relationship that has been established between CAREI and the AAA participants. The analysis concerns implementation issues and changes that have occurred thus far towards making changes in teacher practices and student learning.

Implementation Issues

Leadership

A key component of any reform initiative is the role of leadership—who are the key leaders, what do leaders do to enable a successful program implementation, what are the conditions in which effective leadership emerges? The following are findings about the dimensions of leadership in the six sites as differentiated by formally designated role:

School Principal

The school principal plays a significant role by:

- Being actively, directly involved in the AAA Project, or
- Elevating the level of importance of the project by actively, openly supporting the AAA coordinator.

Changing principals from year to year tends to cause uncertainty in the Annenberg team and may have had a deleterious effect upon program continuity. Strong, constant leadership by the school's Annenberg coordinator may have a mitigating influence on these unforeseen circumstances.

School Annenberg Coordinator

The successful implementation of the arts into the school's curriculum and instructional practices is significantly dependent upon the leadership of the school's AAA coordinator. Among the six sites, there emerged notable characteristics of the coordinator whose role, function, and behaviors were instrumental in supporting changes. These characteristics include:

- Having clearly articulated authority from the school principal to convene and lead peers
- Convening team meetings at least monthly in the first year.
- In subsequent years, having a plan to incorporate teachers who have more recently joined the AAA Project
- Keeping a regular schedule of meetings. The function of having regular meetings is important because they: 1) continue to emphasize the importance of the grant; 2) reduce isolation in working with the artists; 3) diminish the "show and tell" aspect of each meeting and enhance the honesty and problem-solving behaviors of the team members
- Planning with team members to know what to do to carry on when the coordinator can not attend the meeting

District-level Coordinator

With a reform initiative originating at a district level, the need for and importance of a person charged with management oversight is essential. This person must have designated authority to hold sites accountable for progress towards implementation of the project's goals and the time necessary to accomplish this. The six sites noted that district-level accountability for participating schools is characterized by:

- site visits
- review of annual plans, goals, and budgets
- action, when needed, after all aspects are reviewed. Action needs to be swift, decisive, and quietly done
- holding regular meetings, where the focus is professional development and where teachers are expected to share their on-going staff development experiences with their peers at other schools

Artist and Teacher Partnerships

The creation of a working teaching partnership between an artist and a teacher is a newly-found enterprise in the Annenberg Project. Historically, artists have worked in schools as resources to classroom teachers, most often in the role of extending the learning and providing a unique experience for students—an experience which is isolated and not recurring during the course of a school year. The Annenberg Project has sought to regularly embed an artist's perspectives and approach to learning in all subject areas. It is this seamless blend of arts and curricular content that characterizes the core of AAA.

Teachers and artists in the six sites have been observed and interviewed about their experiences while learning to work together. Across all sites, there have been "lessons learned" about how this partnership can be most effective. Some of the findings for both the artist and the teacher include:

The artist

- Needs to expand his/her repertoire of how to work with children in a school setting (i.e., openly discuss how this is different than how their medium usually has contact with children.)
- Needs to learn more about the developmental stages in children's learning.
- Needs to make time for planning with the teacher.
- Must come to the classroom fully prepared, with written lesson plans.

The teacher

- Needs to make time for planning with the artist. The best partnerships have been when the teacher mentors the artist's work with the students, much like mentoring a student teacher.
- Is in charge of "quality control" for the partnership. Given the public obligation that teachers have to the students, an artist who is not doing well in working with students needs to be conferred with, and the partnership terminated if necessary.

The artist and teacher together

- Need to have explicit conversations with one another about the role and action each will take during the arts-infused lessons.
- Should have a de-briefing conversation soon after the artist has been in the classroom. This is the primary way in which the participating teachers have noted that they both learned and grew as partners. Discussing both what worked and what didn't work must occur.
- Have found that two novices (an inexperienced teacher and an artist new to working in schools) together will likely have a difficult time.
- Have developed enhanced respect for one another's discipline as a direct result of their time together planning the lessons and in working as a team with the students.

Changes in Teacher Practice and Student Learning

Teachers in the six schools often report remarkably similar changes in their instructional and professional behavior. There does not appear to be any relationship between the choice of an art form (e.g., theater, dance, visual arts, music, etc.) and the types of changes that the teachers are experiencing in their day-to-day work with students. In other words, all art forms that have been incorporated into the six case sites appear to be equally effective in bringing arts-infused lessons to students.

As teachers infuse arts into their instruction by being involved with an arts partner, they note their own **increased awareness of the broad spectrum of learning styles of the children** in their classrooms and the teachers are using that knowledge to teach differently throughout the day. Said one teacher, "Previously I would do things like demonstrate for them [the students] how to make it ...now I give them the ideas and the students make the learning their own." A principal noted, "We have a whole population here who do not speak English and yet among that population we have, I'm sure, highly gifted children who need to express their giftedness, but the way their giftedness comes out is through the arts....I know I have to get the achievement improved and get the staff on board with me on standards-based instruction, but underpinning all

this has to be the arts.” And an AAA coordinator explained, “When you do differentiated instruction, it usually has art [activities] as part of the instruction...at different levels, so that kids can show what they know in their mode—their best mode.”

The **social dynamics among the students themselves and with students and teachers also appears to have changed** in many of the AAA classrooms. As a secondary teacher explained about his students, “I think taking a risk [in doing an arts activity] opened a door to take other risks. And students who were maybe on the fringe felt more accepted, and I would guess that they are more comfortable taking risks in front of these kids now with other things...because a kind of trust has been established.” Another teacher went on to say, “The most telling statistic is the overwhelming agreement that acting-related activities made students more likely to want to be in school. At least on the days of the activities, students appear to enjoy being in school and were partaking in positive experiences with their peers.”

Much of what teachers are learning occurs when they talk to other teachers who are trying similar things. This is known as **the development of “professional community”** and is often difficult to do with teachers in school sites that are geographically spread over a large area, such as an urban school district. The Annenberg Project has been structured by the district-level coordinator to develop professional community by having bi-monthly meetings among Annenberg teachers and site coordinators. The agenda for every meeting includes some time for teachers to share ideas, strategies, and findings with one another. This is often cited by teachers in the six case sites as being very instrumental in their own professional growth. A beginning teacher explained, “When I was first hearing about all this, it sounded pretty complicated and big and not very concrete....As a first-year teacher I was thinking of just how to do X, much less X, Y, and Z. It was impressive, but definitely overwhelming. There are times when I need to stop and ask people to talk to me like I am three [years old] and that was one of those times. I needed them to take at least six steps back, not just two, and maybe tell us how they started rather than what they had just recently done.”

The teachers in the case sites frequently mentioned the time commitment that is needed to really make changes and to work with a partner from outside of the school. Yet, for many **the willingness to put in the time to do this is directly related to the sense of positive outcomes for the students**. An elementary teacher noted, “One of our team’s goals was for each of us to track a student...just to see if it [arts-infused math lessons] make a difference in the students’ engagement.” Upon reflection of all the work that this teacher has done this year and last, she noted that she had experienced a personal change. “Yeah, it’s amazing how I feel differently about it...there’s a kind of shift in my thinking. I mean it takes time—last year was definitely getting out the kinks...[I’m glad] this is a three-year grant.” Research on educational reforms would clearly support this teacher’s perceptions that the duration for the Annenberg grant to be of multiple years is absolutely essential for real, sustainable changes to occur.

Feelings of emerging self-efficacy among the teachers are evident across the schools. This is known to be a critical element in keeping teachers in the profession and known to keep teachers from “burning out.” A secondary teacher recounted perceptions about the Annenberg Project being a developmental process, “We really only made one attempt last year to have an arts partner come in and do sort-of a product-creating thing with kids. And it didn’t go very well. I haven’t felt that way about anything that we’ve

done this year! I think part of that was having more information and having a really better idea of how to go after some of the things that we wanted. And it is really a learning experience. I feel like we've done more things differently this year than we did a year ago."

The **feelings of positive growth** were noted another teacher on that team, "We really felt like a ditzzy bunch last year, trying to figure out what we were doing...we were sure we weren't doing anything right. [This year] I think we have made some growth and definitely learned some things." A third teacher explained that, "This year we did a much better job of partnering with the artists. We were more selective and maybe more thoughtful in terms of planning for the kinds of people we would work with and the kinds of things we thought we would try to do." She continued, "More people on the team have stepped up this year....Now I feel like it's much more a team effort pulling these things off, making them work. They may not all be interdisciplinary activities, but it's something everybody has a stake in."

Challenges

Expanding the AAA Project into the second and third years in some schools has proved challenging. For example, just as teams have completed a year of developing curriculum and forging a "sense of team" among themselves and their arts partners, transfers of staff out of that building often occur. This is generally unavoidable, but nevertheless it causes feelings of standing still or moving backward as the team attempts to rebuild again the next year. In one case where the Annenberg Project was into its second year, two new artists joined the Annenberg team as well as three new classroom teachers. The "seasoned" teachers expressed apprehension about expanding the project to three new classrooms because these new teachers "wouldn't have the same investment level" that the teachers who created the project in the first year would have had.

Furthermore, the role of the AAA site coordinator has changed in some schools from Year 1 to Years 2 and 3. The issues about which the coordinator was concerned during the first year had to do with project implementation and operationalizing the grant in general. During the second year, the issues have been almost entirely about interpersonal relationships and conflict mediation among the team members—a role she feels she was not prepared for or trained to play.

Summary

Working in the six case sites has been an extraordinary means by which to collect data on this reform initiative. CAREI staff have observed most school AAA teams grow from being dependent upon one or two individuals to becoming dependent upon the group process, which is a very healthy step. Also, the Annenberg Project has enabled many teachers to engage in leadership activities—from initiating work with an artist partner to demonstrating with colleagues at the school how arts-infused lessons enhance the regular curriculum to taking on greater leadership responsibilities at the district level by doing workshops and public presentations. Effective teacher-leaders are a critical component of effective schools, given the myriad of leadership demands present in today's world.

As participants have gained a sense of ownership of the project's ideals, they have begun to modify some of their instructional practices. The "theory of action" in this

endeavor believes that changes in teacher practices will have a positive impact upon student achievement. Since three years' worth of student achievement data is needed in order to draw any reliable conclusions about academic impact, those conclusions are yet to be drawn. In the meantime, the information provided in this cross-case analysis provides mounting evidence that changes in teacher practice and changes in how schools are organized for instruction are happening. No matter what the final evaluation of this project reveals, it is certain that some Minneapolis teachers have been positively "changed forever" as a result of the Annenberg experience and their future students will forever be the beneficiary of that.

Material for this report was drawn from the reports of CAREI staff who have worked in the case sites for the past two years:

Carol Freeman, Ph.D.

Eva Nderu, M.S.

Linnette Werner, M.A.