The Arts in Basic Curriculum Project
A Ten Year Evaluation

Looking at the past and preparing for the future
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Causal-comparative and descriptive methods were used for this study. All schools and three districts that were considered Arts in Basic Curriculum Advancement Sites during the 1998 school year participated in the study. In addition, demographically matched schools and districts were chosen and provided the same types of data as ABC Advancement Sites.

At each participating school site teachers and school administrators completed surveys and provided strategic plans, parent rosters, and school activity schedules. The evaluator spent one day at each school. During this visit he observed different types and levels of arts classes, made note of teaching practices and class activities, documented resources, and interviewed the arts teachers. In addition, a sample of parents from each school was selected and surveyed.

During a visit to each participating district the evaluator interviewed the arts coordinator and a focus group that he selected from the roster of arts teachers in the district. This group was chosen to represent different grade levels and arts disciplines, as well as different locations in the district.

The evaluator also interviewed ABC-affiliated personnel, attended ABC- and state-sponsored arts education meetings and institutes, and examined ABC meeting minutes and other documentation. The data was collected during an 18-month period from October 1997 to March 1999.
I am pleased to present this foreword to Michael Seaman’s comprehensive report *The Arts in Basic Curriculum Project: Looking at the Past and Preparing for the Future*. Evaluating the first 10 years of the ABC Project, the report adds significantly to a growing number of studies that document the importance of arts education as a key ingredient in the basic education of all students. A significant characteristic of this research is that the data are derived from a matched-site approach. This allowed the researcher to actually compare the impact on arts programs of schools identified as arts centered with similar schools that do not give special emphasis to, or receive “extra” funds for, arts programs.

With the purpose and spirit of an overture to an opera, this foreword will set the stage for the report. There are many important themes. These include the operation of the project office, funding and granting issues, detailed analysis of the ABC school and district sites, profiles of teachers, administrators, parents and communities, and a number of important recommendations. There is also a cast of thousands. These unsung heroes have worked tirelessly to improve the understanding of the place of the arts in education and to develop an effective delivery system for arts education in South Carolina. Like many great works of arts, this report will enlighten, encourage, and maybe challenge those who attend to it. Likewise, the reader will be “changed forever” by it because the report gives new insights, perspectives and understandings about the status and future prospects of the ABC Project. However, here the metaphor must end. After all, this is a research report.

The ABC Project began 12 years ago when South Carolina was one of 16 states chosen by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to receive an Artist in Schools Basic
Education Grant (AISBEG). Using the $20,000 grant from the NEA, matched 1:1 by the South Carolina Arts Commission (SCAC), a team (later to become the ABC Steering Committee) developed the ABC Project Blueprint. The NEA accepted the ABC Blueprint and in October 1988 announced a three-year, $150,000 award for its implementation. Frank Hodsell, then NEA chairman, said, "South Carolina is one of the most promising programs of arts education in the nation and is in the forefront of national arts education leadership." During the development of the blueprint and in keeping with the requirements of the NEA grant, SCAC joined in partnership with the South Carolina Department of Education (SDE) and Winthrop University to form a highly successful collaboration.

The basic premises of the Blueprint are that

- **the arts are, in and of themselves, an indispensable part of a complete education, and**

- **arts education increases students' learning potential, complements learning in other disciplines and establishes a foundation for success in school and lifelong learning.**

Important to these premises is the belief that students learn best when the principles and skills of creative writing, dance, drama, music and visual arts are first acquired through experiences with artists and arts education specialists, then applied to learning activities in other disciplines.
The ABC Steering Committee took on the task of transforming these premises into a philosophical base for the project and transforming that vision into a reality. Over the ensuing years, the ABC Project has become the primary force behind the establishment of significant arts education policy in South Carolina. Major initiatives include:

- ABC school and district sites grant program
- Target 2000 Arts in Education grant program - with S.C. Department of Education
- Annual Arts in Education Higher Education Forum
- South Carolina Visual and Performing Arts Framework - with S.C. Department of Education
- South Carolina Arts Leadership Institute for school district planning - with Furman University
- SouthEast Center for Dance Education - with S.C. Arts Commission, Columbia College, Coker College, Winthrop University, and S.C. Department of Education
- Curriculum Leadership Institute in the Arts (CLIA) - held at Lander University
- Dance Education Certification - with S.C. Dance Association
- Where We Stand, a joint statement of arts education - with the professional arts education associations
- South Carolina Visual and Performing Arts Academic Achievement Standards - with S.C. Department of Education and the professional arts organizations

Critical to the accomplishment of these and other important initiatives of the project is the ongoing advocacy efforts spearheaded by the South Carolina Arts Alliance (SCAA). The ABC Project, in tandem with SCAC, developed the Arts Education Advocacy Network that has assembled over 2,000 members ready to support and advocate for arts education. Their advocacy efforts led to the inclusion of the arts in important educational legislation passed in 1989 and 1998. The effectiveness of the SCAA-led advocacy effort, while not a major theme of the report that follows, may be the single most important reason for the project's success.

The ABC Project was initiated and nurtured by Scott Shanklin Peterson, then executive director of SCAC. She enlisted the help of Wade Hobgood, then chair of the Department of Art and Design at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Wade became the first director of the ABC Project, and along
with Margaret Johnson, a member of Winthrop’s Art and Design Department, co-authored the ABC Blueprint. Through a competitive process, Winthrop University was selected as the site for the ABC Office and thus became the higher education partner for the project. From 1989 through 1991, Wade Hobgood directed the project and Carol Collins administered its day-to-day operations. I served as project director from August 1991 until June 1998 and Deborah Smith Hoffman is the current project director.

The first Steering Committee Chair was Representative Hoss Nesbitt of Fort Mill, South Carolina. Representative Mike Jaskwich of Greenville South Carolina followed him in 1991. First Lady Mary Wood Beasley was chairperson from 1995 to 1999, when First Lady Rachael Hodges became the chairperson.

I have been closely associated with the project throughout its existence. Before serving as project director, I was a member of the concept development team (1987). I joined the original Steering Committee in 1988, the Coordinating Committee in 1989, and am currently an active participant in both.

I congratulate and commend Michael Seaman and his team of researchers for producing the comprehensive, user-friendly document that follows. As the reader will note, Dr. Seaman came to this project with no preconceptions about arts education because he brought no arts background to the task. This lack of experience in the field of arts education became his strength because he would not allow himself or his staff to assume anything! He approached the project unencumbered by preconceived notions about the arts in education and proceeded to apply an arsenal of educational research techniques to the project. The resulting report is a very powerful documentation of the ABC Project’s accomplishments coupled with thoughtful recommendations for the future. I hope you will join me in considering the report’s recommendations while celebrating our accomplishments.

Ray Doughty
August 1999
The Arts in Basic Curriculum (ABC) Project is an initiative begun in the state of South Carolina in 1987. It is a collaborative effort funded and run by the South Carolina Arts Commission, the South Carolina Department of Education, and Winthrop University. The stated goal of the Project is “to ensure that every child in South Carolina, from preschool through college levels, has access to a quality, comprehensive education in the arts, including dance, drama, music, visual arts, and creative writing” (Doughty, 1998).

**Executive summary**

The ABC Project has profoundly affected arts education in South Carolina. Indicators of this effect include:

- The development of a strong arts education network.
- A shift in emphasis from performance and products to the four arts areas as academic disciplines by arts educators who are part of the network.
- Major increases in funding for arts education, including ongoing grants programs.
- The development and adoption of state-level documents that address curricula and standards in arts classes.
• The development of district- and school-level arts curricula that are aligned with the Visual and Performing Arts Framework.
• The creation of ABC advancement sites, arts magnet schools, and the SouthEast Center for Dance Education.
• The development of forums, workshops, and institutes about arts education.
• The growth of the artists-in-residence program.

There are still major needs that must be addressed if the goal of the Project is to be realized. A large gap exists between instruction in schools where the teacher is part of the ABC Project network and schools where the teacher is relatively isolated. The primary recommendations of this report are these:

• Focus on outreach to schools and districts.
• Establish a multi-tiered partnership for schools, with different goals and standards for each tier.
• Work for an increase in the number of district arts coordinators and strengthen the district arts coordinator network.
• Widen the existing arts teacher network until all arts teachers are involved in the network.
• Shift some advocacy resources to local school administration and provide training and support for these administrators and their teachers.
The Arts Education Initiative and Target 2000 grants programs have had a positive impact on arts education in South Carolina. These grants provide needed resources, as well as incentives for strategic planning, collaborations with other teachers, and an opportunity to join the arts educator network. The effects of the grants programs include:

- An increased diversity of opportunities for students.
- Funding for resources that would otherwise be inaccessible.
- Increased personnel or resources in a district.
- Better understanding by educators of the arts curriculum and how to integrate this curriculum with other disciplines.

Components of the grant process that may need to be reviewed and possibly improved are these:

- Evaluations of the grant implementation are weak since they are based on self-reported data.
- The grant process timetables are sometimes problematic given existing school schedules.
- Some of the grant application evaluation criteria are unclear or controversial.

Most grant recipients believe that current baseline funding levels are inadequate and, therefore, grants are a necessary funding source. Nonetheless, many teachers are unaware of the importance of obtaining grants or do not have the expertise to write competitive grant applications. Education in the grants programs could be an important component of ABC Project outreach.
A major emphasis of the ABC Project in the first 10 years of operation was the creation and support of ABC school and district sites. There are currently nine school sites. The major findings about the sites are these:

- **Arts education in ABC school sites is diverse both in terms of quality and breadth.**
- **Arts education is more likely to be framework-based when the arts teacher is an active member of the state arts education network.**
- **Arts integration is more prevalent in ABC school sites than other schools, but is most natural in “arts-immersed” schools.**
- **Arts-immersed schools exhibit strong school ecologies (the complex webs of social and environmental factors in schools that, together, can either promote or impede learning) and demonstrate the highest level of administrator, teacher, and parental support for arts education.**
- **The widespread belief that allocating more time to arts classes will lower academic achievement in other subjects is not supported by test score data.**
- **The most visible difference between ABC school sites and match sites are in schools located in lower to lower-middle socioeconomic communities.**

ABC school sites become actively involved in the arts education network primarily because of the influence of dynamic arts educators or school administrators. A fundamental recommendation of this report is that the ABC Project must recruit the involvement of schools and districts that otherwise would not otherwise seek to connect with the Project.
There are currently 11 district sites. The major findings about the sites are these:

- **ABC district sites** are more likely to support framework-based curricula development than match districts.
- **ABC district sites** offer a greater breadth of opportunities in the arts than match districts.
- District coordination is a key factor in promoting arts educator networks, developing framework-based curriculum guides, creating links to the community, soliciting arts education grants, and arranging district-wide opportunities for students to attend performances and view exhibits.

Because district coordination is so strongly linked to whether or not the district schools maintain a comprehensive and sequential arts curricula, the primary recommendation of this report about districts is that the ABC Project persist in creating and then enlarging a district coordinator network. The goal of this network should be to link every arts educator in every district in the state to the arts educator network that the Project has already established.

The following findings are based on interviews and surveys of school administrators, arts teachers, classroom and subject teachers, and parents.

- **Arts educators** often feel they are perceived as second-class members of the school faculty, though this feeling is not as pronounced in **ABC school sites**.
Most school administrators, non-arts teachers, and parents believe that funding for arts education should be increased and schools should offer students a greater breadth of opportunities in the arts.

Most teachers' and parents' expectations of what arts classes should be like are based on the status quo in their school.

Arts educators seldom base their grades on artistic achievement.

Community resources and support can be a powerful factor in strengthening arts education in the schools.

The primary findings of this evaluation are (1) that the ABC Project has built and supported a strong network that measurably strengthens arts education, and (2) for the reform to continue, there must be new initiatives. The Project has made a significant first step toward providing quality opportunities for all children in South Carolina, but the gap between the current state of arts education and the stated goal of the Project is very wide. Therefore, these new initiatives must be bold, innovative, strongly funded, and backed with the energies and passions of those in the core arts education network.

The basic recommendation that subsumes all the specific recommendations in this report is to develop a data-informed strategic plan for arts education, then determine funding priorities based on this plan. To reach every child in South Carolina, the baseline funding for arts education must be increased. Regardless of the size of this increase, priorities should be established for outreach activities that complement statewide initiatives in arts education.
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