

# Dallas ArtsPartners

## **ARTS AND CULTURAL LEARNING:**

Changing Achievement and Expectation

Three-Year Longitudinal Study  
Interim Report - Spring 2004

## Executive Summary

Does arts and cultural education matter? Does it have an impact on students' learning? What exactly does it teach? Whom does it reach?

For at least half a century, educators, cultural institutions and parents have asked these questions. However, the search for answers has never been more important than it is today. Art and music have virtually disappeared from many school districts serving the neediest children. In addition, standards-based reform, focused on basic skills and accountability, has mandated yearly testing with dire consequences for schools that do not meet set standards. This austere education environment has created a dilemma for all those who provide cultural education: do they teach the heart of their disciplines and hope for measurable effects, or do they create lessons with a keen eye to teaching the goals of the school curriculum?

Dallas ArtsPartners (AP) works to address both these questions. AP is a community collaboration that provides all Dallas Independent School District (DISD) elementary students with equal access to high quality arts and cultural programs, and trains every DISD elementary classroom teacher to integrate those programs into the curriculum to benefit student academic achievement and learning in the arts. First, AP staff and partners focus intently on the authentic matches between cultural experiences and important academic learning. Second, they work to ensure that in addition to academic learning, cultural education builds basic habits of mind: making an effort, engaging with learning, and striving for excellence.

Because the staff of Dallas ArtsPartners and their cultural partners set high organizational standards and are accountable for public and private funds, they posed fundamental questions about the effects of their joint programs. Beginning in 2001, they commissioned a research team from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, led by Dr. Dennie Palmer Wolf, to undertake a longitudinal study of the effects of ArtsPartners on students, schools and participating cultural organizations.

This report summarizes some of the major findings from the second year of the study, which focuses on a cohort of students moving through 4th, 5th and 6th grades, a time when achievement gaps and disengagement from schooling can often begin.

Overall, the findings show that high-quality and sustained opportunities to learn from cultural partners can make substantial contributions to children as learners. Among the highlights:

- Standardized test data on reading comprehension indicate that disadvantaged and struggling individuals participating in ArtsPartners' programs perform better than a matched control group.
- The integration of arts and cultural learning where writing is an integral part of the experience (e.g., note-taking, drafting song lyrics, revising an essay on the life of a Holocaust survivor) leads to higher quality student writing. This includes organization, ideas, fluency, word choice, distinctive personal style and the use of the conventions of written English. Low-achieving students demonstrated improved quality of writing, indicating that AP curricula helps struggling students do better and challenges them to new levels of performance.
- The achievement gaps traditionally and almost universally reported between White, Asian, Hispanic and African American students, narrow dramatically for both creative and informative writing exercises that take place as part of the ArtsPartners curriculum.
- AP curricula affect how children behave and talk, as demonstrated by an increase in how often students engage in learning behaviors (e.g., asking questions, revising work, studying another child's work). These effects are most pronounced in low-achieving students.

Thus, Dallas ArtsPartners and its curriculum provide powerful indications that arts and cultural education can serve to promote many types of learning for students of all backgrounds and abilities.

## AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO EVALUATION: THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Both partners in the study - Dallas ArtsPartners and Annenberg Institute for School Reform - share the belief that high-quality public education is a community-wide responsibility, and are committed to providing such an education for all students. This common belief and commitment have resulted in a study that is innovative in two ways.

First, the study is collaborative. It was designed as a rigorous evaluation of the effects of the ArtsPartners program, but also as a strategic effort to build the wider community's will and capacity to invest in the cultural and human development of its children. In that spirit, ArtsPartners staff, members of cultural organizations, artists, classroom teachers, community-based researchers and videographers all participated in the design of the study, the collection of data, and the examination and application of the findings. Thus, the study serves as a laboratory for cultural providers, public educators, college students and community members to collaborate with colleagues working in other sectors of the city's services, and to examine their practices in light of the outcomes revealed by the study. Even though the study is ongoing, the benefits of this collaborative design are already evident in the strength of current partnerships and the quality of programs reaching teachers and students.

*"[ArtsPartners] has helped us to efficiently identify and meet the needs of our clients on a more consistent basis. Our programs are structured with the student in mind." (Survey #48)*

*One interview participant described the positive impacts of "being a part of a high level exploration that had broad implications for the broader field of arts and cultural organizations within the city, and with very specific implications for what we were doing" (Interview #21)*

- Quotes taken from independent interviews and surveys collected by Brent Hasty, University of Texas at Austin, for Dallas Arts and Cultural Organizations: Effects of ArtsPartners

Second, the study examines cultural learning that goes beyond the classroom. The study design is based on a broad vision of the outcomes of education shared by Dallas ArtsPartners and the Annenberg Institute. In this vision, public education yields not only academic excellence but the capacity and will to continue learning both in and outside of school. As a result, researchers, ArtsPartners and collaborating cultural organizations have created a study to investigate a range of possible effects of sustained cultural learning which combines high quality instruction and informal personal creation and investigation.

This "portfolio" of effects includes both targeted academic skills such as reading comprehension and writing along with students' learner behaviors (e.g., asking a question; revising work in progress, studying the work of another student, etc.). The hypothesis is simple yet important: high-quality artistic and cultural learning can make substantial contributions to multiple aspects of children's lives - both immediately and in the long term.

## THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In order to investigate whether or not Dallas ArtsPartners' programs have these kinds of broad effects on student learning, the evaluation study was designed to be:

- **Based on multiple measures:** Researchers selected and designed a diverse set of measures in order to gather both qualitative and quantitative evidence regarding the effects of the program on students' academic achievement, learner behaviors, and attitudes towards arts and cultural activities. Figure 1 summarizes these measures.

**FIGURE 1: SUMMARY OF MEASURES USED TO EVALUATE EFFECTS ON STUDENT LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR**

OUTCOME	QUANTITATIVE MEASURES	QUALITATIVE MEASURES
Student Literacy Achievement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Iowa Test of Basic Skills Scores</li> <li>2. State Assessment Test Scores - TAAS &amp; TAKS</li> <li>3. Collected Writing Samples - Scored on 6 Traits of Writing Development.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Student interview data</li> <li>5. Classroom observation data</li> </ol>
Student Learning Behaviors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Classroom Observations - Coded for Frequency and Depth of Behaviors</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Student interview data</li> <li>3. Classroom observation data</li> </ol>

- **Longitudinal:** It is important to determine whether participating in Dallas ArtsPartners has a sustained and/or cumulative effect on students. Therefore, community-based researchers are following two cohorts of children over multiple years. Cohort #1 consists of four first grade classes ( $N = 8 \times 4 = 32$ ) followed through the end of their fourth grade year. Cohort #2 consists of four fourth grade classes ( $N = 8 \times 4 = 32$ ) followed through the end of their sixth grade year. This allows researchers to index students' growth over the full range of elementary school.
- **Rigorous:** The two cohorts of students have control classroom counterparts matched along multiple dimensions including gender, economic status, academic achievement, first language, participation in special education, etc. Each group (AP Treatment and Control) also reflects the profile of elementary students attending DISD. Over the years as some study students have moved and been retained, this matching of groups and DISD demographics has been carefully maintained. This feature of the design provides insight into what the AP program may contribute to the literacy growth for a full range of students, including Limited English Proficiency (LEP), Bilingual, Special Education, Talented & Gifted and students at risk for academic failure.
- **Focused on skills and attributes important to academic, artistic and cultural learning:** In recent years, organizations offering arts and cultural programs have frequently been under pressure to demonstrate that their work results in academic gains as measured by large-scale standardized tests. In the Dallas ArtsPartners study, researchers have defined outcomes appropriate to both academic and artistic/cultural learning. Collaborating arts and cultural partners have developed content that highlights the genuine partnership between these different domains of learning.

Correspondingly, the study is designed to examine outcomes such as:

- 1) the frequency and types of students' learner behaviors which play a role in both academic and artistic/cultural learning
- 2) the quality of student writing, including dimensions such as voice and ideas, a dimension that matters across creative and informative writing

- **Intensive:** In a study such as the ArtsPartners evaluation, it's not enough to demonstrate that, on average, there are positive results for participating children. It is vital to understand why those results occur. In other words, researchers seek to discover what inspires children to learn. It is equally important to understand if and how the programs work for different groups of students, such as English Language Learners or native speakers. In response to these important questions, researchers selected 32 focus students (Cohort #2) whom they have studied closely, using a combination of qualitative (e.g., interviews, observations, etc.) and quantitative (e.g., standardized test data, scoring of student work, etc.) methods. These data provide us with added insight into how artistic and cultural experiences engage and support learning for a varied range of students, including students who are designated Limited English Proficiency (LEP), Bilingual, Special Education, Talented & Gifted and students at risk for academic failure. These same data help to portray the extent to which students transfer arts and cultural learning to their lives outside of school.

# What do Students Learn?

## THE CASE OF READING COMPREHENSION

In order to investigate Dallas ArtsPartners' potential contributions to student learning, researchers sought an area in which valued academic outcomes overlapped with the authentic activities carried out by arts and cultural providers such as members of science labs, archaeological digs, theater productions and artists assembling a gallery show. They identified the shared processes of forming and researching a question, developing a strong message including facts and ideas, and the capacity to communicate a point of view or vision fluently and articulately. They further identified how a number of these fields use language and writing to capture and express ideas. Based on this background work, researchers focused their search for effects in the domain of literacy widely defined to include both reading comprehension and writing.

**Figure 2: Dallas Independent School District (DISD) collects standardized test data using:**

**Annual state mandated test**

- Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) 1991-2002
- Texas Assessment of Knowledge of Skills (TAKS) 2003

**Annual national test selected by district leadership**

- Stanford 9 (2001 & 2002)
- Iowa Test of Basic Skills (2003)

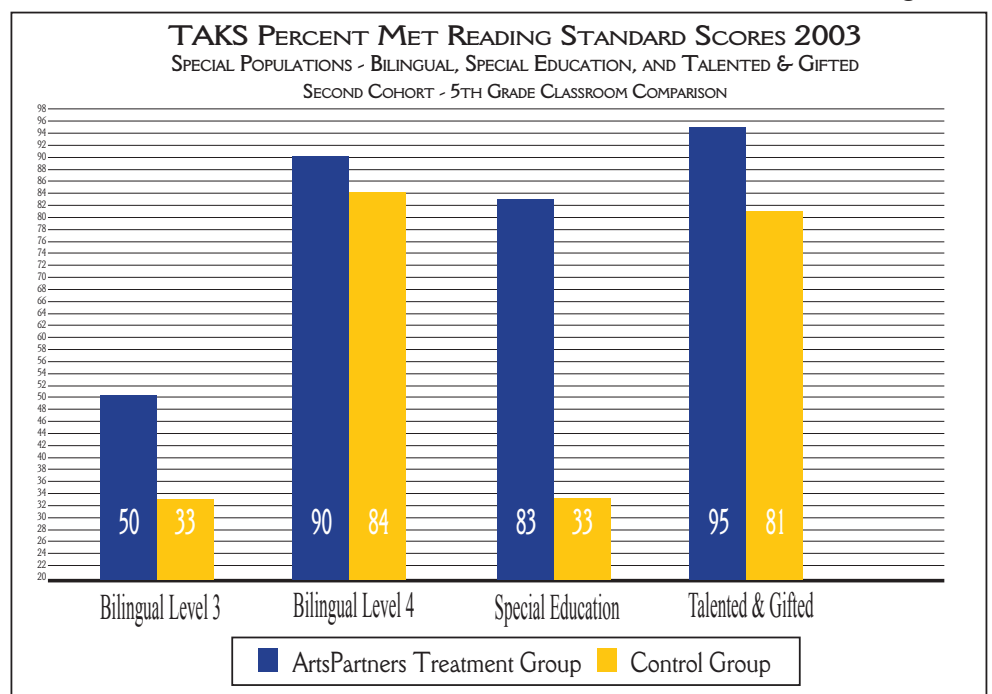
Overall, the standardized test data on reading comprehension offer support for the assertion that the Dallas ArtsPartners program has a positive effect on student literacy outcomes. While these effects can not be seen longitudinally due to changes in standardized test (see Figure 2), they do highlight areas to look for significance in the coming year.

For example, the 2002 Stanford 9 Reading and Language Scaled Score data for Cohort #2 indicated no significant differences between the ArtsPartners (AP) 4th grade students and their

counterparts in the control group. However, in 2003, fifth grade students with a history of AP-sponsored cultural collaborations consistently performed better than their counterparts on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in Reading and Language Percentiles. Across a number of demographic features (e.g., ethnicity, economic disadvantage and current achievement levels) students with a history of involvement with AP made noticeable stride when compared to their counterparts in the control group. For instance, AP students at both ends of the academic spectrum (historically low-achieving bilingual students and students enrolled in Talented and Gifted programs) outperform comparable students in the control group on the National Reading Percentile.

Annual state mandated reading tests provide a second measure of students' overall performance in literacy. In 2002, 88 percent of the AP 4th Grade students met standards as compared to 85 percent of the control students. Using the reading comprehension measures on the more challenging TAKS test introduced in 2003, the analysis identified that AP students outperformed their matched controls at the 5th grade level. There is an 8% difference in the scores of students coming from AP-rich histories as compared to their controls. While this trend is not statistically significant, students in special populations (e.g. Special Education, advanced level Bilingual, and Talented & Gifted) do perform substantially better than comparable students in the control group. (see Figure 3)

**Figure 3**



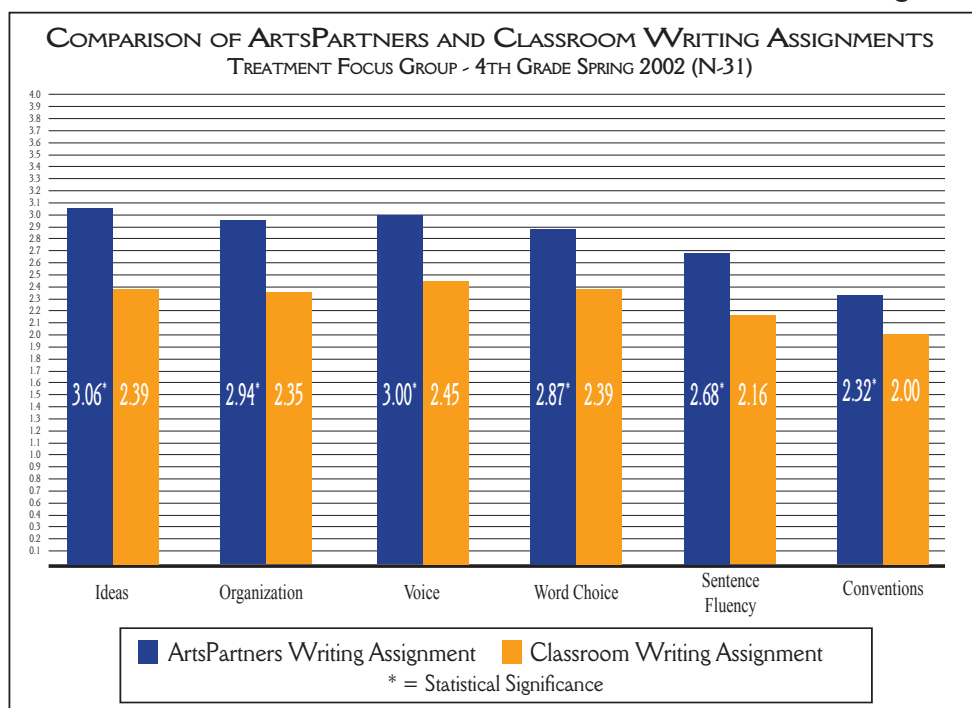
Since the total number of students in this focus group is small, these findings need further investigation. However, these data begin to indicate that AP-enriched classrooms offer less advantaged and struggling learners motivation and support. At the same time, Talented and Gifted students also find a level of challenge and variety that inspires them to perform at higher levels than they exhibit in regular classroom literacy instruction.

## THE CASE OF WRITING

Dallas ArtsPartners curricula have focused closely on strengthening students' writing skills. To evaluate the effectiveness of the curricula in this regard, each semester researchers collect two writing assignments produced in the same format (e.g. three paragraph persuasive essay) within a two week time span. The first writing assignment (Classroom Writing) is created during a typical classroom lesson; the second writing assignment (AP Writing) is created during an ArtsPartners Integrated Lesson Cycle. Researchers selected The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's Six Trait Writing Assessment<sup>1</sup> as the tool to examine the effects of the ArtsPartners program on student writing.

Working independently of one another, researchers coded the collected writing assignments (inter-rater reliability factor = .83 originally; however each piece was triple coded and decided by mode) and found that in 4th and 6th grades, AP Focus students (N=31) scored significantly higher on their AP-enriched lesson assignments as compared to typical classroom writing assignments collected from these same students. In Spring 2002 all 6 traits showed a difference.<sup>2</sup> (see figure 4)

**Figure 4**



These data demonstrate that Dallas ArtsPartners can make significant contributions toward improving students' fluency, word choice and voice (i.e., a distinctive personal style). It's also clear that the ArtsPartners model of collaboration between classroom teachers and cultural partners influences the ideas and organization evident in student writing, along with the care necessary to observe the conventions of written English.

<sup>1</sup> This tool is a continuous scale that can be applied to a range of different types of writing throughout the elementary school years. The assessment generates scores for six traits of a student's writing achievement: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and command of the conventions of standard written English. The instrument also yields a total writing score.

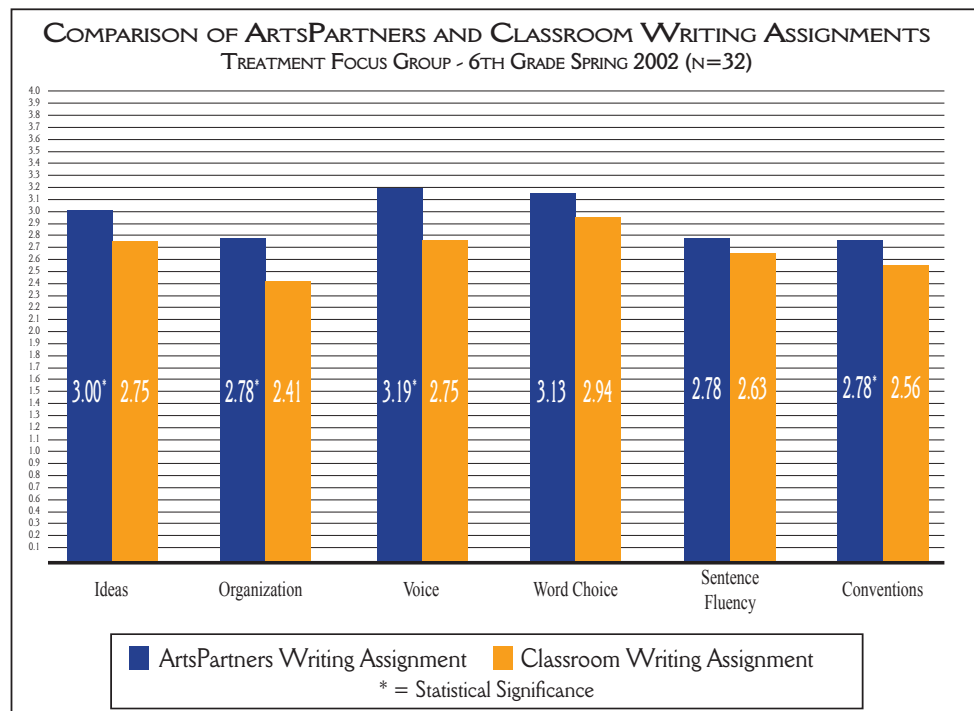
<sup>2</sup> This pattern of results is very strong. All of the traits are statistically significant at  $p < .01$  except Conventions which is  $p < .02$ .

Of note, in 5th grade where both the fall and spring curricula called for informative writing, there are few consistent differences in students' writing in ArtsPartners and Classroom writing. This reflects the double challenge of teaching both informational and persuasive writing that is new to many students. These data also suggest that the ArtsPartners approach to cultural partnerships in fields such as science and social studies may require different structures and strategies than partnerships based in the arts, which are seen as "special" or "different." It may demand more sustained time or more explicit help in making connections to convince students that the innovation and inquiry modeled by an ArtsPartners program can and should be transferred to the texts and genres students see as academic.<sup>3</sup>

However, an initial coding of data from the fall of 6th grade<sup>4</sup> shows results similar to those found in 4th grade. In the fall of 2003, the 6th Grade ArtsPartners students participated in a visit to the Dallas Holocaust Memorial Center and then had a docent from the Center visit their classroom to share survivor stories. The students wrote a first person essay about the experiences of a survivor whose life they researched. For the Classroom writing assignment, the students wrote an essay about Jesse Owens' life, based on readings taken from their language arts text.

The 6th grade students' overall writing scores on the AP writing assignment were higher than their Classroom writing assignment scores in all six writing categories. (see Figure 5) There were statistically significant differences in four categories: ideas, organization, voice and conventions.

**Figure 5**

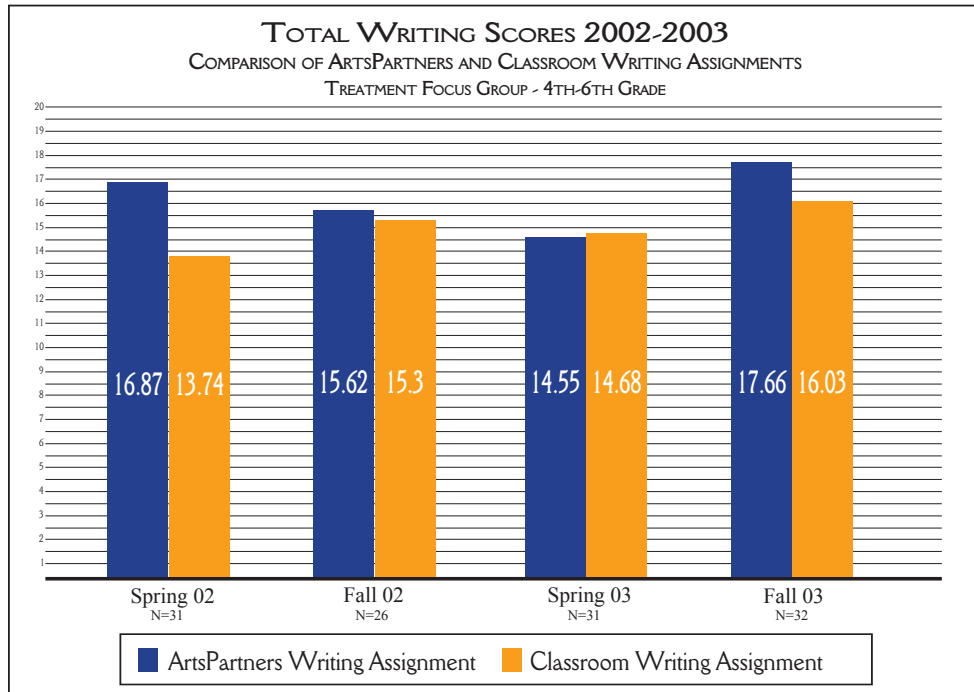


<sup>3</sup> Scores drop across both Classroom and AP writing, indicating the fact that students were taking on forms of academic writing they were still in the process of mastering. In addition, the writing prompts used for both 5th grade writing assignments contained questions intended to spark students thinking about the kinds of information they might include in their essays. Students appear to have assimilated this format to something like the questions at the end of a unit. As a result, many students wrote short segmented replies instead of continuous essays. The result was much lower scores on organization, sentence fluency, etc.

<sup>4</sup> These data have only been single coded (i.e. yet to be coded by two other independent coders).

Looking longitudinally, it is clear that, on average, young writers exhibit important growth between 4th and 6th grades in both AP and Classroom curricula. (see Figure 6) However, this growth begins and ends at a higher level of performance when ArtsPartners is an integral part of students' learning.

**Figure 6**

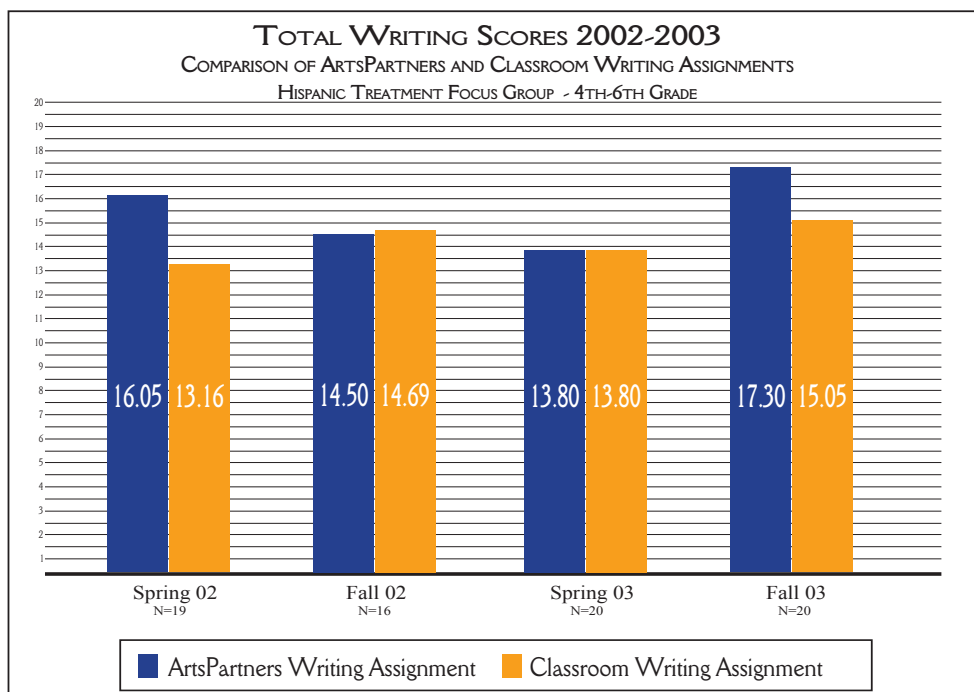


## WHO LEARNS?

The evidence for the effects of cultural partnership curricula on student writing is exciting. But it's far from the whole story. Further analysis of the writing data provides two additional important findings about who learns from curricula that feature cultural partnerships.

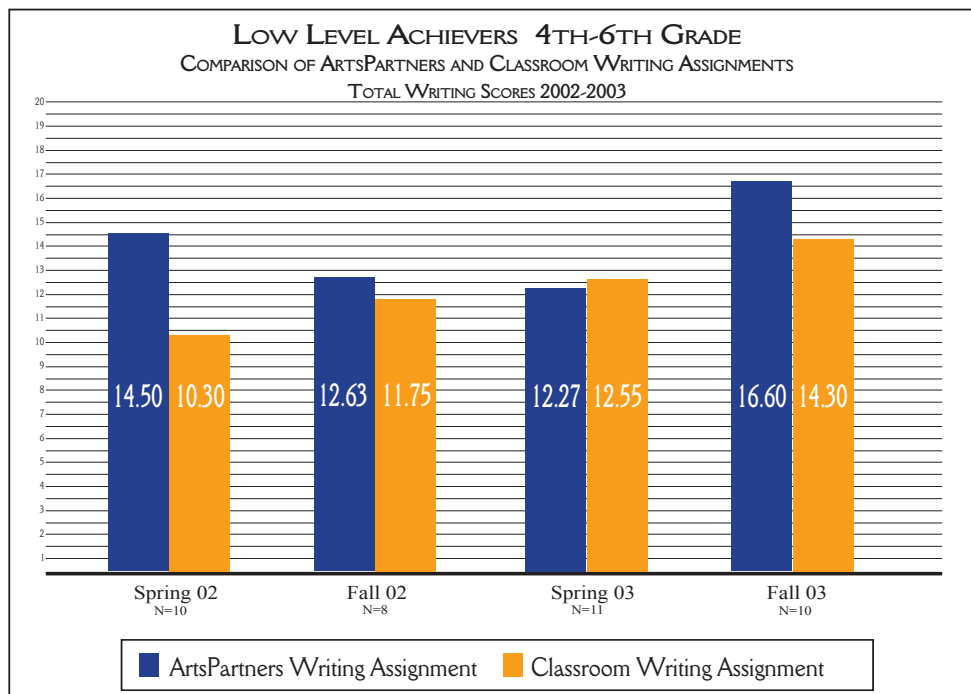
First, the achievement gaps that are almost universally reported between White, Asian, Hispanic and African American students virtually disappear for both creative and informative writing exercises that take place as part of the Dallas ArtsPartners curriculum. For example, Hispanic students earn significantly higher scores for AP-supported writing at 4th grade and 6th.

**Figure 7**



Second, in the context of AP lessons, particularly those focusing on the arts and creative processes, the achievement gap narrows between the most and least advantaged students. This is true of many different groupings of students (those grouped by economic disadvantage, by achievement level, etc) For instance, Figure 8 provides data describing the performance of low-achieving students on AP and Classroom writing samples for 4th, 5th and 6th grades. In the ArtsPartners writing samples, overall, lower-achieving students approach the levels of performance attained by average-achievers. By comparison, in their Classroom writing samples, these same students still lag behind.

**Figure 8**



Thus, well-designed AP curricula can motivate low-achieving students to reach new levels of performance. As discussed above, in fifth grade, student writing performance in both AP and Classroom curricula fell below the 4th grade levels on all six writing traits. But even under these conditions, low-achieving students perform more like their average- and high-achieving peers in the ArtsPartners curricula.

## What is it about Cultural Partnerships that Works?

Earlier analyses show that the ArtsPartners program can enhance students' overall literacy achievement through collaboration between classroom teachers and cultural partners working together to introduce students to new experiences and strategies. The effects are particularly strong in writing. At the same time, the data also indicate that achievement gaps frequently diminish between students of different ethnicities and language backgrounds during AP enriched lessons. Thus, the question arises, "What occurs during AP lessons cycles that creates these effects?"

To answer this question, researchers collect observational and interview data from focus students. The observational data consist of twenty-minute episodes in which a researcher closely watches an individual student, taking notes regarding the student's actions and talk. These notes are then coded for a range of learner behaviors. Most importantly, acting and speaking in these ways indicates a student's desire for teachers and peers to see and respond to him/her as a learner.

Interview data offer corroboration of this hypothesis. In one portion of the interview, students sort a list of statements once to describe their experiences in classroom instruction and again to describe their experiences in learning sponsored by cultural partners. What emerges from this data is that students regularly describe episodes of cultural learning as devoid of the negative aspects which can be a part of classroom experience (e.g. feeling dumb, not knowing what to do, etc.) This is particularly true for students who are currently struggling in school. One interpretation is that students experience AP curricula as a safe place to try things out, to explore and to take risks without fear of embarrassment.

In another portion of the interview, children are asked to describe how they developed a piece of work from first idea to finished product. Based on qualitative coding, it's clear that students frequently see themselves as agents in the AP context. They describe themselves as "wanting to . . .", "choosing," and "deciding." At the same time they describe themselves as "mindful" in talking about their ideas and their evaluations. In addition, children often reveal the social nature of their learning in AP contexts where they learn from classroom visitors, from the staff at institutions they visit, and from each other when they share ideas or read aloud first drafts of a song or biography.

This suggests that for many students, Dallas ArtsPartners programs create an environment which supports engagement in two major categories of learner behaviors: *Personal Agency* and *Collaborative Learning*. The classroom observation data indicate that students engage more frequently in collaborative learning behaviors (e.g., questions teacher, questions peer, asks for help, observes another's work or activity) during AP extension lessons, as opposed to typical classroom lessons. In 4th Grade, students show slightly more collaborative learning behaviors in AP curricula (AP=2.0, CL=1.7). However, by 5th Grade there is a much sharper difference. Students engage in more than twice as many instances of collaborative learner behaviors during AP Lessons (AP=5.7, CL=2.3).

Thus, the observational data further define how the AP program supports improved performance. They illuminate how Dallas ArtsPartners Lesson Cycles produce environments where students aren't intimidated, still and silent. Rather they "step-up to the plate" and take command of their own learning. They create situations in which both their independent actions and their interactions with others draw them deeper into learning and solidify their identities as learners.

For example, when a student ventures to ask a question, he may get a teacher's attention and even a question in return ("Well, what do you think?"). Within seconds, this student transforms from a witness and a consumer, to someone with a mind and an imagination. These findings are corroborated in interviews with the focus students. Once a trusting relationship has been established, children, ranging from low- to high-achievers, open up their thought processes. They reflect on their goals and efforts and evaluate the success of their work. Not incidentally, this suggests the potential role of interviewing and reflection in ArtsPartners future program designs.

## Conclusion

Marisol is a 6th grade low-achieving, English Language Learner who has participated in ArtsPartners for three years. Even short excerpts from her writing (see Figure 9), taken from ArtsPartners experiences, indicate her growing command of written English, the expanding range of her ideas and her increasing skill as a writer.

**Figure 9**

**Spring 2002** - writing about finding an instrument after participated in an African Drum Residency

*"...and I was in the T.V. Because I play gud [good] the instrument and I was very fames [famous] and I like to play all instruments."*

Excerpt taken from AP Writing Assignment exploring elaborative writing supported by the Young Audiences of North Texas' African Drumming Residency

**Spring 2003**

*"I'm a archaeologist I am [Marisol]. We stading [studying] people in the past in the 19th-century. They draw conclusion about people."*

Excerpt taken from AP Writing Assignment exploring culture supported by the Dallas Museum of Natural History's Archaeology Residency

**Fall 2003**

*"...My mom had gave me a star of David. But she said to not led Nazis see it cause they may kill me shust [just] cause I have the star of David."*

*Good thing that I was big enough to listen to my mom."*

Excerpt taken from AP Writing Assignment exploring the Holocaust supported by the Dallas Holocaust Memorial Center's student fieldtrip and survivor stories program

Though she shows progress, Marisol is still acquiring the academic English she needs to flourish in school. Nevertheless, these small excerpts show a young girl who is motivated to write about more than the simple here and now. For Marisol, writing has become an occasion to explore ideas, to imagine, and to enter other times and places.

Much of this growth must be credited to Marisol's own persistence and will to communicate in a second language, supported by her classroom teachers and the district's commitment to meet the varied needs of Dallas children. But it's also true that throughout her upper elementary years she has had the opportunity to write song lyrics with an African drummer; pretend to be an archaeologist - making observations and predictions; and research the possible life history of a Holocaust survivor. She has also been engaged in discussions where there are no immediately right answers. Her classroom teachers and her peers, along with musicians, scientists, museum docents and living history interpreters have expected her to revise and enhance her work. In addition, Marisol has been interviewed about the thoughts and decisions behind her work. As the data in this report suggest, these opportunities may well contribute to growth of young people like Marisol as readers, writers, thinkers and learners.

To view copies of integrated curriculum used during this study, ArtsPartners Searchable Database of arts and cultural programs, general information about the partnership, and more please visit our website:

[www.dallasartspartners.org](http://www.dallasartspartners.org)



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