

# Arts in the Middle (AIM)

A Collaborative Arts Education Project of Inner-City Arts  
and Los Angeles Unified School District 4

# INNER-CITY ARTS INNER-CITY ARTS

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education,  
Arts in Education Model Development and  
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## **Evaluation Report**

Executive Summary

## **Evaluators**

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## Overview of Project



Focusing on utilizing the arts to assist middle school students to excel in reading and writing, the Arts in the Middle project was designed for those students who are failing to meet minimum standards of literacy at their grade level.

The AIM model provides an integrated approach to in-depth arts study to the students of Los Angeles' inner-city schools, where the harsh conditions of economic disadvantage create barriers to achievement.



The AIM program provides students with tools and learning strategies to perform and work creatively in contexts that stress the use of language, the integration of their learning, and across the academic curriculum.





The Program fosters improvements in English Language Development levels (ELD) and in Art Skills among participating remedial Middle School English Learners.

ELD levels represent increasing mastery of reading and writing in English. At ELD level 5 students are redesignated as Fluent English Proficient and enrolled in mainstream English reading programs.

During the project period, January 2005–June 2009, the AIM program served 1,306 middle school students attending LAUSD’s Berendo Middle School.





## Why “Arts in the Middle”?

- Targets 12-15-year-old adolescents who are “in between” young childhood and later adolescence, who are “in the middle.”
- Because we strive to place the arts in the “middle” of the core curriculum that is taught in the schools.

## The Participants

- Designated English Learners, 94% Latino, grades 6-8, 12-15 years old, from Berendo Middle School, LAUSD.
- Students are at risk of educational failure, with extremely low achievement.
- Their average literacy scores fall far below the median 50th national percentile, and well below the averages for California and within the Los Angeles Unified School District.

## The Curriculum:

- Language Arts Teachers and Artists plan and teach the curriculum together.
- The Language Arts Teacher is gaining the experience to bring integration strategies in their teaching back into their regular classroom during the on-track sessions.
- Further training opportunities are also offered that focus on teaching strategies for English learners for the full school faculty (all subjects).

## Building Community:

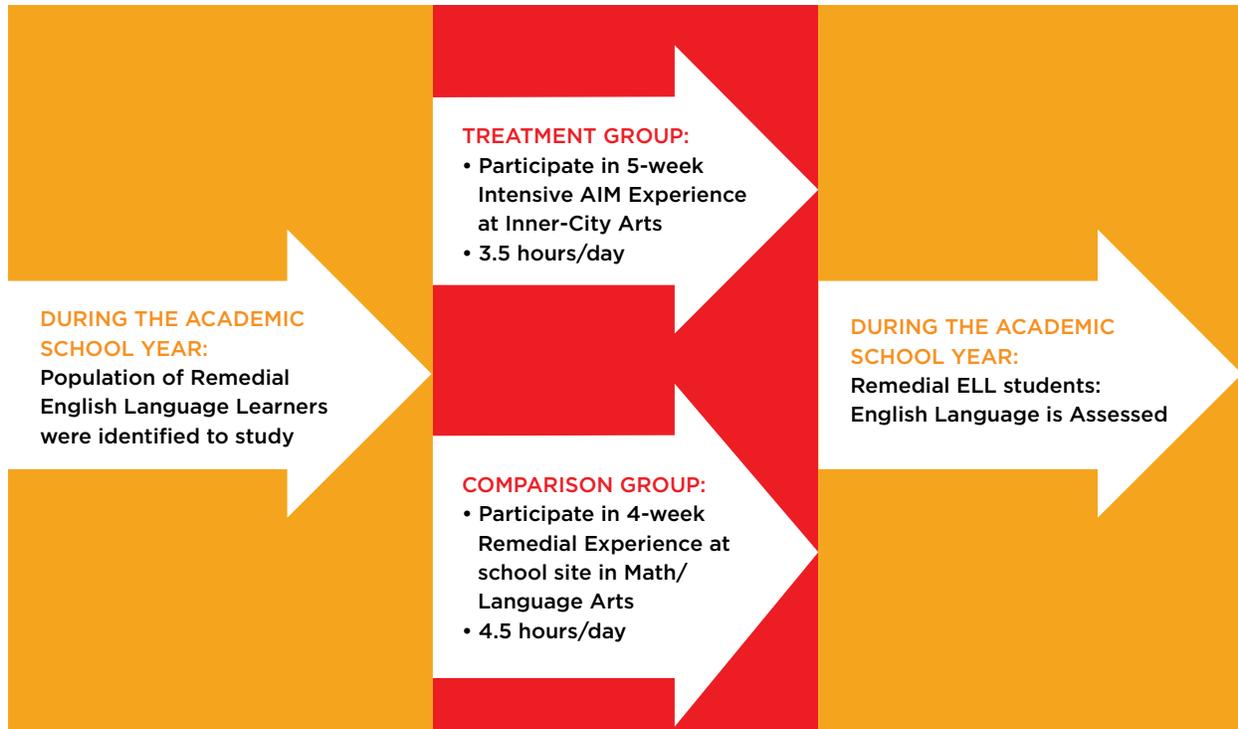
- The program fosters community awareness by emphasizing collaborative activity and joint problem-solving.
- Encourages collaboration and cooperation, where students can help and support one another.

## Research Questions:

- After an intensive 5-week program targeting remedial English learners, can any gains be measured in:
  - **English Language Development** and/or
  - Learning in **Drama** when compared to a control group?
- What is the relationship between Drama and Academic English Language Development?



**ARTS IN THE MIDDLE EVALUATION**



Treatment and Comparison Groups: both are drawn from one population at Berendo Middle School

**EVALUATION RESULTS**

**English Language proficiency:** Following participation in the AIM program, did the students more closely match the school-wide average for Grades 6–8 intersession participants?

- AIM students scored at about the overall school average on the 2006 California Standards Test of English Language Arts.
- After two years, the AIM group’s average score was significantly above the school-wide average score.
- Comparison groups with either their own intersession program or no program at all during the school break showed no improvement in English Language Arts scores.

- In addition, 65% of the AIM students made measurable improvements on the Academic English Language Proficiency (AELP) test.

Within these results,

- AIM participants not only made greater gains in English language proficiency than students in the two control groups, AIM students also showed additional improvement in English language proficiency than the entire school over the same time period.

**Arts learning:** The AIM evaluation concentrated on learning in the visual arts and drama.

- Across these art forms, 86.5% of AIM students demonstrated improved art skills (based on CA state standards).

**Drama.** Learning about drama and how to more fully participate in the drama community is central to the AIM Model. To characterize learning in drama, two aspects of drama participation were examined: (1) knowledge of the tools and activities specific to drama and (2) the ability to participate in drama activities more fully.

- Across the two instruments, 62.5% of AIM students gained from the pre- to post-assessment. Moreover, the AIM group made statistically significant gains between pre- to post-assessments.

*My students' experiences at Inner-City Arts allowed them to gain confidence and increased skills in the various art forms.*

— BOB HUNTER, 8TH GRADE ELA,  
22 YEARS TEACHING

*After being at Inner-City Arts, my students were more focused and their motivation to read was higher.*

— BRENDA NOJ, 6TH GRADE ENGLISH/HISTORY  
6 YEARS TEACHING

## PRE-TEST TO POST-TEST:



Pre-test



Post-test

## JARED'S EXAMPLE

During the pre-test, Jared is standing outside of the circle and is prompted four times by the instructor to say his name with a movement. He takes 1–2 minutes to respond. He stands with hands in pockets while the rest of the group becomes restless. Finally, he whispers his name and does no movement. When coded, Jared scored a “0” across the board for all sub-scales.

During the post-test, Jared stands attentively inside of the circle. Arms are in the drama-ready position when it's not his turn to participate. When it comes time to say his name with a movement, Jared confidently calls out his name and carries out the arm-raised gesture depicted to the left. When coded, Jared scored “1's” across the board for gesture, stage presence, teamwork, and diction and volume.

**Visual Art.** A secondary objective of the program was to engage students in the learning of visual arts. Similar to the assessments in drama, two aspects of visual arts practice to characterize learning were examined: (1) knowledge of the tools and activities specific to visual arts and (2) the ability to participate in visual arts activities more fully based on observations.

- 70% of the AIM students gained on the pre-post knowledge test. Moreover, the AIM group made statistically significant gains between pre- to post-assessments in performance-based observations.

## EXAMPLES FROM THE PERFORMANCE-BASED OBSERVATIONS IN VISUAL ARTS



Student 1: Pre-Drawing



Student 1: Post-Drawing



Student 2: Pre-Drawing



Student 2: Post-Drawing

## RESULTS

- The AIM evaluation study suggests that there is a relationship between certain areas of drama learning (e.g., knowledge of drama and performance) and areas of language acquisition (e.g., sequencing, formulating a persuasive argument, and summarizing); this positive correlation confirms some of the earlier relationships found in the literature on drama and language development.
- This is an early foray into the mechanisms of transfer in Drama and English Language Development—one of the first to document this with older children and second language learners.
- The evaluation begins to address a shortage of research on drama with older children generally.

100% of the AIM participants in the 5-week AIM program matriculated to their next ELD level, suggesting that the AIM program is favorable as a remedial educational effort for students in need of additional support.

AIM, language, and art: Taken together, these findings provide strong evidence regarding the efficacy of the AIM model in spurring student academic achievement and for its potential contributions to school-wide change through ongoing teacher training and support.

### Professional Development.

- Teacher surveys documented improved integration of arts-based learning in regular Grades 6-8 Language Arts classrooms.
- Teachers attributed these changes to AIM teacher training activities and collaborative planning.
- The survey data also spoke to the systemic impact that participation in the AIM program had on participating teachers' plans to remain in the field and on their job satisfaction—a key problem facing inner-city schools.
- Teacher's responses in the program suggest that professional development that focuses on community building in the classroom, making connections between art forms and academic areas, and engagement in learning strengthens and broadens teaching strategies and approaches to learning.

75% of the participating teachers experienced connections between the art form and other curricular areas. 100% experienced the connection between art and writing.

## A COMMUNITY CONCEPT OF HOW THE AIM MODEL WORKS

- The word community is used by participating teachers to characterize the nature of their time at Inner-City Arts and to portray their views of children at work. Community is also evoked by children's descriptions of their experiences at ICA and even their travels between their schools and their arts classes.
- Inner-City Arts presents immediate opportunities for students and teachers to know each other in different ways, to cooperate in creating works of art, to give and receive feedback on each other's work, and to gain skills in a short period of time that may boost their own senses of success and agency.
- Classroom teachers are drawn into the process as collaborating allies, and as human beings who themselves have things to learn and who themselves might have reason to ask a child for advice.
- With the Inner-City Arts teaching artists in this group, there is a thriving, multi-age, multi-skill level community that has reason and opportunity to pull together toward common goals—which is exactly what they seem to do.



*Classroom community building, and sharing experiences centered around the many positive experiences at Inner-City Arts.*

— BOB HUNTER, 8TH GRADE ELA,  
22 YEARS TEACHING

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*I see their confidence brimming.*

— CARMEN PADILLA, 6TH-8TH ELA, HISTORY, ESL  
22 YEARS TEACHING



#### STUDENT PROFILE

“My strongest memory from the AIM program was a student named Sebastian. He was a spirited young man, clearly articulate with leadership capabilities, but not aware of how to use those capabilities for positive effect. He had been in the program once before, and the teacher then had consistently expressed frustration with him and had even considered terminating his participation. Upon entry to the program for the second time, a second language arts teacher immediately expressed doubts about his ability to participate without talking back or distracting others.

I took Sebastian aside and told him I thought he seemed like a really smart guy and asked why he came back to us for his intersession. He told me he was in a remedial language class and had to enroll in intersession, and chose us because he had fun last time. I asked him if he wanted to be able to enroll in a regular English class when he returned from intersession. He said yes. I told him that then he needed to participate in a different way. Since he was back again, he needed to be a leader instead of someone who took attention away from the teacher. His eyes focused on me and he understood.

That intersession, Sebastian went from being the annoying, distracting one, to being a standout actor and filmmaker. That session, he ended up being one of the students who was able to meet Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and had his picture taken with him. You could see the humility and pride in his eyes at being chosen for such an honor. The next chance I got to check in with him, he advanced from an ELD level 2 to a level 4, and mainstreamed into English. And his confidence was through the roof!”





*Their time at Inner-City Arts affected my students in the classroom because they became vocal about what they thought. I think that the more my students were encouraged to be creative it became easier for them to formulate ideas, opinions, and especially questions, which often came up in discussions. Whether it was the camaraderie we developed at Inner-City Arts or their creative exercises, something from the time spent at Inner-City Arts made the classroom a conducive environment for collaborative learning.*

— ESTHER LEBOVICH, 6/7 ELA, ESL  
28 YEARS TEACHING

*When students are engaged in creating or performing they don't see it as "learning," and yet they are learning as they talk to each other, problem-solve, expand their imagination, plan and execute.*

— ESTHER LEBOVICH, 6/7 ELA, ESL  
28 YEARS TEACHING

*Bringing the visual and performing arts into my classroom leads to increased excitement and participation on the part of my students.*

— BOB HUNTER, 8TH GRADE ELA,  
22 YEARS TEACHING

*At the beginning of a session, students were barely speaking to each other—much less the group as a whole. By the end of the session, students were able to not only perform and share artwork, but they were also able to reflect on it through writing and speaking. There was a confidence there at the end and a pride in the work they had done.*

— KRISTY MESSER  
TEACHING ARTIST, AIM

**Arts in the Middle, a Collaborative Arts Education  
Project of Inner-City Arts and Los Angeles Unified  
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