

The Effects of Distance Learning on the Attitudes of Elementary Age Children: Year 2, a Follow-up Study

ARTS to the Delta, a 1+ million dollar project, is an advanced-technology infrastructure program for the region of northeast Louisiana which provides a gateway for education, skills training, and enrichment for Louisiana delta-area students. The primary goal is to provide -- through distance learning via video conferencing technologies- life-long-skills for rural 1st-5th grade participants. The project provides -- 1) educational opportunities to increase student academic performance and retention; 2) skills enhancement to encourage entrepreneurship and life-long learning among economically-distressed delta residents; and 3) intercommunication opportunities so that delta residents can experience "virtually" beyond their present condition. The grant brings the delta into the world by bringing the world to the delta.

Year 1: Analysis of the fall 2002 classroom activities, when triangulated with project staff interviews by telephone and survey data from the teachers themselves, indicates that the instructional techniques were sound, the children were engaged, and the content was well conveyed during the fall 2002 classes. Students were clearly being introduced to fine arts content and gaining new interpersonal skills. Teachers at the five remote sites were apparently less comfortable with the use of the video conferencing system than their students (based on observation of video footage), and (based on teacher Likert ratings) are still somewhat undecided about their ratings of the whole approach after having their students on the system for one semester. Surveys administered at a later date might confirm whether or not teacher confidence increases after the delivery system "settles down." Suggestions for formative improvements include: a) continued reductions in technical difficulties, b) more training for the teachers at the four remote sites, in the adjustment of the telecommunications systems components and debugging technical difficulties, and c) continued evolution in teaching styles (such as more student-participation examples, collaborative group chair arrangements at the remote sites). It is the just-in-time technical adjustments and fine-tuning/continual improvement in content delivery and teaching strategies that are believed to be the primary sources of maintained and increased engagement of the learners throughout the fall 2002 semester.

Year 2: Analysis is a follow up evaluation to the fall findings. This report is based on standardized test scores for students that participated in the first year of the program, interviews with participating teachers, site visits by the evaluators, and survey data in evaluating the value of music education important for academic achievement as it correlates with all other content areas. Earlier studies indicate that learning rhythms and where parts of the beat fall can help strengthen a student's math skills. Other studies stress music taught conceptually (experiential learning involving the elements of music, e.g. melody, harmony, texture, timbre, form, expressive whole, rhythm, etc.) has been shown to increase reading comprehension (ESEA, 1969; Tucker, 1981; Catterall, 1995; Murfee, 1995; Friedman, 1959), and develop social skills (Maltester, (1986).)