

CAT CREATIVE ARTS TEAM

IN THE NEWS



A PARTNERSHIP FOR EMERGENT LITERACY: CUNY'S CREATIVE ARTS TEAM AND NYC'S HEAD START

The CREATIVE ARTS TEAM, more familiarly known as CAT, a university-wide initiative of the City University of New York (CUNY) and the NYC Administration for Children's Services Head Start program, have developed a model arts-in-education curriculum for New York City's Head Start students. Over the past thirteen years, CAT's Emergent Literacy Project has served over 5,000 New York City Head Start students and has trained over 500 Head Start teachers since 1993. "We're delighted to have a program like CAT that has actively and effectively engaged our teachers and children in such an innovative and imaginative way," comments Maria Benejan, Assistant Commissioner of Head Start.

This year's program was specifically designed to meet the literacy needs of English language learners. With supplemental funds from the New York City Council Immigrant Initiative, CAT actor/teachers Steve Elm, Samara Gaev, Max Ryan, Mitsu Salmon, and Helen Wheelock conducted 22-day residencies at three selected Head Start sites with high percentages of immigrant populations in East Harlem and Brooklyn. Drama residencies actively involved students and teachers in role-play and CAT artists mentored teachers and participating education directors in interactive storytelling methods to stimulate children's imaginations, build their emotional commitment, and develop literacy and English acquisition skills.

Interviews, observations and surveys were used to measure Head Start teachers' abilities to work with their as well as education directors' capacity to supervise, coordinate and sustain drama at the participating sites. In addition, a pre and post residency survey was specifically designed to assess each child's English language and literacy performance based on skills from the federally mandated *Creative Curriculum Continuum*. Preliminary findings indicate a positive shift in children's English acquisition and literacy skills. The evaluation design is being overseen by Dr. Stuart Cochran, CUNY's Director of Research & Development for the Office of Academic Affairs.



Head Start teachers have responded to the partnership with enthusiasm.

For more information on CAT's Emergent Literacy Program, contact CAT Program Director, Frances McGarry at (212) 652-2844

<http://www.nysaae.org/>