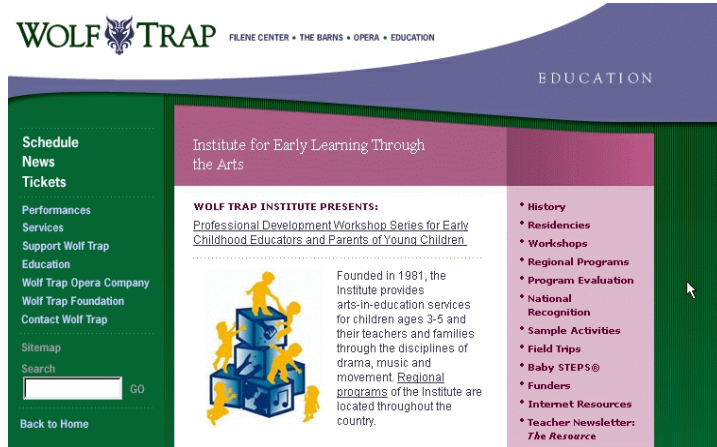


Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts A smART stART

by
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Arts education – and particularly early arts education – is like good nutrition. We know we need it; we know that if we have it, we'll enjoy it and we'll benefit from it; and we also know that, sadly, most of the time we simply can't afford it. Traditionally, early arts education suffers whenever there is a downturn in the economy, or whenever other priorities take precedence. But with TOP support, the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts is undertaking an ambitious initiative to deploy information technology to develop an online

community to provide and sustain professional development opportunities in literacy and the performing arts for early childhood educators.



The screenshot shows the Wolf Trap Institute website. The top navigation bar includes 'WOLF TRAP' with a logo, and 'FILE CENTER • THE BARNIS • OPERA • EDUCATION'. The 'EDUCATION' section is highlighted. A left sidebar menu lists: Schedule, News, Tickets, Performances, Services, Support Wolf Trap, Education, Wolf Trap Opera Company, Wolf Trap Foundation, Contact Wolf Trap, Sitemap, Search (with a 'GO' button), and Back to Home. The main content area features a purple header 'Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts'. Below it, a section titled 'WOLF TRAP INSTITUTE PRESENTS: Professional Development Workshop Series for Early Childhood Educators and Parents of Young Children' includes an illustration of children with blocks and a text box stating: 'Founded in 1981, the Institute provides arts-in-education services for children ages 3-5 and their teachers and families through the disciplines of drama, music and movement. Regional programs of the Institute are located throughout the country.' To the right is a list of links: History, Residencies, Workshops, Regional Programs, Program Evaluation, National Recognition, Sample Activities, Field Trips, Baby STEPS®, Funders, Internet Resources, and Teacher Newsletters: The Resource.

The immediate goal of project stART smART is to produce a cadre of teaching artists who can function as trainers of the stART smART content and approaches, and who are capable of using digital network technologies to support instruction. Using this same interactive technology, artists have the

chance to provide constant feedback on the process, including submission of digital records of classroom activities, regularly scheduled videoconferences, and participation in online threaded bulletin board discussions. During the three-year period of the TOP award, the stArt smArt Network will connect three of Wolf Trap's regional programs: the Center for Education at Wolf Trap in Virginia, the Center for Arts Education/Memphis Arts Council in Tennessee, and the Creative Arts Team of New York University; 216 teachers and approximately 4,320 children will participate.



Building on this foundation, the teachers involved in the project will be able to apply the stART smART content and approaches to creating, implementing, and assessing classroom plans. Teachers participating in the project can periodically submit lesson plans online, allowing Wolf Trap's evaluation team to follow the teachers' progress in conceiving and designing developmentally appropriate performing arts lessons that teachers can coordinate with the literature the kids are reading.

Teachers will also have the opportunity not only to submit digital video documentation of their own performance in leading stART smART Network lessons in their classrooms, but also to critique the work of fellow program participants. At various points throughout the project, teachers have the chance to demonstrate their ability to post and access lessons online; to participate in existing and initiate new discussions on a threaded bulletin

board; and to evaluate themselves and others using a variety of online tools.

It all sounds wonderful, but ultimately a project like this stands or falls on the children's capacity to demonstrate that they are actually learning something. To handle this part of the initiative, Wolf Trap will compare teacher and teaching artist evaluations of students' performance against generally agreed upon arts learning and emergent literacy objectives. A team of evaluators will analyze students' performance in teacher and teaching artist-led lessons, both on video and in person.



stART smART could be a significant breakthrough in arts education nationwide. One of its greatest strengths is that it builds upon and extends access to the ongoing success of Wolf Trap's Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts. The concepts and techniques the teachers learn through this project will stay with them long after the project ends. And the children who experience the arts-based lessons are likely to carry with them a special literacy, perspective and cognitive development that will serve them well into their formative school years.