

# Introduction to ACT

## Preparing Students for the School Day

### *Why ACT?*

**The goal of ACT is to build thinking, learning, reflection, and engagement skills.**

Music and other arts illustrate and develop many mental skills that are necessary for achievement in other academic areas. Data from research on this has been presented in leading publications. ACT builds on this research to prepare the student for the curriculum challenges of the school day.

ACT uses music and other arts to provide experience and practice at maintaining and adjusting mental engagement (focus), and in critical thinking concerning knowledge, understanding, analysis and synthesis/creation. Through its Inquiry Learning approach, ACT also fosters student curiosity, initiative, and active involvement in learning.

Responses to initial development of ACT by teachers and students have been highly favorable (see Appendix II).

### **Learning Through Engagement and Reflection**

ACT lessons have two parts, both of which are important to the fullest learning experience that ACT can provide.

The first part of each lesson contains activities that involve skill-developing *engagement* with music or visual arts and often also related engagement involving mathematics or verbal arts.

The second part of each lesson (*Follow-up*) provides students an opportunity to *reflect* upon what they have just experienced, to connect this learning to their broader interests and experiences.

Beginning with John Dewey, many educators have emphasized that both *engagement* and *reflection* are essential parts of the most useful learning.

### **ACT fosters achievement in language arts.**

ACT fosters language acquisition by creating opportunities for students to practice verbal language while engaging with the arts in a structured yet open way.

ACT fosters writing skills by helping to develop mental skills needed for effective writing, by helping students to better understand what makes written language effective and by providing a motivational purpose for idea formation.

ACT fosters reading skills by helping to develop mental skills needed to read with understanding; and by providing both background information, which enables understanding of literature, and active involvement, which increases interest.

### **ACT fosters achievement in mathematics.**

ACT creates a motivational atmosphere of physical engagement to promote active mathematics learning.

ACT fosters math skills by helping to develop mental skills for using mathematics effectively, building number sense, and then understanding of how and why mathematical operations on numbers are developed in the way they are and what they accomplish.

### **ACT Lessons**

ACT lessons have been designed to develop through the arts general engagement and thinking skills and also foster adaptation of these skills to specific academic areas. At this stage of development ACT focuses on mental skills and their adaptations to language arts and math for the elementary school level.

ACT lessons are intended to be presented creatively and freely. These lessons, which require 20-30 minutes of class time, prepare students for learning in a variety of disciplines. They are especially effective if used regularly to begin each school day.

- The lessons in each series should be presented sequentially.
- They can be revisited as needed.
- They can be presented in shorter time increments, which would extend over more days.
- They can be combined with material from other lessons and integrated with other curricula.



ACT lessons are labeled as follows:

- Lessons marked “A” prepare a student for active involvement in further learning, and build basic engagement and thinking skills.
- Lessons marked “M” address connections to mathematical skills.
- Lessons marked “L” address connections to language arts.

# “A” Series of ACT Lessons

## Introduction

### **ACT Lessons A1-A3: *Listening and Engagement***

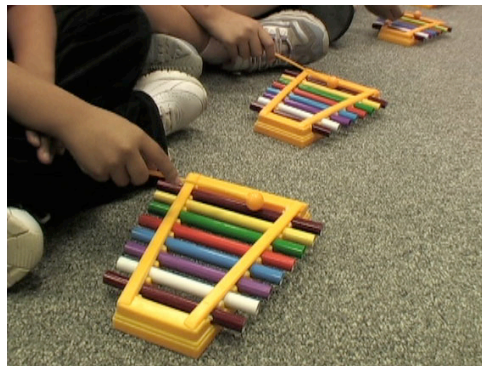
- These initial lessons serve to develop skills at active learning by having students listen to and interact with music.

### **ACT Lessons A4-A11: *Developing Thinking, Learning, and Engagement Skills***

- These eight lessons develop the ability to clap and conduct rhythmically in time to music, skills that may seem simple but actually use the mind in complex ways.

### **ACT Lessons A12-A31: *Organizing Information in Your Mind***

- In these lessons, students use music and visual art to explore two ways to organize and use information.
  - ***Sequence***
    - Thinking involving sequence is important both in mathematics and language arts.
  - ***Categorization***
    - Thinking involving categorization is important to language arts and to mathematical thinking concerning probability and statistics.
  - Teachers should adjust the pace at which they cover these lessons according to the preparation of their students.
  - Students who receive coordinated music and visual arts training may be able to progress more rapidly through these lessons.
  - Students without coordinated musical training may need to repeat one or more of Lessons A15, A17, A19, and A21-A31 in order to master this sequence.
  - Any lesson may be repeated until most students have mastered it.
- Lessons A12-A14 introduce thinking about musical space, which is developed further in Lesson A15.



- Lessons A12-A15, A17, A19, and A21-A31 form a series that build skill sequentially, so they should be covered in order. Lessons A16, A18, and A20 are also a series that should be covered in order.
- Lessons A12-A15, A17, A19, and A21-A31 develop sequential thinking through introductory studies that concern musical pitch. Further training coordinated with these lessons by a music specialist is highly recommended. Such further training can go beyond this introduction to more detailed development of capability concerning musical melody and harmony and at the same time increase the impact of these ACT lessons on broader learning.

