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With greater emphasis on academic test scores, many schools are neglecting the arts. This non-traditional education program in a charter school is infusing the arts into the curriculum.

Many educational policy leaders have embraced the assumption that reading, mathematics, and science should be the primary focus in raising academic proficiency. This has changed the face of education, abandoning holistic learning while embracing a rigid structure focused on test scores. "Educators have responded rationally to incentives that, to devote more time to math and reading, spur reductions in social studies, science, art, music, physical education, cooperative learning and other character-building activities" (Rothstein, 2008, p. 14). Schools are required to meet specific scores in core curriculum areas including math, reading, writing, and science. The

energy and resources that districts spend to meet these demands have driven the system to withdraw from extra curriculars and electives. Urban schools are seeing a significant reduction in the arts (Bitz, 2004).

Research from the National Association of State Boards of Education found the arts to be important to education and at risk of elimination (Meyer, 2005). Educators are faced with a complex dilemma with regards to curriculum design. Regardless of the importance of maintaining and sustaining the arts, the reality of achieving test scores to avoid significant sanctions occupies a majority of educational focus. Local, state, and federal dollars are at risk when schools fail to make adequate progress by these imposed measures and standards. At the heart of the curriculum dilemma are potential consequences that may include the closure of schools and the displacement or removal of staff.

A consequence for reducing or depleting the arts from school curriculum includes what Maslach coined “Reduced Personal Accomplishment,” which is a significant reduction in feeling competent and being productive (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Today’s school child is expected to participate in more assessments than historically was the case. While education is in need of accountability, a side effect of these imposed policies is the reduction of healthy relationships and opportunities for students to learn within styles that suit their needs. Many students will thrive with an educational design that promotes the arts, creates a climate of respect, and supports their learning styles.

There are No Throwaway Students

If creativity is stifled, students may feel as though they are less able to function and may become frustrated. A model utilized by the Perseus House Charter School of Excellence (CSE), located in Erie, Pennsylvania, upholds the belief that there are no throwaway students. The school’s philosophy is that while test scores remain an important necessity in education, healthy relationships within the school are of equal value. To reach these goals, this school has a mission statement that speaks to both personal and academic growth. This balance is essential because most students at the CSE function two to three years below grade level, live within a socio-economic status that is below the poverty line, and are at risk for dropping out. The primary goal, due to a 40% transient rate, is to provide the students an opportunity for growth and the ability to leave the CSE prepared to become contributing members in the community. Risk is transformed into resilience as over 70% of the students who graduate from this school are in university studies, military service, or gainful employment. All of these pathways to personal success require the ability to communicate effectively with others, control one’s temperament, and foster healthy professional relationships. CSE also tracks daily attendance, earned credits, reportable aggressive incidents, and student work force school attendance, among other indicators. See Table 1.

Intervention Approaches

To address socio-emotional needs, all students receive a core curriculum of “Personal Development” from Aggression Replacement Training®

which includes Skillstreaming, Anger Control, and Moral Reasoning (Glick & Gibbs, 2011). Beyond the Aggression Replacement Training® curriculum, Amendola and Oliver have developed the Prepare Curriculum Implementation Guides (*The Arnold P. Goldstein Approach*) including an adapted Anger Control Training manual (Amendola & Oliver, 2014). This increases focus on cognition and psychological cues. Empathy and Social Competence Training (Salmon, 2015) specifically focuses on the ability to teach others to understand how significant individuals in their life are feeling. It includes a definition of empathy with attending and non-attending behavior, feeling identification increasing

the vocabulary around ranges of feelings, and the HEARS Model.

Problem-Solving Training (Parker et al., 2013) focuses on the importance of individuals’ understanding of their problem-solving barriers and thinking errors to solutions; the ability to identify their own problems and gather information from their and others’ perspectives; and evaluating potential consequences and outcomes. Focus is given to cognitive distortions and overcoming those thinking errors.

Social Perception Training (Gunderson, Stromgren & Moynahan, 2013; Parker et al., 2013) specifically focuses on emotional awareness and the understanding of one’s thoughts, feelings, emotions and actions, and the ability to interpret others’ intentions so they may use the correct social skill at the right time and place.

It is also important to align with family members. A curriculum developed by Calame and Parker entitled Family Ties (2013) is a family-based intervention to complement The Prepare Implementation Guides, and family members attend 16 of the 30 sessions. The combination of these powerful interventions was intended by Arnold Goldstein to be descriptive in nature and address the individual needs of those utilizing the Model.

They gain the capacity to make better choices and enhance their own insight into situations that may lead to negative outcomes. Through role playing, students explore and shape their artistic ability for expression, cognitive functioning, and problem solving skill sets. This is complemented

Table 1

| | 2010 | 2014 |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| Daily Attendance Rates | 66% | 77% |
| Earned Annual Academic Credits (SC) | 4.20 | 6.02 |
| Behavioral/ Mental Health Referrals | 33% | 53% |
| Total Graduates since opening in 2003 | 235 | 605 |
| Student Transient Rate | 42% | 29% |
| Reportable Aggressive Incidents | 9.8% | 6.9% |
| Student Workforce School Attendance | 65% | 91% |

*Note: The data above has been taken from the Perseus House Charter School of Excellence.
All data has been reported to Pennsylvania Department of Education.*

by Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI) training for all CSE staff. The behavior specialist, program facilitators, and administrators perform reclaiming interventions with disruptive students. They effectively communicate by using a format that is non-threatening and displays a high level of respect, turning problems into learning opportunities (Long, Wood, & Fescer, 2001).

Most traditional school systems follow a fixed timeline for students to move through for credit completion. But all students do not fit in this pre-determined pattern. The CSE uses a student-driven timeline and a grading system that does not allow students to fail. There is no failing academic grade; instead a grade of "N" exists to acknowledge that a student has "Not Yet" met at least a basic level of understanding or comprehension for identified content. Chief Educational Officer Dr. John Linden states, "In this system, time is not the enemy of a student, but the variable for success." The model does not incorporate grade levels, and students maintain their course until they demonstrate at least a basic understanding of the content. Academic instruction is geared not only toward the class as a whole, but also to the student as an individual. A cornerstone of this model is activity-based instruction so students stay motivated and believe that success is not just a possibility but a reality.

Art and Action

To enrich learning experiences, teachers spend no more than thirty percent of instructional time using the textbook. Experiential activity-based instruction is encouraged. Many students are kinesthetic learners who display minimal attention spans. Action-based instruction has increased attention and promotes participation and learning. Many of the current grants for the arts are aimed at promoting the arts to be taught outside of the school day (Chapman, 2007). The CSE does not support that position. Art and music teachers participate in department meetings for math, science, language arts, and social studies to support action-based learning through related classroom projects. Music educators Abril and Gault (2007) found that connecting music to other subject areas was considered to be an ideal curriculum, reflecting interdisciplinary learning. Faculty from different disciplines work collaboratively on a particular project and team teach. Rosenbloom (2004) identifies this approach as ideal methodology and distinguishes this format from "turn teaching," where each teacher is limited to his or her narrow curricular area.

Students at the CSE become more engaged in academics because these are tied to their interest in the arts. Tethering students to standardized tests eliminates opportunities for qualitative assessment and promotion of individual creativity (Rayment & Britton, 2004). Educators are not

technicians but should have the liberty to incorporate formative assessments that explore the interest areas of students who produce creative work and demonstrate proficient understanding of the content. This is a major concept for the Charter School of Excellence and it is clearly seen in the lesson plans and design.

Examples of how the arts become infused into the curriculum and provide opportunities for effective instruction are abundant. A two-week-long lesson plan utilized the language arts department, the music teacher, and the art teacher. The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame was the focus of collaborative planning. The language arts teacher utilized technology to enlist students in researching Hall of Fame inductees. The art teacher developed a project where students created story boards to support their research. Students learned music history through listening as well as watching their inductees' performances. The classroom structure used a combination of days during which the three departments team taught, turn taught, and taught independently of the others. The class took a field trip to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame to see their inductees' exhibits. Finally, students had to provide a class presentation, research paper, and story board as the culmination of the project. This type of approach maintained student interest and was an ideal methodology for infusing the arts into research, technology, creative and persuasive writing, and reading of non-fiction based information.

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The idea of cross-curriculum collaboration with the arts has no boundaries. A week-long project involved the social studies classes and the art teacher exploring the students' heritage. They were to research specific topic areas that applied to their identified descent, as applied to agriculture. The students then created flags that both identified their national descent and agricultural findings.

Another example of how the arts may be incorporated into the educational design is seen within the senior graduation project. Students at the CSE are provided various formats to choose from when completing this state mandate. Some students

choose to produce the traditional research project to satisfy this expectation. Others elect opportunities that permit a demonstration project, art project, music project, or Power Point oral project. An example of an art project came from a special education student who chose the topic of ambigrams, a form of graphic art involving word inversions. The student was able to draw illustrations, provide a shortened research piece, and verbally present the presentation to satisfactorily complete the project. Another student chose a demonstration project and took apart the engine of a lawn mower, explaining the mechanics and science behind the operations of the engine. This demonstration allowed for the student to display how advanced his understanding was for these areas. Through incorporating research based on non-fictional information and utilizing problem solving and presentation skills, this child's skill sets and self-esteem were enhanced. These opportunities allowed the student to be creative, take action, and have fun learning.

Conclusion

Infusing education with the arts and challenging youth to think abstractly aids them in gaining a deeper understanding of the world around them (Chessin & Zander, 2006). The design of the Charter School of Excellence maintains strong theoretical background and infuses art and action into the delivery methodology. Incorporating art and hands-on learning while focusing on student needs has created a culture that continues to enhance the likelihood of personal or academic success into adulthood.

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CSE Student Testimonials

“The students here are friendly and I don’t have to worry about getting picked on. I haven’t really witnessed bullying here which is surprising because it’s school, you’d expect bullying. It’s just how society is.”

“I used to be an outcast at my other schools and now that I go to the CSE I fit in much better with the people here. CSE is a very friendly school and has a very friendly atmosphere that has bettered me in many ways, and I am thankful for what this school has given to me.”

“This school can change you from a troublemaker into a positive person. Even though the school is small, we still have big tasks. CSE makes you feel welcome and comfortable while also making you feel safe. This school made me the person I am today. At my last school I always got sent to the office or got detentions. Here I don’t get in trouble. If you want to change and become a better person, I recommend you come here.”

“The Charter School of Excellence helped me open my eyes and really start focusing on school. It helped me see school from a point of view I never would have imagined existed. I used to see school as a waste of time. I would always get in trouble, get terrible grades, and I now realize it was because I wasn’t trying hard enough. If it wasn’t for CSE I would probably still be where I was, lost and struggling.”