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A COMMUNITY ARTS PROGRAM: AN IMPACT STUDY

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A Community Arts Program: An Impact Study

ABSTRACT

The AmeriCorps ArtsUSF program was an outreach program that provided hands-on arts experiences to underserved children in culturally and economically deprived environment. The primary goal of the ArtsUSF AmeriCorps was to help lift the quality of life of children through hands-on arts experience, and to help improve the communities' image, stability, and culture by providing accessible, safe, and affordable cultural activities and programs. The secondary goal was to help the members develop and obtain an increased awareness of societal problems, learn skills that make real changes in solving some of the societal problems, and become more responsible citizens and professionals. The project had two components: Getting Things Done and Member Development.

The objectives of Getting Things Done were:

- (1) improved hands-on arts skills;
- (2) improved arts appreciation skills;
- (3) improved skills in expressing feelings in creative and appropriate ways;
- (4) improved school performance; and
- (5) improved attitude in being kind-to-one-another

The objectives of Member Development were:

- (1) improved understanding of the interdisciplinary approach;
- (2) improved teaching skills;
- (3) improved understanding of societal problems;
- (4) improved skills on solving societal problems through the arts;
- (5) improved organizational skills;

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THE PROBLEM

A report by the National Endowment for the Arts (1988) identified specific reasons why arts education is important: Arts education (1) provides young people a sense of civilization; (2) fosters creativity and teaches effective communication; (3) provides tools for critical thinking; and (4) can improve the general learning environment. Studies have shown that the stimuli provided through the arts play in healthy brain development; and that participation in the arts affects positively in the school community, appreciation of cultural differences, and active community service (Goals 2000 Arts Education Partnership 1997). The arts in creating a literate, imaginative, competent, and creative society by providing children with tools to understand the world was clearly addressed by the National Standards for Arts Education (1994). These reports make it clear that arts help to develop intellectual as well as emotional capacities of the children. Further, Goleman (1995, 1997) posited, "emotion is...crucial to effective thought, both in making wise decisions and in thinking clearly" (p. 27).

Enacting upon an outreach mission to help improve society through arts experience, AmeriCorps ArtsUSF program was created to provide intense, expressive arts experiences for children who live in the culturally and economically deprived environment. The program was focused on building children's skills and self-esteem. At the same time, one of the goals of AmeriCorps ArtsUSF was to provide the volunteer artist-teachers with both in-service job training and lessons in civic service. The program was conceived to encourage children to make meaningful connections to the real world and to generate new insights and to synthesize

new relationships between ideas” (The Consortium of National Arts Education Association, 2002, p. 3).

THE PROGRAM

The program was created in response to a community-based initiation developed through year-long collaborative efforts between the University of South Florida and various community constituents in Tampa Bay area, who had concluded that the arts experience with trained artists could indeed have impacts on lifting children's self image and quality of life in these economically and culturally deprived communities.

Children's program was focused on both skills and attitude development. The program was designed to help develop hands-on arts skills, arts appreciation skills, skills to express feelings in creative and appropriate ways; and to help improve school performance, social skills, attitude about anti-drug, alcohol, and smoking, attitudes toward self and community, and being kind-to-each-other. The ultimate goal was to lift the quality of life of culturally disadvantaged children and to increase their knowledge of the diversity of peoples and cultures through arts experience. Member development program was designed to help the artist-teachers to use this opportunity to expand their horizon through the concept of volunteerism and to develop sense of direction in life through the experience. Member training program was focused on interdisciplinary arts approach, solving societal problems through the arts, teaching skills,

Several arts teachers were consulted to assure content validity; and the instruments were pilot-tested to help improve construct validity. The Members administered the surveys twice: November baseline data were collected after the initial organizational period of the program; and

relationships among the skills and attitude dimensions (see Table 3). For example, arts and arts-related skills were well grouped as intended in both November and May datasets in factors one and two. Factor three in November data indicated that the children who expressed through arts also had class learning skills, independent problem-solving skills, the ability to integrate arts to life, and positive attitudes on diversity. Factor four showed a relationship between attitudes on diversity and attitudes on being kind-to-each-other. Factor five indicated connection between anti-drug, alcohol and smoking attitude and a positive attitude toward the community. Factor six suggested relationships among class learning skills, group problem-solving skills, and attitude on diversity. May data showed a strong relationship between arts and arts-related skills and attitude about diversity and being kind-to-each-other in factor two. Factor three in May data showed that children had gained stronger connections among arts skills, independent problem-solving skills, and anti-drug, alcohol, and smoking attitude.

----- Table 3 -----

Member Profile:

Members came from diverse locations, for example, Florida, New York City, Hungary, Philadelphia, with varied artistic talents and training in music, dance, theatre, visual arts, film, and woodworking. Members were selected based on their background and commitment to the AmeriCorps• mission of serving the community while developing self (see Table 4). There was an overwhelming sense that this was a life-changing experience for many of the artist members.

----- Table 4 -----

Member Development:

a) The Experience:

It was an equally eye-opening, heart-warming experience for members as it was for the children as they ventured together in this program (see Table 5). Field trips to Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center, museums and theatres, and University of South Florida were new experiences for most of the children. Week-to-week work was long and hard, but seeing the children enjoying and learning through the day-to-day activities gave them great, wonderful feelings. Many members wrote that the program was •running smoothlyŽ and •projects were flowing.Ž They saw the children •enthusiastic,Ž of positive energy,Ž •excited,Ž and •expressive.Ž One member described the dynamics vividly, •The week was long and hard and wonderful. Monday through Thursday, we worked toward the photo contest. I brought my manual camera and showed them how to set the shutter and aperture and how to focus. Each

the children becoming more creative in their ideas for new projects, using dance as a way of opening up to each other, and gaining control and a sense of challenge. The members observed the children not only developing problem-solving skills but also learning to work together and sharing the joys of the experience. Making paper mache with old newspapers and using them for dramatic plays taught teamwork.

Children were encouraged to work on different mediums to create great art work by using found items from the nature and turning them into totally different artistic objects. Such creativity gave both the members and children a sense of possibilities that they never thought of

such efforts and growth. •This week I did a complete creative movement lesson. It went extremely well. I reapplied the skills every day and I was excited to see that the children retained the information. We also did a music lesson but it did not go quite as well. I blame that on our preparation however, not the children. I feel that if we were to tell the children to jump off a bridge, they would. That's how much trust they are developing in us.Ž

The program gave hands-on experience and reflective time for many members to test out their life's goals and dreams and also provided concrete launching pad for careers, as one

f) Frustrations

Members worked long hours in training and preparing for the program. Once the program began, the children's enthusiasm and delight made it all worthwhile, despite poor facilities and other difficult conditions. The major problem at most of the sites was the space: Even though the site authorities welcomed AmeriCorps ArtsUSF program, their perception of the arts were not much more than extra-curricular crafts time. Our artists' lessons were well grounded in the philosophical and theoretical premises of the program to teach children to appreciate the arts and to respect people through the arts activities. Another major issue had to do with children's self-perception. While the members observed change during the program, there were deep-rooted negative self-image that was reflected in one journal entry: "What do you do when a student writes on [his] comic strip "I am not dumb," "quit calling me stupid," "I hate this place," "I hate going home," "I hate everything." Despite some of the difficulties and frustrations, the power of sharing humanity through arts was evident in this program and in the communities.

----- Table 5 -----

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

We raised a question, "What can we do to help lift the lives of our children who are left behind from the American affluence, diversity of culture, and the fine arts?" On a larger premise, we wondered, "Is there a role of the arts toward world peace and globalization?" In this time of political crises around the world, many children are left to learn that hate, crime, and poverty are the norm of life. The AmeriCorp ArtsUSF program was launched in the pockets of those deprived areas amid the affluent Tampa Bay area in response to community ronse 19.2ampa B

Overall, results showed impressive progress in all measured items, particularly •integrating arts to life,Ž •group problem-solving,Ž •attitude on diversity,Ž •attitude on being-kind-to-each-other,Ž and •alternate skills to aggression.Ž Data also showed strong connections between •expression through the artsŽ with •class learning skills,Ž •independent problem-solving skills, •ability to integrate arts to life,Ž and •positive attitude on diversity.Ž These skills related closely to •anti-drug, alcohol, and smokingŽ and •attitude toward community.Ž

In assessing member progress, the data were filled with thoughtful reflections and much emotional turbulence. Members overall felt that the AmeriCops ArtsUSF provided valuable experience, that had profound life-changing impact on them. This was the first time for many of the members to encounter the level of poverty, non-functioning family conditions, and destitute life qualities of the children in these communities. They faced the value and effects of their inputs in helping others through this volunteer experience. They realized that one of the ways of reaching •the American dreamŽ was helping the less privileged. Working as the •provider •

that we can use our imagination and tenacity to help pave ways to peace and cooperation among nations; and that with our imagination and keen emotional intelligence, artists can help the world dare to think the unthinkable ... peaceful world and globalization!

TABLE LEGEND

- Table 1. The Children: Data Description by Age Group and Site
- Table 2. Children's Skills and Attitude Development
- Table 3. Factor Analysis Summary: Relationships Among Skills and Attitude
- Table 4. Member Profile
- Table 5. Member Journal

APPENDIX

Lee, Sang-Hie and AmeriCorps ArtsUSF (1998). AmeriCorps ArtsUSF Assessment Instrument:
Getting Things Done (AAGTD).

Table 1. The Children: Data Description by Age Group and Site

Age group	Dover	Interbay	North Tampa	Salesian	Zonta	Total	%
5 to 7	25	2	2	19	26	74	39%
8 to 9	16	4	12	10	23	65	34%
10 to 11	8	5	10	14	11	48	25%
12+	1	1	-	-	2	4	2%
Total	50	12	24	43	62	191	100%
%	26%	6%	13%	22%	33%	100%	

Table 2. Children's Skills and Attitude Development (N=191)

	Number of items	Pre Score (Sd)	Post Score (Sd)	t score	% Change
Overall arts and learning skills					18%
Arts skills	6	25.84 (4.11)	32.72 (4.86)	18.71*	17%
Expressive skills	3	13.23 (2.46)	17.42 (2.13)	22.32*	21%
Appreciation skills	4	12.01 (2.18)	16.25 (2.64)	18.52*	21%
Integrating arts to life	7	27.21 (4.97)	37.24 (5.97)	22.19*	23%
Class learning skills	4	18.42 (3.61)	23.04 (3.05)	14.70*	18%

Group problem-solving 97) (s)11(s)-13(le97 re f BT /F5 1 TOs281(l)-3(73(1 TD .0117 Tc -.0178 Tw [()-3415(Int)2

Table 3. Factor Analysis Summary: Relationships Among Skills and Attitude

	November	May
Factor one	Arts skills Expressive skills through the arts Integrating arts to life	Arts skills Expressive skills through the arts Arts appreciation skills Integrating arts to life
Factor two	Arts appreciation skills Integrating arts to life	Expressive skills through the arts Class learning skills Independent problem-solving skills Attitude on diversity Attitude on being kind-to-each-other
Factor three	Expressive skills through the arts Class learning skills Independent problem-solving skills Integrating arts to life Attitude on diversity	Arts skills Independent problem-solving skills Anti -drug, alcohol, and smoking attitude
Factor four	Attitude on diversity Attitude on being kind-to-each-other	Class learning skills Group problem-solving skills
Factor five	Anti-drug, alcohol, and smoking attitude Attitude on community	Arts skills
Factor six	Class learning skills Group problem-solving skills Attitude on diversity	Attitude on being kind-to-each-other

Table 5. Member Journal

Experience	Creativity	Teaching	Culture	Community	Frustration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •long and hard wonderful •kids fell asleep, but enjoyed the music by Mahler •wonderful to see them enjoying the program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •During the mirror exercises, they had a blast •work together much better •more creative in their ideas for new projects •f gave them control and a sense of challenge •f a sense of possibilities for themselves •f opportunity to research for new answers and possibilities in creating art work •hands-on projects, then exposing them to actually see famous work of artists really enforces their creativity and challenges them even more •positive things in life and appreciate and understand other artists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •f children retained the information •if lessons are really structured and well designed, the children will follow it to the dot •complement a child, they usually have instant interest. If I accidentally tell them to stop doing this and that, then they continue to do it. •I want focus on behavior management as a priority •consider a week of love, not only for the boys and girls, but also for myself •f beginning to appreciate the arts more •Their personal behavior in some have changed in a positive way and this is very good and a great feeling (smile) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • know what the children's background is, not only for us but also for themselves to learn that they all have cultural background, and to respect each other's values and ethnic background •the Easter show was a great opportunity for the kids at Zonta to see other kids from a different Boy and Girls Club and to perform for them. ... wonderful opportunity for them to be exposed to a different culture and difel rent c runni1(for)TJ 0 -1.1709 5D -.0042(l)-20(a17(l)5(e)e)16(n)-1()Tj - tha program teollm79(lIm79(lIort)22(-22(a)17(o))TJ 0 -1.1459 TD -.0048 Tc .02 doio12-7(a)17-32 oy2(o)-24()TJ 0 -1.1709 TD -.0079 0167 Tw [(m pac5-18.,17(

APPENDIX

AmeriCorps ArtsUSF Assessment Instrument
Getting Things Done (AAGTD)

Evaluator: Member or
Outside Observer

Student's Name _____ SS#: ____ - ____-[V 1] Age ____-[V 2]

School _____[V 3] Program Site _____[V 4]

Person Responsible for Assessment _____ Date _____

Introduction: This instrument is designed to assess the impact of AmeriCorps ArtsUSF program on children's development of arts and arts-related skills, classroom learning skills, and cultural behavior and attitude. Section I contains four dimensions to measure arts and arts-related skill; Section II, three dimensions on classroom learning skills; and Section III, five dimensions relating to cultural behavior and attitude.

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Arts Appreciation Skills		Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
a)	Expresses emotions through dramatic art, music, dance, and visual art	5	4	3	2	1	[V 14]
b)	Knows how concepts such as shape, line, sequence, space and time are related among art, music, dance, and drama	5	4	3	2	1	[V 15]
c)	Knows how we learn about ourselves, our relationships, and our environment through art forms						[V 16]
d)	Knows how artists generate and express ideas						

d)	Seems focused when presented with new skills or ideas	5	4	3	2	1	[V 28]

Independent Problem-Solving Skills		Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
a)	Delves into the situation when given new tasks	5	4	3	2	1	[V 29]

a)	Expresses feelings about community	5	4	3	2	1	[V 43]
	Shows interest in doing something for the community	5	4	3	2	1	[V 44]

Note:

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