

# WHAT ARE EFFECTIVE ARTS EDUCATION STRATEGIES THAT ENGAGE ETHNIC AND ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS?

By David A. Valentine

## First, Create Principles Based On Multicultural Arts Education Models

In 1990, substantial literature was being written advancing multicultural arts education as a response to the changing demographics of urban neighborhood schools, and more importantly the increasing number of failing or drop-out students in these schools. Clearly, traditional education models that catered to mostly homogenous student populations with modest minority representation were on the decline.

In the middle 1980's arts educators began to call for a number of paradigm shifts to address the growing catastrophe erupting in urban neighborhood schools.

One commonly endorsed call demanded adaptation of a standards based arts education curricula which could be integrated with general education courses.

Another view which began to gain footholds in the early 1990's was to engage the arts educators to initiate student and community centered arts projects that were informed by authentic socio-cultural community values, traditions, and literature.

Ron Brandt from the National Arts Education Research Center said, "We come in many colors with differing backgrounds and traditions. [We] have some things in common, but we are increasingly aware that we do not see everything the same way." (1)

Outsider artistic and cultural perspectives have gained legitimacy as valuable windows into the complexities of the American experience. The notion that sameness and difference can coexist, but also enhance each other as a positive expression of American pluralism is not without its critics. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. warned in his book *The Disuniting of America*, "The question America confronts

as a pluralistic society is how to vindicate cherished cultures and traditions without breaking the bonds of cohesion - common ideals, common political institutions, common language, [and] common tastes [that] hold the republic together.” (2) Schlesinger is concerned that a form of ethno-cultural Balkanization would gradually eclipse the cohesive effects of the dominant culture. Conservative pundits decry arts education as non-utilitarian play with no long term education value, and reactionary legislators craft policies that shun the efficacy of the arts, and ignore the work of teaching artists working to mitigate youth alienation from intellectual curiosity, self awareness, and a personal stake in their community. “Some people fear that more attention to minority groups may have the effect of dividing people. But in a complex society, there are many different elements, and we should view this as a unique opportunity to build strength for the whole.” Chang-Lin Tien, Chancellor, UC Berkeley.

### Then, Use Those Principles To Create A Set Of Best Practices

In 1990, The National Arts Education Research Center published a series of articles outlining broad principles that would foster effective multicultural arts education. Summarizing Gollnick and Chin’s findings in a paper called, *American Culture and Multicultural Education* (3) I have formulated four basic outcomes that effective arts education strategies aimed at ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged youth need to consider:

*It needs to help students gain insight into human nature.*  
We need to engage ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged students in curriculum infused with motivationally rich experiences that address the complexities of human relationships and the role personal responsibility plays in formulating our choices .(Case Study #1)

*Arts education creates avenues of understanding our own culture, and fosters appreciation and communication with others about their culture.*

Effective implementation of cultural bridge building requires collaboration between arts educators and community leaders. Authentic socio-cultural values embedded in the community are handed down from generation to generation. They must inform student-led activities and curricula design. Projects that embrace these rich relationships stand a better chance of touching participants in enduring ways. (Case Study #2)

*Arts education promotes intellectual growth that is fed by curiosity, creativity and inquiry among diverse disciplines.*

Effective outreach strategies to underserved classrooms need to be based upon well constructed models of curriculum integration that can appropriately address different teaching situations

Robin Fogarty writing in his book *The Mindful School: How to Integrate the Curricula* (4) outlines ten strategies for curricula integration through discreet organization models that can be used (in whole or in part) to form engaging links between distinct and traditionally separate disciplines like Math, Science and English Language Arts He arranges his models into three groups based upon disciplines and learners:

<u><i>Within A Discipline</i></u>	<u><i>Across Disciplines</i></u>	<u><i>Within &amp; Across Learners</i></u>
<i>Fragmented</i>	<i>Sequenced</i>	<i>Immersed</i>
<i>Connected</i>	<i>Shared</i>	<i>Networked</i>
<i>Nested</i>	<i>Webbed</i>	
	<i>Threaded</i>	

.While the scope of this paper does not allow a thorough examination of all ten models the ‘Webbed Model’ will act as the theoretical foundation of a real world experience. In essence, the Webbed Model connects an entire group of disciplines together to weave multiple links that enlighten and foster understanding across disciplines. (Case Study #3)

## Three Case Studies: Snapshots Of Best Practices

These cases are not 'how to' examples of enduring program development. They are meant to demonstrate how different communities responded to local challenges to at risk, underserved and economically distressed youth. They add substance to Gollnick and Chin's multicultural arts principles and thus remind us that the effort to affect a reversal in the alienation and withdrawal of large numbers of American youth is an on-going struggle.

### CASE STUDY #1

#### *Music Theatre Workshop / Under Pressure Series Chicago, Illinois*



The Music Theatre Workshop (MTW) serves Chicago's poorest at risk students through the creation and presentation of real life theater by professional artists and playwright apprentices that are drawn from the lives of the young people MTW serves. Using critical thinking exercises, students develop decision-making skills that allow them to understand their role in how the choices they make play out in their lives.

At the center of MTW's outreach are three performance units: *The Under Pressure Series*, *Playwriting & Performance Workshops*, and the *New Arts Intervention Program*.

The following text tracks the *Under Pressure Series* (UPS). The heart and soul of UPS is its creation of original short plays or musicals written by its resident artistic director and staff composer. Their straight from the streets authenticity is gleaned from interviews, and workshops with children who are encouraged to speak about

the realities of their lives. Research topics include: experiences of violence, gang involvement, teen pregnancy, dysfunctional families and substance abuse.

Characters developed from their research become composites of many actual persons. Frequently the literal responses by children to interview questions resurface in final dialogs or lyrics. This process allows the UPS to use drama to create positive outcomes in the following profound ways::

*Increase young people's knowledge and understanding of the choices they face.*

*Stimulate students to talk about their feelings and the pressures they face in their lives.*

*Guide students through counseling and support services.*

*Foster using the arts as a method of self expression.*

The average audience for a typical performance is between 50 to 100 students.

This intimate size allows the actors and staff to have role playing follow-up discussions where the actors (who remain in character) divide the audience into small gender specific discussion groups. Staff and actors begin the discussion by asking students to finish certain questions e.g. *'I feel most under pressure when...'* Actor/facilitators do not teach answers to problems or tell the students whether their decisions were good or bad. Instead they help students understand the process by which some familiar choices lead invariably to chronic undesirable outcomes. Then students begin to understand why they do the things they do.

The Department of Education and the Loyola University of Chicago's Children and Family Center studied the effectiveness of MTW's Theatre program from 1989 to 1992. The study found MTW's original theater works and discussion groups outscored the federally funded DARE Drug Free Schools Program in two out of six categories, and it was equal to DARE in the remaining four.

## CASE STUDY #2

### *The Pascua Youth Artists and Project Choki at Richey Elementary School Tucson, Arizona*



Early in the 20th century when Arizona was still a territory of the United States, the Pascua Yaqui Indians from the Mexican state of Sonora fled genocide, and settled outside of Tucson. The settlement achieved federal recognition and the San Ignacio Old Pascua Yaqui band of native people found a new home. Later, Arizona became a state, and Tucson expanded its city limits until it surrounded the Pascua Yaqui tribal land turning it into a ten block square reservation in the west side of Tucson. Today, over 600 members of the Pascua Yaqui nation try to continue a distinct way of life bounded by an overwhelming, urban American culture.

In 1990, the median income for a family of five was approximately \$5000.00. Unemployment in the tribal area was 75%. Major gang affiliations thrived including local chapters of the Crips, Bloods and a home grown gang called, the ‘OPs’, (the Old Pascuas). .A proliferation of guns, violence, substance abuse, and alcohol plagued tribal life. Bordering the Pascua Yaqui is *Barrio Adelante*, a predominantly Hispanic, low income neighborhood dominated by the Latin Kings crime syndicate and high unemployment. The Tucson Unified School District built a Pre-K through 6th grade neighborhood school across the street from the Pascua Yaqui village square, Richey Elementary School.

In an attempt to forge effective outreach to their at-risk children, the San Ignacio Yaqui Council, the tribal leadership organization invited Arts Genesis, Inc.

a local arts organization to create a youth led native crafts and culture collective. Pascua Youth Artists emerged to promote self-reliance, self esteem and heritage pride by producing traditional art artifacts and T-shirts as a cooperative enterprise. The level of profit shares for an individual would be measured not by sales alone, but also by traditional tribal values of cooperative behavior, respect and support. Adherence to these principles increased one's profit share. Drug use and gangbanging among disaffected teens began to decline. The success of the program influenced the Arizona Governor's Office for Children to fund a series of workshops on traditional Yacqui approaches to substance abuse.

Into this mix came Project Choki, the brainchild of local artist, Carol Krestler. She saw an opportunity to expand culturally rich, traditional arts and values into the Richey Elementary school's curricula. The Pascua Yaquis were 40% of the school's population second only to Hispanics who were 50%. Krestler collaborated with the Pascua Yaqui tribal council, Arts Genesis, Inc. and Richey Elementary's administrator to develop Project Choki, a multicultural model for integrating arts, and traditional values into liberal arts curricula.

Project Choki transformed a failing Anglo-centric education program into a model multicultural education program that elevated tribal arts to the same level as Euro-centric arts education. It integrated the traditional history of Pascua Yaqui culture with standard Social Studies, and used authentic Pascua Yaqui, and traditional Latino codes of behavior as role models for student behavior. Project Choki created decorative murals and traditional crafts that filled the trophy cases and halls of the school. The program also connected tribal lore and ceremonies with the dominant outside community by having Pascua Yaqui storytellers to regularly share their lore in the school library. The program attracted the attention of NEA Director, Jane Alexander. During her tenure Project Choki garnered grant support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

## Case Study #3

### *Science Technology Arts and Recreation (STAR) After School Program, Exposition Park Los Angeles, California*



In January 2006, the Amgen Center for Science Learning of the California Science Center embarked on developing an after school program based on the successful model of its inquiry based hands-on science and technology museum. The program would be designed for 1st through 5th grade students with an emphasis on practical science and technology-use. It would also integrate arts education to compliment the other disciplines in a fun and engaging way.

The Theodore T. Alexander, Jr. Science Center School (The Science Center School) is a joint project of the California Science Center and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). It is a Targeted-Assisted Charter School with primary emphasis on Math, Science and Technology. Its facilities are part of the California Science Center complex, but its teachers and staff are LAUSD employees. The school served a student population 60% Latino, 35% African American, 2% Sub Continent Asian, 1 % Asian Pacific Islander, 1% African and 1% White. Dual language (Spanish/English) classes were established from K through 2nd grade because 40% of the schools Latino students had monolingual Spanish speaking parents. Dual language implementation was an attempt to address below proficiency English language learner assessments..

In June 2006 I concluded six months of apprentice teaching artist training, and 12 hours of visual arts classroom experience with the LA County Arts Commission's Teaching Artist Training Program. Jacques Bordeaux, the Director of the Science Center School Project (the Science Center's equivalent of an LAUSD principal) heard of my work with the LA County Artist Training Program and asked me to apply. I did and in September of 2006 I was hired as a 4th and 5th grade instructor.

*Using Visual Arts and Digital Photography to Enhance Direct Observation Projects in Earth Sciences*



The Amgen Center for Science Learning gave us specific content standards to follow for 4th and 5th grade Physical, Life and Earth Sciences. I introduced digital cameras to student team leaders to document each dig site from which soil samples were gathered in Exposition Park. Pictorial copies were printed for paste up in each student's science journal.. When the samples were placed under the microscope students not only had to write down what they saw (soil, rocks, and organic matter) they had to draw and color the different shapes of various materials seen under the microscope and cut and paste that information into their journals. Subsequently, they used their journals to return to various site to collect samples for pH analysis.

### *Multi-Discipline Approach To A Friction and Drag Experiment*



In a project to test friction and drag students built simple parachutes and hypothesized about the whether creating a small hole versus no hole in the parachute fabric would alter the outcome of rate of descent. Using metric measuring sticks and digital cameras the students performed the experiments. Then, after downloading the pictures onto a computer they used an image editor to zoom in on the parachutes and measure the distance differences between the parachutes with holes and those without, and were able to translate meters into percentages to establish that parachutes without small holes fell on average 32% slower than parachutes with holes.

### *Art Makers and Art Collectors*



To illustrate the relationships between art object makers and collectors I organized an Art makers / Art Collectors discussion with the students featuring art created by myself and the interim principal of the Science Center School, Brenda Rodgers. As artists the principal and I talked about the process of creating art and

answered questions from students about why we made art. This was followed by a hands-on exploration of sample pieces from the African Art collection of the STAR program director, Jacques Bordeaux. He talked about how to begin collecting art and the satisfaction one gets from adding to and maintaining a personal collection. Finally, Stephan Hardy, a curator from the California African American Museum talked about the importance of supporting artists work and maintaining cultural ties through art objects in the home.

*'In A Minute' Illustrated Short Stories With Sound Effects*



A frame from 4<sup>th</sup> grader, Marlee Droney's "Dave Hears Everything"

I led the students in a 10 week project that began with an examination of the nature of sound waves, their structure, and how they are measured. Using digital still cameras in 'movie mode' we captured ambient sounds in the local environment. Later we used Apple's iMovie program to download our sound samples; digitally stripped the video from the audio and archived the audio as discrete sound files.

The students wrote one page short stories. They drew and colored a series of pictures that captured the action points of the story. They recorded their own narration of the stories on digital video, and edited everything together in iMovie. The results were charming stories about going to work, vacationing, walking the dog, and alien attacks all utilizing natural sounds to punctuate narration and illustrations. Everyone received copies of each other's videos collected onto one disk.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

(1) Ron Brandt, Introduction, “A Framework for Multicultural Arts Education”, Volume Three, Ellyn Berk, Editor National Arts Education Research Center, 1992 New York, NY.

(2) Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. “The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society”, 1992 W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. New York, NY

(3) Donna M. Gollnick and Philip C. Chin, “Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society” 1990 Maxwell McMillan International Publishing Group, New York, NY

(4) Robin Fogarty, “The Mindful School: How to Integrate the Curricula” Skylight Publishing, Inc. Palatine, IL  
Also see Appendix A1 through A5 for charts and information on Fogarty’s ideas.

## CASE STUDY SOURCES

THE MUSIC THEATRE WORKSHOP / UNDER PRESSURE SERIES from “Art Works! Prevention Programs for Youth and Communities “ 1994 Dian Magie and Christine Miller, PhD.

To see current programs at the Music Theatre Workshop and how they have expanded into parolee re-integration into society through performing arts and discussion groups go to <http://www.mtwchicago.org>

THE PASCUA YOUTH ARTISTS AND PROJECT CHOKI from “Art Works! Prevention Programs for Youth and Communities “ 1994 Dian Magie and Christine Miller, PhD.

Project Choki was extracted from the Richey Elementary School when a change of temperament by the Tucson Unified School District in favor of increased test scores and block scheduling of classes caused severe cutbacks to funding for Project Choki. Curricula emphasis returned to a strict education model of Math, Science, and English Language Arts. Project Choki was rolled back into Arts Genesis, Inc. and re-emerged in 2003 as Arts Build continuing to expand its

services into the more at-risk communities around Tucson, just not very often within TUSD's neighborhood schools.

Today Richey Elementary School is 60% Hispanic and **30%** Pascua Yaquis. Richey Elementary's student population has dropped from 257 students to 207. Test scores for the 2008-2009 school year overall are among the lowest in the Tucson Unified School District this despite a student teacher ratio of 15.9 to 1. For a detailed look at the Richey's API scores visit:

<http://www.zillow.com/school/AZ-Tucson/Tucson-Unified-District-3684/Richey-Elementary-School-4051/>

To see information on the last major Project Choki mural installation at Richey Elementary School in 2001 visit: <http://www.artsgenesis.org/grant.html>

"The arts have changed lives." That was the message Jane Alexander, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, wanted to convey to Tucsonans during her brief visit here on March 10, 1994. She said the arts can give a young person a sense of pride and self-determination. At Richey Elementary School, Alexander praised its Project Choki, a program promoting the arts and culture of Old Pascua. As for the NEA, the chairman was optimistic about its future funding and encouragement of artistic freedom. "As soon as the economy picks up, we'll see more funding for the arts," she predicted.



David Sanders Arizona Daily Star