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Advocacy for arts education in public schools

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ADVOCACY FOR
ARTS EDUCATION
IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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LS400-CAPSTONE

PROFESSOR SCOTT WALTZ

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Backstory

When my mom was pregnant with me, she was teaching Art in a Fort Lee, New Jersey elementary school. As my sisters and I were growing up she taught art out of the house to both adults and children. Then when we were older she went back to teaching at a Private school. We were raised to be creative and industrious. Art has always been part of my life- a positive part of my life. Art helped me stay focused and coming to school in my teen years when school and social life became increasingly difficult. I believe having a background in art has helped me be a creative thinker and a strong problem solver. I feel that having art in my life has helped me stay optimistic and has given me a positive outlet for stress. I believe having art in kid's lives can do the same for them. I believe art and art education can help them become not only creative but innovative and competitive on a global scale.

I felt I was successful in my first career as a manager for fabric and crafts stores because of my artistic and creative abilities. When I decided to come back to school, some of the first courses I took were in Art History, Color theory and Drafting. Once I decided to focus on becoming a teacher, my first thought was, "I want to be an art teacher". Then the reality sunk in, there aren't any *real* art teaching jobs left anymore, they've all been cut. No one takes art and art education in the schools seriously anymore. I heard this and worse from my own conscious, family and friends, so I decided to move forward in a slightly different direction. Come spring of 2010, I asked myself, why can't I be an art teacher? Are there art teachers left? Where are they? I know Art, Music and P.E. programs have been cut from the schools for years; especially when

times are tough, and times have been tough. Art has lost its standing as an integral part of the school curriculum, or has it? It has fallen out of political favor in these days of standardized testing and NCLB (No child left behind) stresses on schools, or has it? I have decided to challenge my beliefs about the state of art education. I want to learn about the studies that have done about the importance of Art in the classroom. I want to find out who the advocates are and what's being done about getting art education back into our schools. I have heard of PTA funded positions, matter of fact, I was just hired for one. Can these programs be developed for all schools? For my Capstone project I plan to connect with the Arts Advocacy community and see where progress has been made and what work needs to be done. I plan to investigate the policies regarding art education and what legislation and funding currently exists for art programs. I plan to investigate the accessibility of art and art education for all school aged children, regardless of social or economic status. I want to see if art education can be reinstalled into the standard curriculum for all public schools.

Initial Problem Statement:

Over the last few decades, Art Education has been removed from the standard curriculum in our public schools and our children and our society are suffering because of it. Art education promotes creativity and self-expression. Studies have shown that there is a direct link between creative abilities and leadership skills as well as creative problem solving and critical thinking skills. Studies have also shown a direct connection between exposure to the arts and improved abilities in other academic areas. Americas needs to restore art education back into our Public schools. America needs to educate children to be critical thinkers who are creative and innovative in order to be competitive on a global scale.

Literature Review

Creativity, innovation and the ability to problem solve have been recognized as some of the key skills needed for success in the 21st century (Sheridan-Rabideau, 2010), (Harding, 2010). A visual arts education can nurture and support the development of these skills. Unfortunately, Art education has been systematically removed from our public school's curriculum (Grey, 2010), (Harding, 2010), (Smith, 1996). Whole generations of children are being deprived of the benefits and opportunities an art education could provide. In this era when schools have standards-driven testing and assessment-driven funding, art education has been unfairly dismissed from the classroom and stricken from the list of priorities (Grey, 2010), (Harding, 2010), (Smith, 1996). It's time for parents, teachers, students and community members to stand together and advocate for art back in the classroom. The many facets and the importance of an arts education needs to be understood by all in order to rally the enthusiasm needed to get through the bureaucracy of public policy.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 is the current legislation that dictates policy on school funding by the Federal government. If a school has been designated as having children who need help with their academic performance they must show adequate yearly progress (AYP) in order to continue to receive funding(Beveridge, 2010). To show AYP a school must assess their students in math and reading, two subjects that have extensive testing standards. Subjects like art are harder to assess therefore, schools tend to do one of three things. The school will focus their attention on the assessable subjects and use elective periods, like art, as a reward for good behavior, take it away as a punishment or eliminate it all together. The

implications of this are devastating for many reasons. It can devalue the importance of an art education in the student's eye as well as devalue the skill and discipline it takes to both produce art, experience art and to teach art (Beveridge, 2010), (Greer, 1997). Interestingly enough, the NCLB legislation actually designates Art as a core curriculum subject (Beveridge, 2010), (Grey, 2010). This designation has been beneficial in some ways: advocacy groups and community programs have developed with this renewed prestige in mind. The problem arises because of loopholes in the law. This legislation neither gives schools the ability to adequately assess performance nor hold the schools accountable for providing the art education in the classroom (Beveridge, 2010), (Grey, 2010). The focus remains on subjects like math and reading and because funding is dependent on performance in these areas, art gets squeezed out of the daily curriculum.

Advocates for art and cognitive-development researchers agree that an art education teaches creativity, fosters innovation and nurtures problem solving skills ((Dobbs, 1998), (Dorn, 1998), (Greer, 1997), (Wachowiak & Clements, 2001). The advocacy groups for art can be broken into two basic camps. The first group believes in Art for art's sake. These advocates believe art has its own unique contributions to education. Art education is broken into four basic disciplines: Art making; Art History; Art criticism; and Aesthetics (Dobbs, 1998), (Greer, 1997), (Wachowiak & Clements, 2001). Each one of these aspects has distinct benefits for the student. For example, Art-making involves actual production of work that can foster group skills, understanding of the creative process and build up confidence in abilities (Wachowiak & Clements, 2001). Art History educates children on multiculturalism as well as fosters an appreciation of cultures and civilizations throughout history. Art criticism helps to develop a child's ability for observation and interpretation of visual stimulus and learn how to express

those verbally (Dobbs, 1998), (Greer, 1997), (Wachowiak & Clements, 2001). The other group advocates for art integration in the classroom, where art is used to supplement core academics like science, math and history (Dorn, 1998). The emphasis is on “sneaking” art into the curriculum because there just isn’t time or funding allowed for art as a separate subject. This side to art advocacy also believes the skills that art help develop carry over into other subjects (Feldman, 1996). For example math has many conceptual aspects to its discipline, where a student who has an ability to visualize or imagine could better understand those concepts.

Both groups that advocate for art education agree that one of the main benefits to an art education is the nurturing and development of Creativity in the student (Dobbs, 1998), (Feldman, 1996), (Sheridan-Rabideau, 2010). Creativity is the one universal skill that can assist our children with being successful in all aspects of their lives. Samuel Hope (2010) has written a comprehensive list describing some of what it means to be creative.

“If I have “learned” to be creative, I understand that:

1. Every particular thing, from the smallest to the greatest—fact, reality, condition, machine, technique, work of art, and so on—can be used to make something else. Something else can be something new.
2. I, personally, can make something else and something, and I can do this constantly.
3. To make something else, I need to connect and combine particular things first in my imagination, and then in a project, whether large or small.
4. The more I know and can do, the more I can connect and combine, and thus, the more new things I am able to make.

5. If I want to make new things that make sense to or are useful to others, I must be able to communicate using various languages and other frameworks.
6. The more capability I have with these languages and frameworks, the more creative I can be, and the more my creativity can reach and serve others.
7. Through constant practice, I am able to imagine connecting and combining things that I learn.
8. Through constant study and practice, I am able to use what I have imagined as the basis for creating work or a product of some kind.
9. Through experience, I become more proficient at matching possibilities and capabilities.
10. The more I learn, the more fluent I become with various languages and frameworks, and the more sophisticated am in understanding the work of others, the more I can see that many problems have multiple solutions, and the better I am able to deal with complexity.
11. The greater my comfort with multiple solutions and complexity, the more capable I am in dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty in productive ways.
12. The more capable I am with all the things mentioned above, the more proficient I am in planning any work that I want to do, particularly in areas where I have the greatest knowledge and skill. I know the necessity of planning to some degree, but I also know the limits of planning. I know that the work can shape itself as it progresses, and that the creative work process itself reveals new possibilities and necessities.”

There is a clear need to get art education back into our public schools, especially if we as a nation want to maintain strength and success in the modern world. The way to get art education back into our public schools is to create an awareness of its importance to the general public as

well as create an advocacy movement within the population this cause most directly effects:
parents, teachers, students and community members.

Community Partner

I began my search for a compatible community partner by speaking to Art advocacy groups in our local area. I found a woman who heads the Salinas chapter of a prominent California Organization. She is a staunch advocate for arts education and spear heads many local groups and events to promote the arts in our local communities. I explained I was concerned with Art Education and was in need of a substantial project to execute. We sat down at first and had a long discussion about what she and her organization had discussed about Arts education advocacy at a recent summit. One of the points they all had agreed on was the need for “Fierce” advocacy for the arts. The group of ten or so individuals came up with preliminary plans to produce a series of Public Service Announcements (PSA) for television. The PSA’s would feature a range of people from different backgrounds speaking about how art plays an active role in their lives. I agreed to adopt the group’s project. My plan was to tailor it to my Capstone objectives and execute the project by lining up 3 more participants, write scripts, schedule filming, coordinate production and ensure delivery to TV stations. We also discussed the need for a website that the viewing audience would be directed to. The purpose would be extensive information about Arts education advocacy. My new community partner was very enthusiastic for my help as that no one had time to further develop the original idea. We agree that large scale community involvement is key to getting arts education back into our public schools. The reasoning behind producing Public Service announcements is to use mass media to reach a broad audience to inspire and educate about a worthy cause: Arts education. She has agreed to provide the videographer with funding for filming as well as connection to three people who wanted to participate in the PSAs. She also will provide assistance with the development of a website and any other creative consultation I might need to complete the project.

Project Timeline with Deliverables

October 18-22

- Develop and draft questions to interview participants
- Talk with videographer about schedule
- Talk with participants about filming schedule
- Write up filming schedule
- connect with television stations about what size spot they can pick up

October 25-29

- Write scripts for PSA
- Develop/create Ask for Art website

November 1-5

- Have filming finished
- Send to production

November 8-12

- check on progress of production
- draft assessment plans

November 15-19

-Have production finished

-Hold focus group

-send tape of PSA to TV stations

November 22-26

-analyze statistics from website visits

-draft results paper

November 29-December 3

Create Capstone Festival PowerPoint presentation

December 6-10

Archive Capstone Notebook with CSUMB Library

December 17

-Present Capstone at Festival

The Significance of My Capstone Project

The main objective of my capstone is to motivate a wide range and volume of people to advocate for arts education. Through my course work here at CSUMB, I have come to understand a little about advocacy. The main components to social justice through advocacy are education, public awareness and action. Of course, there is strength in numbers when it comes to any cause. I have designed my capstone project to include these elements.

I believe the expressive arts such as music, visual arts, theatre and dance should be a distinct part of our children's education in public schools. My research on the benefits of an arts education was extensive and many experts agree that an arts education must be included in school curriculums. I designed my capstone project to achieve several goals. These smaller goals support the ultimate goal of getting arts education programs back into our public schools. The impact of the completion of that goal is far-reaching.

One of the smaller goals is to educate the general public about the importance of an arts education. Many people in the community who do not have children, might not otherwise see the need for an arts education. My desire is to expose the direct relationship between an arts education and a prosperous society. Our communities all benefit from the development of creative problem solvers, critical thinkers and strong leaders. To inspire other people, beyond just those immediately involved will be vital to accomplishing the ultimate objective. It is also important to inspire those immediately involved as well: parents, caregivers, guardians, teachers, and students. My intent is for community members to hear the radio Public service announcements and have their interest peaked. Ideally, they would then visit the website and

have access to the wealth of information available. The website is designed as a hub for links to local and national sites. These local and national sites have done their own extensive research on arts education advocacy and provide many options for those who want to get involved. These sites list legislation campaigns, ways to advocate for arts education on an individual and local basis as well as discuss programs already being implemented. The other sites my website links to also publish the countless benefits to providing an arts education to our children. The connection and access to this pertinent information is key to inspiring and motivating potential advocates. It is my hope that an individual would then be well informed and feel motivated to participate in their own way.

Assessment of Advocacy for Arts Education Capstone

The ultimate test of the success of this capstone would be the reinstallation of Arts education into our public schools. The next best test would be a mass influx of people joining the movements to get arts education back into the schools. Of course both tests would be too vast to implement at this time. I set out to launch a campaign for public awareness about the topic of arts education. It was also my intent to inspire and empower people, through mass media, to become advocates for arts education. I created a 30 second Public Service announcement (PSA) to air on the radio. This PSA will direct listeners to a website. The website hosting program offers access to statistics about my particular site. I can acquire a schedule of air times for the PSA and compare it to stats on how many people visited the site on what day. I can also see the number of links accessed and view *Contact us* forms. With this information I intend to analyze the effectiveness of the Radio Public Service announcement as well as the website I created. If resources permit I may also form a focus group to listen to the PSA and visit the website to get direct feedback.

Results

When I started my research I focused on Visual arts education. For my project it was only logical to include all of the expressive arts: Drama, Music, Dance and Visual Arts. The campaign I started was a call to action for getting Arts education back into our public schools. I wanted to let people know that an arts education is valuable and that the children in Public schools, for the most part, are not getting it. I wanted community members, teachers, students, and parents to get information, get motivated, and get involved. I first wrote a script for a 30 second Public Service Announcement (PSA); (see Appendix A). I emailed it to one of my community partners, Austin Sherwood of Yellow Bus Advertising. He in turn emailed the script on to his contacts in local Radio. The radio station made the recording and the PSA was aired for three weeks, on three different stations, 15 times per week- per station. Those stations were KDON 102.5, a pop station, KOCN, oldies, and KTOM, a country music station. All three stations have a National reach and claim they have, in general, 100 M on-air listeners. I was unable to obtain more specific numbers. I learned that PSA's are played on air when the station has "unsold inventory". Meaning when advertisers don't buy the time spots, the radio stations plug in other announcements, like Public Service Announcements. So, most likely, the PSA will not air in prime time spots, but it will still play. The Public Service Announcement alerts people to the need for Arts education in Public schools and directs listeners to find out more by going to the website, Askforart.weebly.com. Originally I had planned to assess the project's success by the number of hits on the website. I had also planned on getting feedback from visitors to the website. I have since decided that while there were some views of the website, and no contact forms filled out, this might not be the best gauge to use to determine success. Ultimately, success will come with the re-installation of arts education in our public schools. There are, however,

smaller stages to this goal. With the airing of this first message of my campaign, hundreds, maybe thousands heard the message. The web address is long, due to having to use the free hosting, so it is understandably hard to remember. For the future I will attempt to shorten the address. I feel it is possible that upon hearing the message, people might turn to other immediate sources. They might check with their local school or arts organization to see what programs are underway. People might do their own web searches for information or local arts organizations. I would like to think that the project was a success by just putting the word out there. I have learned many things that will help me improve my efforts in the future. For example, in talking to many community members, I have made new connections and I have new ideas for further action. I intend to pursue discussions, with my new contacts, about how best to improve and continue the campaign. In doing this project I have learned about how Public Service announcements work for Television and radio. I have also learned how to develop a website.

When I first started my search for a project that was art education related I went and spoke to several local organizations. One community member served as a great inspiration for developing my final project. The original idea was to produce TV PSA's with a variety of community members expressing how the arts played a role in their daily lives. In trying to pursue this original project I ran into many challenges. My biggest challenges were time and resources. I was able to morph the original idea into a project that I was able to complete in a semester, yet still kept the spirit of promoting Arts education in our Public schools. I found that even if people are enthusiastic about the same cause, they can have different ways of achieving their goals, and that's okay. I found there needs to be certain chemistry between people in order for them to be able to work together in a productive way.

I truly believe that through public awareness we can gain public support for this cause.
With public support and advocacy, the goal of arts education in our public schools is achievable.

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Appendix A

Right now, thousands of children are being denied an arts education in our public schools. Creativity is the number one skill our children need to possess in order to be successful in the 21st century. Creativity ensures innovation, creative problem-solving and critical thinking skills which lead to new technology, new jobs, positive solutions and strong leadership. When children receive an Arts education their creativity is nurtured and developed and we all benefit as a society. You have the power to help get Arts education back in our public schools. To find out how to get involved go to www.askforart.org <<http://www.askforart.org>>