

EMPOWERING PARENTS TO ADVOCATE FOR ARTS EDUCATION

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EMPOWERING PARENTS TO ADVOCATE FOR THE ARTS

A Project

by

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Abstract
of
EMPOWERING PARENTS TO ADVOCATE FOR ARTS EDUCATION
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This project is an Alternative Culminating Experience for a Master of Arts in Education: Curriculum and Instruction with an Elective Emphasis on Arts in Education. It follows Pathway V: Art Educator as Advocate. The problem addressed in this project was how to empower parents to advocate for arts education in their children's school.

The sources of data for this project include interview notes from meetings with parents, school leaders, and arts education advocates. Data also includes results of a survey that parents completed and their notes on their advocacy experiences.

As a result of this project, the researcher has come to the conclusion that most parents are extremely supportive of having a comprehensive art education program in their children's school. However, many of them are not comfortable advocating for this right now due to other issues facing the schools, such as the current budget crisis. For those parents who are willing to advocate, it became evident that they needed support and training regarding how a school operates and who they should be speaking with to discuss such issues. In addition, parents need information from arts leaders regarding the value of the arts and how to begin planning and implementing a program.

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Date

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. REVIEW OF RESEARCH.....	8
3. THE STUDY.....	31
4. REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	41
Appendix A. Informational sheet, “Speak up for the Arts”.....	50
References.....	53

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Challenge

It is no surprise to educators and arts enthusiasts that the arts are typically the first to be cut from school budgets during difficult financial times. Despite the fact that the benefits of the arts have been repeatedly proven and that school administrators will claim to value arts education, the arts are often seen as extraneous and unnecessary expenditures. Since many parents of today's students do not understand what an arts education program should look like, and many teachers are uncomfortable teaching the arts, few advocates speak out on behalf of this important matter. In addition, many parents may also be uncomfortable speaking to their school leaders, especially asking them for changes. Therefore, this researcher is attempting to serve as a leader in the arts by informing parents about arts education and also helping them to feel empowered so that they will be more willing to speak up.

The Importance of this Project

By creating an advocacy tool for parents to use when communicating with their child's teachers, principals, school district leaders, and school board members, the researcher worked to educate parents on the importance of the arts in schools, while also empowering them to promote the arts. In conversations the researcher has had with school principals and other education leaders, it has become apparent that changes are more readily made when parents demand them. However, many parents are unaware that

their children are not receiving a quality, comprehensive arts education. Many of the parents of today's school children did not have an arts education themselves when they were in school, and, therefore, they may not know that their children are not receiving one or they may not know what a quality arts lesson includes. It appears that many parents mistakenly think that the arts exist in schools because they bring home a craft project or a drawing.

The advocacy tool that the researcher published for parents gave them talking points to use that will better allow them to speak to school administrators on behalf of the arts. These talking points include what constitutes a quality arts education program and the benefits of the arts.

The Context

The researcher worked with parents from a variety of school districts in the Sacramento area. The school districts all have varying levels of art instruction in their schools. Some, such as Elk Grove Unified, are committed to the arts and offer professional development for their teachers in the arts. Other school districts, such as Woodland Joint Unified, do not have a cohesive arts education program, lack an arts coordinator, and the majority of their schools do not teach the arts during the school day.

To further set the context for this study, school districts in the Sacramento area are facing severe budget cuts due to the California state budget crisis. Many of the school districts have had to cut programs and lay off teachers and classified staff. It is suspected that schools will face even deeper financial setbacks in the 2010/2011 school year. As a

result, the researcher acknowledges that this is a difficult time to ask school leaders for arts education programs when they are struggling to pay for staff and basic supplies.

The Procedure

The researcher began this project by interviewing various arts education leaders in California to discuss with them successful strategies for arts advocacy. The researcher also met with parent advocacy group members to determine how to best organize a group, how to work effectively with parents, and what type of support parents need. The researcher then also met with school administrators to learn successful techniques other advocacy groups have used when approaching them.

After the interviews had been conducted, the researcher gathered a group of parents from several school districts throughout the Sacramento region. During the first group meeting, the researcher surveyed the parents to determine their knowledge of the arts education programs currently taking place in their schools, their awareness of what an arts education program should look like, and their comfort level in speaking with their child's teacher, principal, school district administrator, and school board members. The researcher also queried the parents as to what type of support and information they would need to advocate for the arts.

Based on the interviews and the first focus group meeting, the researcher created a draft information sheet that was distributed to parents. Once this piece was created, the researcher interviewed the parents again to discuss the usefulness of this piece. Parents were given the opportunity to role play a conversation with a school leader, but none of

the parents expressed a need to partake of this. The parents then were asked to speak with their school leaders and other parents about arts education using the talking points and strategies discussed. The parents recorded their responses generated from their meetings and how comfortable they felt advocating. In particular, the researcher looked for what arguments seemed to be the most effective.

After the parents conducted their meetings, the researcher followed up with them to discuss what worked and what did not, as well as which approach seemed to be the most effective with teachers, with principals, with district administrators, and with school board members. Using this information, the researcher made edits to the pamphlet and distributed it to the participants. Copies of this final version were also distributed to members of parent groups in the school districts so that they in turn may become advocates for the arts.

Questions

The questions that guided the researcher's reading of literature to inform the project were:

What is effective advocacy?

How does one affect policy and curriculum change in schools?

As a passionate supporter of the arts, an educator, and arts administrator, how can the researcher be a more effective arts education advocate and leader?

What information do parents need to advocate for the arts, and what is their current perception of arts education in their children's schools?

What are the benefits of having the arts in the schools?

What does a sustainable, well-designed arts education program look like?

In order to answer these questions, the researcher read a variety of books on the benefits of arts education, successful advocacy strategies, public school policy and procedures, and sustainable arts education programs. The books read included Elliot Eisner's *The Kind of Schools We Need*, Rache Dickinson's *Improve Your Primary School through Drama*, the National Art Education Association's *Supervision and administration*, and Michael Jacoby Brown's *Building Powerful Community Organizations*. In addition to reading literature that addresses the questions, the researcher conducted interviews with leaders in the arts, parent advocacy groups, and school administrators. Finally, the researcher conducted a focus group comprised of parents. The focus group discussed what parents think of the arts and the art education their children are receiving; what information they need to communicate with their school leaders; and the usefulness of the parent advocacy piece.

Research/Documentations

The data for this project was gathered primarily through interviews with leaders in the arts, parent advocacy groups, school board members, and school administrators. Surveys were administered to the parents in the focus group to assess their comfort level with speaking to their school board meetings before and after receiving the advocacy piece.

The research goals of this project were to determine what parents currently know about the status of arts education in the schools and what information they need to know in order to advocate for the arts.

Applications

Through this project, the researcher hoped to further develop her advocacy and leadership skills in arts education. By conducting focus group meetings and interviewing leaders in the arts, this study required the researcher to step outside of her comfort level on many occasions. However, the researcher firmly believed that these meetings and conversations were of great benefit to not only her, but also the parents and, hopefully, they will produce positive results for the arts.

The researcher analyzed what she learned about her leadership skills from this experience by journaling throughout the duration of the project. Feedback from the parents and school leaders also allowed the researcher to better understand her strengths and weaknesses in these areas.

Significance

The goal of this project was to create a useful information sheet that could be distributed to parents to help them become advocates for the arts. The researcher aimed to inform parents about the benefits of including the arts in schools and how they could help create arts programs in their children's schools. The researcher hoped to be able to generate awareness among parents of the need for quality and comprehensive arts education programs in the schools so that the parents would be more likely to fight back

when the arts are cut from the budget just as they would if cuts in math, science or language arts were being considered.

A secondary goal of this project was to be able to determine what this cross-section of parents knew about the arts and their value. This information may be useful to other arts leaders and advocates as they craft their own communication pieces on arts education.

Definition of Terms

The researcher did not plan to use terms of art which warrant definition. There was no vocabulary used which required definition of terms.

Limitations

The limitations of this project were the ability to gather a group of parents who were willing to participate in the focus group and speak to their school leaders and board members.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RESEARCH

As part of the preparation process for creating an advocacy piece for parents, the researcher read a variety of literature to better inform her methods. The researcher chose to focus on the theories and practices of education, effective advocacy strategies, and arts integration. This section serves as a review of the literature that was read and from which the information for the project was culled.

Theories and Practices of the Arts in Education

Although the arts are considered a core academic subject under No Child Left Behind, they often are the first item to be cut when schools are facing the pressure of high stakes testing or tight budgets. An arts education program is frequently thought of as being unnecessary or expensive. For too long, schools have dismissed the arts as being co-curricular or extra-curricular and do not recognize the fact that the arts “inform as well as stimulate...challenge as well as satisfy” (Eisner, 1998, p. 56). Without the arts, Eisner argued, students are not being taught to think and cannot be fully prepared for their futures.

Regardless of any other factor, the arts reach out to students who otherwise might not be engaged at school. Where traditional school curricula may not excite them about learning, the arts have the potential to inspire them. When the arts are incorporated into a curriculum, the students are given another positive way of connecting with each other and the subject matter. For instance, a classroom play can bring together a class

and allow them all to showcase their many diverse talents whether they are on stage, making costumes, or behind the curtain managing props. The students are able to learn about themselves and see their peers in a new light. When the students feel this connection with one another, they are more likely to become more involved in one another's lives and in the class. According to the *Champions of Change* report, youth who are not engaged at school and other community institutions are the most likely to fail or drop out of school. In most cases, the arts are the only reason for staying involved in school. A school that successfully uses the arts is also more likely to involve more adults and community members in the lives of children. In successful arts education programs, the adults are facilitating the learning and providing support rather than dictating the process (Fiske 2000).

The arts also give people another means of expressing themselves. According to Ernest L. Boyer, "Every child has the urge and capacity to be expressive. ...for most children the universal language of the arts is suppressed, then destroyed, in the early years of learning, because school boards consider art a frill" (Boyer, 2004 p. 287). However, the arts allow teachers to be more expressive and create an atmosphere that engages and inspires students with diverse learning needs and from a variety of cultures. For students who are learning disabled or are dyslexic, the arts can provide an alternate mode of learning. For instance, since music helps commit things to our memory, some dyslexic students are encouraged to use it when learning challenging subjects such as math. On the opposite end of the spectrum, those students who are doing exceptionally

well in core academic areas can be further challenged by participating in art programs and relating them to regular subject areas.

When students become excited about what they are doing in school and feel more connected with what is going on, they tend to have an increase in self-esteem. The value of arts integration is that it can make learning more of a holistic experience and allows students to explore all facets of their spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual development. They finally feel that they can succeed when before they may not have been excelling in traditional school curriculums.

As educators across the country have observed, the arts not only help to raise the self-esteem and aspirations of students, they also engage the student's senses in the learning process and help develop listening, observation, communication, and critical thinking skills. The arts engage a student's multiple intelligences.

Even attitude and behavior is affected by school curriculum. The arts "have been cited as being essential to academic and emotional development" (Respress, 2006, p. 24), and research has consistently proven that arts programs can "reduce delinquent behavior and improve self-esteem" (Respress, 2006, p. 27). Certain arts methods such as Education Through Music (ETM) are effective ways for helping children with emotional development. ETM "lays the foundation for an environment that is safe and nurturing, naturally stabilizing the emotional-cognitive system. With a stabilized emotional-cognitive system, the intellect is free to fully develop" (Richards Institute, 2007). The

students who are at risk of failing in school and least likely to have access to the arts at home are the ones who most need the power of the arts in their classroom experiences.

Although these results are significant, it is still unclear as to why the arts are effective. As the *Champions of Change* report indicates, there is no doubt that those who are exposed to the arts have an increase in ability to process many types of information (Fiske, 2000). Although most researchers have not yet figured out the way in which this works, they do know that it is related to the electric circuits in the brain. When humans are born, they have electrical circuits in the brain that simply need to be hooked together by sensory experiences. For instance, when babies are exposed to music, the brain is activated which is evident in the brain patterns and help to influence how the brain is developed (Fiske, 2000) and improve spatial reasoning and complex reasoning. The influence of the arts on intelligence continues to take place as a child grows. Simply put, the arts are necessary for the human brains to develop and function at their fullest potential.

Despite these findings, most schools have been forced to terminate their art programs due to budget and time restraints. Dance, drama, and advanced musical lessons are rarely offered in public schools now. While children in the elementary grades are often still given some sort of musical lesson, this does not make up for a solid background in all areas of art. However, teachers are generally poorly trained in these areas and do not have the resources to draw upon. When educators are interested in

incorporating arts into their classrooms, they are often unsure as to how to do this or as to what the financial cost will be.

For the most part though, the biggest challenge educators face is the pressure to focus more on raising test scores in the areas of math and science so students can compete globally. Schools are also attempting to become more technologically advanced, and when budgets are already tight, money generally goes to computers rather than to the arts. The arts are perceived as a high investment, low return commodity.

In their article, *Arts Integration in an Era of Accountability* (2006), Jacob J. Mishook and Mindy L. Kornhaber discussed how the arts are being taught in this time of standardized testing. Although empirical evidence has shown that there has not been a dramatic reduction in time and resources devoted to the arts, the authors felt that the nature of instruction in the arts has been modified in such a way as to be detrimental to arts education. The authors suggested that the arts may have been undermined in public schools because there is a large discrepancy in how educators view “arts integration.” While some educators believe that the arts should be taught as a stand alone subject, others feel that the arts should be used to teach other subjects such as having students sing the names of the U.S presidents, design murals for a social studies unit, or dramatize their vocabulary words. The authors referenced a previous study by Liora Bresler in which arts education was categorized into programs such as “co-equal, cognitive integration,” “subservient integration,” “affective integration,” or “social integration”

(p. 4). In Bresler's study, which was conducted in 1995, it was determined that most arts education programs were "subservient," where the arts were used simply as motivation or to enhance learning in other subjects. They were very rarely integrated in a coequal manner so that the arts could stand side by side with the rest of the core curriculum.

Mishook and Kornhaber conducted a study to investigate the influence of high-stakes testing on the arts and their manner of integration. For their study, they chose twenty-three schools in Virginia. Some of these schools were self-identified as having a strong focus on the arts while the others did not have such a focus. After analyzing the results, it became apparent that the arts-focused schools were more inclined to have the arts integrated in a coequal fashion, and the non-arts-focused schools were more likely to have subservient integration. It was also noted that those schools with a higher socioeconomic status were the arts-focused schools, whereas those schools with lower socioeconomic status were more apt to have less of an arts-focus and to use subservient integration. Fortunately, none of the schools had cut or reduced their arts programs, but many of them had changed the nature of their arts integration to accommodate the high-stakes testing. The findings also revealed that schools with a strong mission to include the arts and support from their administration were much more likely to have a coequal integration approach. Schools without this support from the district and county administrations and those with lower test scores tended to have a subservient integration approach to the arts.

The article also brought up the dilemma that many arts educators face today. If a school were to only use the arts to teach other subjects, then the students would not be taught to appreciate the arts for art's sake. They do not learn to just enjoy the arts and to express themselves in the arts. In addition, the school would no longer see the value of an arts program as the arts have been diffused into the other curriculum areas. However, if the arts stand alone, then it is too easy to cut them when time and financial resources are tight.

The solution, according to Arnstine (1995), appears to lie in the fact that the curriculum should be chosen by those who are responsible for teaching it. Curriculum should be chosen to reflect how people learn and what knowledge is of most worth to them. The curriculum should also be presented in a way that makes it relevant to the students so that they understand why they are learning the content. All too often this is not the case. Arnstine pointed out that often those who do choose the curriculum are very knowledgeable in only one subject matter, but feel that they are experts in all subject matters. In addition, curriculum is often chosen to meet "national needs (p. 343), even though students' needs may not necessarily translate into those that are seen as important to the survival of the country.

As Elliot Eisner stated, "Curricula in which the arts are absent or inadequately taught rob children of what they might otherwise become" (1998, p. 64). The arts prepare children for the future and help them to see that "life's problems almost always have more than one solution, and they typically require judgment and trade-off" (1998, p. 28).

It is imperative that teachers recognize this and have the freedom to incorporate the arts in their teaching.

Effective Advocacy

At least three main issues contribute to the reduction of the arts. “These include: 1) financial constraints, 2) changes in administrative philosophy, and/or 3) lack of influence or advocacy for the arts” (Rushlow, 2005, p. 5). Hence, advocacy, or the support of a cause, is vital for the sustainability of arts education in schools. While there are several art advocacy groups already in existence, such as the California Alliance for Arts Education, many of these groups focus their efforts at the state or national level. However, many of the decisions regarding where and how to spend the money are made at the local level, so it is just as important to establish advocacy groups consisting of parents and community members to speak to principals and school board members. Principals and school board members alike state that when parents speak, they listen. School board members, in particular, are elected officials, and it serves them best to listen to those who elect them. The following is a review of literature explaining important and effective practices to use when advocating the arts to school leaders.

“Policy-making in school districts can be divided into four steps or phases: introduction, visibility, decision-making, and implementation” (Hatfield, 1983, p. 19). As such, effective advocacy really has a two-fold purpose. The first purpose is to educate school leaders about why the arts are important and how an arts education program can be established so that they will feel well prepared to make a decision. “Basically [arts]

leaders must consistently and continuously educate the public about how meaningful arts education contributes significantly to the cultural and economic lives of individuals, the effectiveness of schools, and the enhancement of the public good” (Bradford, Gary, & Wallach, 2000). This is essential as school board members “tend to be oriented toward politics and business. The general neglect of the arts in their own schooling usually has not aroused a keen desire to correct this deficiency in contemporary education” (Hausman, 1980, p. 213).

Before advocates can educate the principals and school board members, they must educate and prepare themselves first. According to the California Alliance for Arts Education website, advocates must first research what arts education currently exists in the school or district and who is teaching it. Advocates must also ask which students currently have access to arts education and which do not. They should also ask how the current arts education programs align with the state Visual and Performing Arts standards, how the programs are currently being funded, and what funding sources exist for future programs. Parents and community members who are planning to speak to principals and school board members should also educate themselves on the priorities of those decision-makers, what strategies will be most persuasive with them, and what policy changes they have authority to make under Education Code. Finally, advocates should understand how school board meetings operate and should have prepared talking points to use.

The next step for advocates is to find allies either at the school level or amongst other parents so that leaders may hear from multiple voices representing a variety of perspectives. However, these allies all must share a common view on arts education so as to not complicate matters by layering on the argument of arts for arts' sake versus arts to improve academic learning. "The struggle between these two views of among arts educators has often reached fever pitch and canceled both sides out" (Fowler, 1996, p. 36). Advocates should keep in mind that these two views can both be presented as talking points, but there must be a common language. As the Alliance for Arts Education (1976) stated, "While beneficial side effects are noteworthy, it should not be assumed that arts educators are advocating 'Arts in the Core of Curriculum' merely to improve students' work in other subjects. Aesthetic education is important in its own right; education of the whole demands that attention be given the arts" (1976, p. 7).

These allies must then define their vision for the arts education program at the school or for the district. "Arts education programs can't be created at the top and handed down. They have to come up from the community level" (Fowler, 1996, p. 202). In formulating their vision for what the arts education program is supposed to accomplish, objectives must be defined. Objectives "provide the direction for a program; they explain what the fundamental values are and give some guidance as to how to realize such values" (Hausman, 1980, p.120). Hausman further explained that these objectives must benefit the entire school and not be inclusive. "Persons interested in developing school arts programs whose vision reaches only to the arts are frequently myopic and naïve.

They must come to realize that a school is a culture where certain priorities already have been established” (p.211). As John J. Mahlmann has stated, the “tendency for educators in the arts to isolate themselves from the rest of the school is a characteristic that is evidently as pervasive as it is non-productive in terms of program development” (in Alliance for Arts Education, 1976, p. 32). In addition, this vision should include partnerships with community arts organizations to help make the program more sustainable.

Once the vision has been clarified, the advocates must lay out their arguments to be used when approaching the education leaders. “There is a basic commonsense question which may strike directly to the hearts as well as the heads of those who operate schools, those who send their children to schools, and those concerned citizens in society at large. ‘How do you want your children to grow up?’” (Hausman, 1980, p. 16).

Advocates should build upon this with reasons why the arts are essential in schools as many education leaders may struggle to see their importance. In fact, as Thomas C. Todd, former Superintendent of Public Instruction in Pierre, South Dakota, stated the “average citizen will have great difficulty in accepting the art as a basic area of education” (in Alliance for Arts Education, 1976, p.71). This is reinforced by the fact that there are no test scores, assessments, or designated funds for the arts, as well as a lack of certificated arts teachers, especially in dance.

Arts educators begin to look at the content of what was being said and decided that administrators who were negative towards arts education needed to be

countered with why art should be in the school, i.e., theory and rationales. Those who were neutral or positive did not need so much of why as they needed how to go about putting a program in their schools. (Hatfield, 1983, p. 3)

Therefore, research data, statistics, plans, potential partnerships and funding sources need to be laid out for the administrators. As Edward Fiske pointed out in *Champions of Change*, in a society that values “measurements and uses data-driven analysis to inform decisions about allocation of scarce resources, photographs of smiling faces are not enough to gain or even retain support. Such images alone will not convince skeptics or even-neutral decision-makers that something exceptional is happening when and where the arts become part of the lives of young people” (Fiske, 2000, p. 6).

However, advocacy pieces should also include more than just words and facts. They need to include stories and testimonials about the arts. To further promote the cause, administrators may need to personally witness an arts education experience. “It simply will not do to continue to proclaim that ‘the kids are turned on’ and to expect everyone to be satisfied” (Hausman, 1980, p. 120).

In order to really change the curriculum, one must win over school board and board of education. The school board has become increasingly accustomed to receiving input from parents, community leaders, and businesses regarding curricular matters. As a result, a unique strategy is required to gain their attention. “One school-board member advises arts people to ‘call a board member or take them to lunch, but don’t smother them with any more stuff to read’” (Fowler, 1996, p. 202). In addition, it is important for

school board members to know that the advocates have also spoken with the principal and have their commitment. A principal's "interest can mean the difference between a program's being accepted or not. Principals establish the budget and control resources. One principal can create an oasis of success in the arts that will be envied –and replicated-by others" (Fowler, 1996, p. 201). On the other hand, according to The Arts, Education, and Americans, Inc. (1982), if the school board endorses a program but the principals do not have buy-in, the program is less likely to succeed (1982, p.9). The process of advocating at the school and district level needs to be a carefully orchestrated political dance in some cases.

Once the first purpose of advocacy has been accomplished and a principal or school board member has been convinced that an arts education program should be established, they will want to know how this can be done. Many times, it is this second purpose that is the most crucial to successful advocacy. According to Jerome Hausman, "We seem to know what to do and how to do it. But the doing occurs so rarely that it provides frequently cited exemplars rather than the norm. There is a paucity of well-conceived programs translated into reality" (1980, p. 208). Parents and community members need to involve themselves in putting into place the plans that were used to convince the administrators. Their support will be needed to ensure the success of the program. Hausman even stated that these advocates should remain at the core of the program.

How long a productive network of schools in the arts or anything else survives and remains vigorous depends in large measure on what we came to call ‘the hub’. Ideally, the hub is an autonomous or semiautonomous entity which maintains a rather delicate inside-outside relationship to the rest of the network. It is a source of ideas, support, certain kinds of help and, above all, the kind of open encouragement that can come only from an agency with no punitive power or authority (1980, p. 227).

Finally, successful advocacy projects are those in which there is follow-through and two-way communication between the advocates and the decision-makers. “It is imperative that all arts educators – not only arts administrators – keep these key decision-makers aware of program successes and needs, and always remember to thank them for the work they have accomplished on behalf of the arts program” (Rushlow, 2005, p. 7). Even when little has been accomplished, it is critical to keep them informed through letters, testimonials, press releases, and minutes of meetings related to the program. In addition, decision-makers should be invited to arts events and to witness the classes taking place. From the time the advocate first contacts the decision-maker, there should be constant communication and eventually an established relationship. Harry S. Broudy reinforced this when he discussed that this type of communication needs to be frequent and on-going as school leaders should be working to create an environment that allows the students to fully realize their potential and achievement. He further goes on to remark that an education in the arts is critical for this environment to exist (Broudy, 1972).

In some ways, it is shocking that so many challenges continue to face arts education. “As long ago as 1927, the Department of Superintendents of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) resolved that ‘...we are rightly coming to regard music and art and other similar subjects as fundamental in the education of American children’” (Hausman, 1980, p.3). Hausman then pointed out that in 1962, the Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association stated, “We think it is important that all individuals have a wide exposure to the arts. This should be a part of the school program at all ages and in as many artistic areas as can be provided. Particularly, we think that each student should have rich experiences not only in appreciating the artistic works of others but also in creating artistic experiences himself” (p. 4). Public schools are best positioned to offer all kids, regardless of socioeconomic status, an education in and an exposure to the arts and yet many schools are failing their students by not taking advantage of this unique opportunity. Parents and community members need to be forthright about this issue and make sure that school leaders are hearing a strong, unified call for the arts so that this will not continue to happen. As Hausman concluded, “Failure of concerned citizens to find K-12 arts programs in the schools to which they send their children probably constitutes more justifiable grounds for complaint than does inadequate progress of their offspring in reading or mathematics”(1980, p.6).

Arts Integration

When it comes to arts education programming, educators debate about what type of programming would best serve the students and what constitutes the most authentic arts education experience. “Three major modes of programming have evolved in response to this question: (1) single, autonomous, arts study; (2) interdisciplinary arts study; and (3) arts study integrated within the general curriculum” (Hausman, 1980, p. 129). This section of the literature review will define the third mode of programming, arts integration, and discuss why this appears to be the most sustainable method and, therefore, what parents should be advocating to see in schools.

As the name suggests, a single, autonomous, arts study is instruction in which the art form is taught without connection to another subject area. This is most commonly seen in secondary schools and tends to be focused more on projects or performances. As such, their primary focus tends to be on the talented students and not on making the arts accessible for all students. Although, this type of instruction is important in order to nurture the talent of those gifted students, “equally important is the obligation to provide creative experiences for students of moderate and even limited talent, for the sheer enjoyment of it and the payoff in deeper understanding of the inner workings of the arts and of the self” (Hausman, 1980, p. 130).

An interdisciplinary arts study allows for a synthesis of different curriculums such as in college level humanities courses. This type of study tends to put the art form into boxes which could potentially limit the timelessness of the art. In addition, when teaching

multiple art forms at once, the impact of the art may be lost instead of having the intended impact of the arts enhancing each other. “Most problematic is an inevitable tendency toward academicism; such courses often become so bogged down in historical and factual information that they lose the immediacy of the experience of art and the need for the students to encounter their world through active involvement with it” (Hausman, 1980, p. 134).

The final category that arts education may fall into is arts integration. According to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (2009), “arts integration is an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject area and meets evolving objectives in both” (2009, p. 5). When planning for this mode of instruction, the first and most important step is identifying the connections between the art form and either the curriculum area or the concern or need. A concern or need would be an issue such as behavior, classroom management, or teaching English Language Learners (p. 13).

When using the arts integration approach, the teacher must be keenly aware of the objectives for both areas and ensure that they are enhancing and reinforcing each other. The teacher must also be willing to allow time for exploration of the art form and experimentation in the lesson. According to the San Bernardino County Office of Education (2008), “The teacher has to have accurate, workable arts content information upon which to build the integration. Quality integrated content is dependent on strong

content from all the disciplines involved. The science content may be strong, but the song about 'being green' may simply be an add on" (2008, p. 95). "Arts integration is not about art activities tacked on to regular instruction to spice it up" (2008, p. 98). Instead, it is about "*uncovering* the standards, exploring their mysteries, and engaging in the arts to create poetic and metaphoric expressions of those explorations" (p. 98). As Fowler also stated, "While some may regard arts integration as "a means of enhancing basic instruction, by subordinating the arts to serve learning in the traditional subjects. In fact, in an effective interdisciplinary program, students learn as much about the arts as they do the subject that is their focus" (1996, p. 70). Therefore, arts integration is not simply a means to an end. When well-planned, it is an effective way to teach a diverse group of students with a wide range of interests, abilities, learning styles, and background knowledge. In addition, it has the potential to give them more ownership of their education by providing opportunities for the students to determine the outcome. For instance, when students are asked to write a play or create a piece of art, they are in control of what the final product will look like.

An example of a unit integrating dance and science with evolving objectives would look like: (1) dance only for lesson one; (2) science only for lesson two; (3) more dance than science for lesson three; (4) more science than dance in lesson four; (5) dance and science are balanced in the final lesson (p. 30). However, arts integration may be used for more than just dance and science. Other applications include drama and literature, music and math, and dance and history. For instance, a teacher could explore a

culture in the social studies curriculum through dance or song. A teacher may also choose to teach a piece of literature using the tableaux method, where the students portray images from the story to better understand the plot and character development.

The Ed Online website stated that this type of instruction allows for learning that is actively built and constructed, experiential, reflective, evolving, collaborative, and encourages problem solving. Another study reinforced the benefits of arts integration: “Similarly, in education, children often learn best by being absorbed in tasks that require the *incidental* use of skills and ideas, rather than *focusing* on them in a detached way. The arts provide powerful ways of doing this. There is growing evidence that standards of achievement rise through a broad and balanced curriculum that includes the arts, in which children are able to play to their strengths and to make connections with what they know” (Aprill, 2001, p. xx).

Arts integration offers teachers the opportunity to engage children’s multiple intelligences.

To attain better results and *reduce* ... variation in student achievement, [Benjamin S.] Bloom reasoned that we would have to *increase* variation in the teaching. That is, because students varied in their learning styles and aptitudes, we must diversify and differentiate instruction to better meet their individual learning needs. The challenge was to find practical ways to do this within the constraints of group-based classrooms so that *all* students learn well (Guskey, 2007, p. 103).

The arts can provide this very practical way needed to differentiate instruction. Students who are English Language Learners (ELL) may benefit from having a teacher who integrates drama and literature whereas a student who struggles in science and is a kinesthetic learner could achieve great results and be more engaged in school if science and dance were taught together.

Arts Academy science teacher Sung-Joon Pai says, ‘I see my students’ commitment to learning every day – I know they want to be in my classroom. They enjoy studying science, because of the way we, the teachers, connect it to the arts. Today, one of my students, an actor, responded to my explanation of the scientific method with a quotation from Shakespeare – it is amazing to see students making connections, feeling that excitement. (Jensen, 2006, p. 227)

In addition to helping children succeed academically, using the arts in the classroom can help children learn social skills, character development, and improve behavior. A successfully implemented arts integration lesson helps reinforce the need for positive behavioral choices to be made by all participants. “Just as the adults involved in arts integration must build a way to collaborate and work together, so too must teambuilding occur with students. Bringing in different materials to work in a classroom, introducing new people to the scene, and suggesting a different way of learning has the potential for chaos unless all participants see arts integration as an opportunity to bring people together to work for a common goal” (Aprill, 2001, p. 66). Arts integration can also encourage the general classroom teacher to work more in tandem with the school’s

art teacher. By working together and having a shared vision, the teachers and art specialists can create a dynamic arts education program that clearly shows the value of the arts at their school site.

Apart from the proven academic benefits of using an arts integration approach, this method is also much more financially feasible for many schools. Since these lessons would be taught in the primary classroom, a separate space is not required. Also, the classroom teacher would be doing the majority of the teaching so additional staffing resources would not be necessary apart from perhaps an arts specialist to help guide the teachers and provide professional development training. This method also does not require more time during the day or necessitate adding minutes to the school day. In addition, as arts integration is implemented in the schools, the school board members and administrators will most likely see an increase in student achievement as well as a decrease in behavior problems, tardiness, and absences. These results will speak the loudest to the decision makers and serve as the best form of advocacy there can be.

While the arts integration approach is clearly not a substitute for the more focused learning of the art genre, and valid cases have been made to teach the arts strictly for art's sake, it "is another application that can provide impressive educational dividends: the arts used as vehicles to enhance learning in other subjects. In addition to being treated as subjects worthy of study in their own right, the arts can function in tandem with the entire curriculum, enlivening it and ensuring the student's engagement in the learning process" (Fowler, 1996, p. 67). It also enables schools and school districts to make the arts more

accessible to all and in a small way, ensure social justice and quality in the schools. As Fowler continued to state, “Such a concept takes the arts out of the elitist world that seems to say that art is just for the gifted few and makes it a democratic expressive tool, that all people can create, use to communicate, and share their own and other’s perceptions” (p. 69).

Therefore, when advocating for arts education, the researcher is encouraging parents and community members to propose arts integration programs. They have proven results, are more financially viable, and, thus, more sustainable, and provide an opportunity for all students to participate in the arts. An arts integration approach allows the students an opportunity to learn not only the core content areas of math, language arts, science, and social studies, but also to be fully exposed to and engaged in an art form without it being diluted.

Conclusion

In summary, the arts are a necessary part of educating the whole child. The arts engage students, allow them to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills, and help to develop multiple intelligences. However, the arts are quickly being forced out of schools in the United States due to a lack of funding and a lack of advocates for the arts. Therefore, parents and community members need to begin speaking to their school boards and principals about the benefits of the arts. In addition to promoting the arts, advocates need to help with the implementation of quality, sustainable arts education

programs. Although various modes of arts education exist, arts integration is one of the more viable and successful methods for today's elementary schools.

Chapter 3

THE STUDY

The Pathway

For my culminating experience and the purpose of this study, I chose to focus on Emphasis V: Art Educator as advocate and leader. Students who choose this emphasis might either be teachers or administrators within public schools or, alternately, be players in private, community, state, or federal arts education organizations. The purpose of this work is to forward the availability of arts education for people of any age through grant writing, program creation and administration, and/or public advocacy. Student portfolios will focus on the development of a particular in-depth advocacy or leadership project, such as the writing of a major grant, the creation of a non-profit arts organization, the creation of a school program, or the creation of a professional development program for arts educators.

Narrative Inquiry

This project was done using the narrative inquiry method. The process of narrative inquiry is based upon a contextual framing of the experience within the current culture and environment. The researcher must communicate the impact of previous events and stories, while including the details of the current process into the bigger picture (Clandinin, 2000). In education, the narrative is becoming increasingly more important as it allows the researcher to tell the stories and details of the personal experiences and lessons learned while studying the area of focus. Working with parents

and other arts leaders lends itself as a natural avenue for storytelling as I had to reflect upon the successes and challenges that were revealed during this project. As Clandinin states, "...as inquirers, we, too, are part of the parade. We have helped make the world in which we find ourselves. We are not merely objective inquirers....On the contrary, we are complicit in the world we study. Being in this world, we need to remake ourselves as well as offer up research understandings that could lead to a better world" (Clandinin, 2000, p. 62). As an advocate and educator, it is essential that I reflect upon my growth process during this study to give others an idea of where my background and influences and how I got to this point. Therefore, chapters three and four will be written in the first person.

How the Researcher Became an Advocate for the Arts

Growing up, I had few opportunities to explore the arts. Although I was able to take years of dance and piano lessons, my schools offered little in the way of arts education. In fact, I can only recall having a year of recorder lessons in elementary school and a semester of painting in high school. Additionally, my hometown of Santa Maria, California, lacked a vibrant performing or visual arts scene so there were very few cultural opportunities in which to participate.

However, this all changed when, while attending the University of California at Davis, I accepted a position as an assistant to the Director of Community Outreach at UC Davis Presents. Working at UC Davis Presents provided many opportunities for me to attend performances and witness the artists working with students at local schools. In

addition, I was constantly amazed at how the artists could touch the students who participated in the residency activities. An example of this is when I had taken a very young and naïve, but truly accomplished, pianist to a tough, inner city high school. After being escorted down the hall by police, the pianist and I arrived in a dingy auditorium filled with high school students who were not necessarily interested in being there. They made several comments about the artist's appearance and the fact that he was a pianist and not a rap star. However, as soon as this young man began playing, the students stopped. One could see their jaws dropping and notice an immediate change in their attitudes. Afterwards, they had a litany of questions for the pianist, and a good majority of them waited in line for his autograph. Some of these students admitted to playing the piano as well and wanted advice from the guest artist. This was a transformative experience for both the students and myself as the music had so deeply affected the students. Consequently, I was bitten by the "arts bug" and have been involved in arts education ever since.

Upon graduating from UC Davis, I was asked to become the Art Education Coordinator for UC Davis Presents which later became the Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts. After six years in this position, I left the Mondavi Center to be a classroom teacher for a year and a half, until I was laid off due to the budget crisis. During my time as a teacher, I participated on the Natomas Unified School District's Art Cadre and incorporated the arts into the core curriculum as often as possible. The students in my class were able to learn dance, drama, and painting as they

were learning about Social Studies, Science, Math, and Language Arts. Currently, I am working as the Art Education Coordinator for the Yolo County Arts Council, where I am implementing four arts education programs in schools throughout Yolo County.

As a result of seeing how the arts can so positively impact the lives of students and seeing the inequality of access to the arts in public schools, I decided to work to inform others about the value of the arts. My goal is to work to show parents, teachers, principals, and other school leaders that the arts do belong in the classroom. In addition to raising test scores, the arts increase student engagement at schools and allow the students another way of expressing themselves and being successful. Furthermore, the arts help us teach to the whole student, which is by far the greatest reason to include them in the curriculum.

The Process of the Project

While considering which avenue to take for the focus of this thesis, I met with a school principal who is a staunch supporter of the arts. Mr. Olvera remarked that if change is truly going to happen in schools, the demands for this change need to come from the parents. As he said, “When parents speak, the school administrators listen.” This claim was reaffirmed by several other principals who said that they are more likely to consider a request when it has been made by a group of parents and that the arts would be much more present in schools if parents were asking for them. None of the principals interviewed had been asked by a parent to have a more comprehensive art education program at their school. However, all of these principals and other teachers commented

that they would be willing to consider implementing new programs if the parents not only spoke out requesting one, but also were also able to present them with the necessary information. The principals and other school leaders felt that they would not have enough time to do research on the costs of an art program, the scheduling, and where to find the resources. Thus, it was made clear that parents needed to know which organizations, such as a local arts council, and resources could be accessed for this before meeting with the school leaders. It was also recommended that parents be equipped with a list of funding sources and statistics on the benefits of the arts before approaching the principal. With this information in hand, I decided to take on the challenge of working to empower more parents to advocate for the arts.

In order to conduct this study, I gathered a group of forty-one parents of elementary school children from several school districts throughout the Sacramento region. These school districts included Davis Joint Unified, Elk Grove Unified, Folsom Cordova Unified, Natomas Unified, River Delta Unified, Sacramento City Unified, San Juan Unified, Travis Unified, Roseville Joint Unified, Western Placer Unified, Dixon Unified and two private schools. I chose to interview parents from this sampling of school districts, as I wanted a diverse group of cultures and socioeconomic levels as well as an array of experiences in the schools. Knowing that each school district has different levels of art offered, I did not want to focus on one particular area, as it possibly could have skewed the results.

The parents, who ranged in age from 20-65, represented a multitude of professions such as teacher, veterinarian, microbiologist, artist, business owner, nurse, military lab officer, social worker, marketing manager, fire captain, author, event planner, physician, development coordinator, bank manager, sales representative, and at-home moms. These parents were asked several questions related to their experience in schools as children, what type of art education they had in school, and the impact that the arts had on them. The responses regarding the impact of the arts were overwhelmingly positive. As one parent said, “It was the single most influential key to my success in school. Because I enjoyed music/choir in school and wanted to go to practice/class, I was motivated to go each day, to do well in school and attend school even when sick.” Another parent stated, “Education in the arts dramatically enriched my education. It truly gave life and meaning to my school day from elementary school through high school. I was lucky enough to have enthusiastic teachers educating our students in music (band and choir), theatre, and visual art.” And yet another parent remarked,

I learned so much about technique and style and some about the mechanics of creating visual artwork (how to draw a face, how to work with clay, how to use oil pastels and water color, etc.) In high school, I took art workshop for two years. In this class I learned lost-wax casting and how to work with stained glass. I found that I had an unexpected ability in this area. I took great pride in the projects that I made, and I continued to work with stained glass even after finishing high school. I learned how to read music some in elementary school. We

worked with a variety of instruments and learned a lot about singing and performing. Overall I would have to say that my art education was crucial to my total development as a student. It unlocked creativity in me that helped me learn how to express myself. I also developed an appreciation for the creative process and the beauty seen and heard and felt in the art of others.

Interestingly, the few parents who claimed that the arts had a minimal impact on their experience in school, were also those who knew very little about their child's current art education and were reluctant to advocate for the arts. As one parent with little exposure to the arts in school stated, "[The arts are] not a big enough priority" for him to advocate for them. Unfortunately, many parents of today's school children, like myself and this particular father, did not receive an education in the arts and, therefore, may not fully have an appreciation for their role in their children's education. In addition, many of these parents may not know what a quality arts education looks like. In fact, 10.5% of the participants did not even know if their children were being taught the arts at school.

Of those who were aware of the arts education programs, 63.2% said that the arts were taught only occasionally and not as a comprehensive program. Their students were primarily taught drawing with 70.6% of the parents stating that this was the primary art discipline. A majority of students were also taught music and painting; however, only a small group of students received instruction in ceramics, dance, or drama.

After determining how the parents felt about their own art education and that of their students, I queried them with regards to the benefits of arts in the schools. Every

single parent agreed that the arts should exist in an ideal situation and 51% of them would even be willing to pay a fee if necessary to keep the arts in schools. Although most of the parents knew that the arts impacted student engagement, had a positive effect on student behavior, and increased critical thinking skills, some felt that another compelling reason for keeping the arts in schools was that they are fun. As one parent stated, “an increase in your points 7-9 are very compelling reasons to incorporate art. I also believe that a creative outlet balances the child's day and will increase their enthusiasm to the "brain" work of the other subjects, and will likely put FUN back into education.” Another parent wrote, “First of all FUN! Arts are fun but they also provide us with the history of culture from many nations and many eras”. Using this as a basis, we discussed how the arts do in fact benefit children so that the parents could better state their case when speaking to the schools.

The next step I took was informing parents of the California State Visual and Performing Arts content standards. While most were aware of the content standards in other areas of curriculum, many did not know that the arts had standards as well. Many were also unaware that Education Code mandates the inclusion of arts education in the adopted course of study. We went over the standards together and discussed what each standard meant, where they could find copies of the standards for future reference, and reviewed sample lesson plans. Following this, I discussed with the parents the different strategies of incorporating the arts in the school day such as teaching art as a single subject or integrating it into other subject matters. My preference is that the arts be

integrated as this appears to be the most sustainable avenue for an arts education program but after talking with the California State PTA Executive Director, I was cautioned against advocating for a certain type of arts program in the early stages.

Once the survey results and interviews had been compiled, I developed a concise information sheet that the parents could use to gather facts and other information necessary for their presentations. The parents indicated that they would prefer to not have a large, bulky document as they would rather be directed to informative websites. Therefore, I chose to draft the version that is exhibited in the Appendix rather than a more detailed document. In addition, I offered the parents an opportunity to role play but the majority of them felt that they did not need to take advantage of this.

The parents were then asked to meet with their school leaders to discuss the status of arts education at the school and how they can be improved. Twenty-five of the parents who participated in the initial discussions, agreed to meet with their school leaders. The parents who did approach their school leaders indicated that they felt much more confident doing so as a result of having statistics and facts to back them up. However, not every parent felt that their experience was positive. Others felt that the principal was receptive but knows that change will not be coming immediately. As one parent stated, “I advocated on behalf of the Arts Foundation...it was well-received and supported, but immediate change is hard. But important to keep the issue in front of them at all times, and let it be known that we are watching and giving voice to an ongoing issue.” Another

parent, who is also an artist, was invited to start up an afterschool art program at her daughter's school which she is now considering doing.

Despite the fact that the majority of the parents who did advocate did not see an immediate positive change, I still that much was accomplished through this project. The parents who participated are now much more well-versed in the language of the arts and the benefit of an arts education. This in turn has led to more conversations amongst them and their school leaders regarding the topic of arts education. In addition, the feedback from their advocacy experiences allowed me to determine how I could better improve as an advocate and what further information is needed to prepare the parents.

Chapter 4

REFLECTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the course of this project, I worked with over forty parents to assess their views on arts education in schools as well as their feelings regarding advocacy. While I feel that this project positively impacted the parents who participated and can potentially impact numerous other parents, teachers, administrators, and students, it is not lost on me that I, myself, was probably most greatly affected of all. As a result of this study, I was able to more clearly define my reasons for being an advocate for arts education and the critical role it plays in schools. I was also able to better articulate the impact of the arts on students and how to successfully integrate the arts so that I can now present a stronger case for the arts when speaking with school administrators and other parents. I feel that I am now better informed to make more thoughtful and comprehensive presentations and to write more useful communication pieces. In addition, I feel as if I have developed a cache of resources and connections that can now be drawn upon when future opportunities to advocate for the arts present themselves. This rich network of arts organizations and resources can also be used to support other parents who may want to talk to decision makers. This work helped to establish me as a knowledgeable leader in the arts and one who can be called on for support and information as needed.

Prior to starting this project, I was a fifth grade teacher at a school in Sacramento. However, during the course of writing this thesis, I was laid off due to the budget crisis in

California. Subsequently, a job as an Art Education Coordinator for the local arts council presented itself to me and allowed me to return to my original career path of working in art education. Reengaging in the arts on this level has served as a great source of inspiration and has given me a renewed sense of passion for the arts. This renewed sense of passion can also be attributed to this study. In addition, I gained a greater perspective on the lack of information related to the arts that parents have and the widening gap between them and the schools. Knowing this and being able to acknowledge the unique expertise I have acquired in my many years of work in the arts, I realized the unique position I am in to inform others and to help transform how students are educated. I have worked to hone my leadership skills so that I can be more vocal about demanding equal access to the arts. As one who has always tried to avoid speaking in front of others, this project encouraged me to take risks and speak out more often about this subject matter. This new found attitude and position of leadership will benefit me greatly as I continue to pursue advocacy and leadership positions in the arts.

I also feel that there were many successes that resulted from my work on this piece. First and foremost, I was able to inform the parents with whom I worked about the value of an arts integrated curriculum. Many of these parents were previously not aware of the type of art instruction that their children were receiving in school. It appeared that many of the parents were under the impression that their children were receiving a much more high quality arts instruction than they truly are. This was due primarily to the misconception that one-time arts projects or crafts equate to an arts education program.

However, in order for a student to have a quality arts education program, it needs to be sequential and standards-based. In addition, many parents previously did not know that there were California Content Standards for the Visual and Performing Arts, although they were aware that there were standards for the other subjects. The parents were also informed of the many resources available to them where they can find more information on the arts and arts providers in their area.

Despite the successes, there were a few challenges that this project faced. The primary challenge was the current budget crisis in the State of California. Many of the participants in this study did not feel that now is an appropriate time to be advocating for the arts as they felt that there are many more pressing needs facing the schools. When asked why they would not advocate for arts education at this time, one parent stated, “Budget cuts. We are not in a place in California right now to add to the expenses of education.” Another parent said, “I feel like it is futile. The schools here are dealing with overcrowding, shortage of teachers and funds. I feel that they would just put me off till later.” Although these parents developed a deeper understanding and appreciation for arts education programs, these statements reflect the fact that they still do not believe the arts can be a top priority in schools. Many of the parents indicated that they would be more willing to advocate for the arts in a less trying time. Therefore, the arts education leaders need to do a better job of working with the parent groups schools to help them realize that an arts education program should not exist only when there are additional funds. Arts leaders need to have examples of successful models used in schools as evidence that the

money spent on the arts is money well spent. In addition, if the school has a well designed model, money that is spent on the arts could prevent money from needing to be designated for intervention programs or for behavior problems.

The other major obstacle faced during the course of this study was that many parents did not understand how schools operate and how decisions are made. When asked to describe their comfort level in speaking to their child's teacher, only 44.4% of the participants felt confident doing so. The rest stated that they were either not at all comfortable with this or they would only do so if absolutely necessary. In addition, only 24.2% of the participants were comfortable speaking to the principal and 14.7% were at ease expressing their desire for change with the superintendent. The vast majority of the parents did not feel that they could speak at a school board meeting, and, in fact, several of them did not know they could even attend or when these meetings take place. Therefore, it quickly became evident that the first thing needing to be addressed was increasing parents' awareness of the school system and their role in their child's education. As leaders, it is recommended that parents are given the information and training to better understand how they can set up meetings with their child's teacher, school principal and those who make decisions. Parents also need to know the role of the school board and how they can participate in school board meetings. It should not be assumed that all parents feel welcome and comfortable being on a school campus even though their children attend there. Furthermore, it should be noted that the parent advisory committees that exist on school campuses, such as PTA, Site Council, and the

English Language Advisory Committee, should be working hand in hand to make decisions together and to welcome more parents into their folds.

As a result of realizing the full impact of these obstacles, I also decided that it is necessary not to advocate for a particular type of arts education program, but rather to work on a more macro scale. Before one can fully make the case for an integrated arts education, the parents need to be assured and trained in how to work within the school system. They also need to understand that the arts do have great value in the schools, regardless of the budget situation. In the meantime, schools need to be suggested programs that their limited resources will accommodate. Only when there is a continued dialogue on the benefits of the arts and the school is fully committed to having arts education should the discussion regarding the type of sustained arts education be broached.

Although there were challenges, the participants in the study indicated that they were appreciative of the opportunity to learn more about arts education, the resources, and the arts organizations that exist locally. Many of these parents were unaware of their own lack of knowledge related to the arts and, therefore, were not paying attention to the arts when they thought about the education their children were receiving. Other parents had just been so busy with their daily lives that they did not even have time to consider what was happening in the classrooms or to notice that the arts were not being taught. In fact, as one participant said, "This is getting me really excited about the arts again, just thinking about all of these questions. I feel like it gets so lost in our day to day teachings.

That's VERY unfortunate. Especially in this day and age when it is probably one of the more important things we could be doing with our children.” On the other hand, there were parents who noticed that the arts were not being taught, but did not know what to do about it or with whom to speak. One parent stated, “Honestly, I don't know how to approach the topic. I've been upset at the changes they have made in the last year with cutting programs. Honestly I didn't realize how bad it was and didn't really think about it until I was asked to take this survey.” These parents who participated in this study are now not only experiencing a renewed sense of vigor for the arts, but also are much more empowered to address this issue. Whereas they may have been focused on other things previously, they now feel that the arts have been brought to the forefront again. As a result, many more school teachers and administrators will be receiving requests from parents to develop quality arts education components.

Recommendations

For other arts leaders who are interested in working with parents to advocate for arts education, I have the following recommendations. Once a group of parents has been identified to speak to the school leaders, it is critical that they have an understanding of how the school works. For this they need to know, who the principal is and how they get an appointment with him or her or if monthly parent meetings already occur. They also need to know who makes the decisions for the school and if they should be speaking first with the teacher, with the principal, or with a superintendent. Parents should be informed of other groups that are working on the school campus such as the PTA, Site Council, and

the English Language Advisory Committee and how these groups operate. If parents are not able to get positive results after talking to decision makers at the school level, the arts leader should work with them to prepare them to present at a school board meeting. It is important to stress to parents that persistence is the key to affecting change. School leaders will listen when they see that the parents are firmly committed to this issue.

Once parents have an understanding of how to navigate the schools, they should be assisted in gathering research on the benefits of the arts and why they should be included in the school day. Parents should be familiar with the California State content standards for the Visual and Performing Arts and how they can be taught. The advocates should also work with a local arts organization to determine how to plan a program and what the potential financial costs could be. It would also be beneficial to determine funding sources for this program. Once this information has been compiled, the parents should begin scheduling their meetings with the school leaders.

Initially, I felt that parents should be advocating for an arts integrated program where the arts are taught in conjunction with the other curricular areas. However, after meetings with parent groups and other arts education advocates, it became apparent that this should not be the focus when first implementing a program. These arts leaders suggested that parents advocate on a larger scale with the priority being just getting the arts included as part of the school day. Only when the stakeholders have been convinced that the arts are valuable and benefiting the students should the parents begin working to finesse how the arts are taught.

Conclusion

In summary, this project appears to have made a positive contribution to not only my future goals, but also to the parents who participated in this study. This study determined what parents know about the benefit of the arts, the California content standards for the Visual and Performing Arts, the resources available to them, as well as their confidence in being advocates for change. As a result, these parents are now better equipped to assess their child's art education in schools and to speak about this with their school leaders. These parents also now have a variety of resources that they can use when doing so. Finally, I now have an idea of what information needs to be prepared before meeting with stakeholders and parents so that I may better advocate for the arts and be a stronger leader in this area. There is so much work to be done to ensure equal access to the arts, but it is exciting to be pursuing this very worthy cause.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

This appendix is the text from the pamphlet that was created for the parents.

Speak Up for the Arts!

Why do the arts belong in schools?

- ❖ **Extensive research has demonstrated that arts education engages students in learning, contributes to higher test scores and reduces truancy and dropout rates.**
- ❖ **Teaching creativity and the arts contributes to higher test scores across the board in every subject area.**
- ❖ **Arts education helps prepare our students for the expectations of the twenty-first century workforce.**
- ❖ **As schools have felt increasing pressure from standardized tests and federal mandates to spend more time on reading and math, school curricula is narrowing in focus, leading to a 22% reduction in the amount of time spent on arts and music instruction.**
- ❖ **Arts education is mandated in our State Education Code for pupils in grades 1-12, in the disciplines of dance, music, theater and visual arts. The code does not mandate schools to follow these content standards, which leaves implementation of arts education to the discretion of each school district.**
- ❖ **Due to the efforts of parents who value arts programs, privately funded high quality programs have been maintained in wealthier school districts. But a child's access to arts education should not be predicated by where they happen to live. Until school districts have confidence that new arts education funding is ongoing, they will be reluctant to invest in hiring and training teachers. We need to secure ongoing funding for sequential, standards-based arts education for all children in grades K-12.**

Adapted from "Top 10 Things to Know about Arts Education in California" on the California Alliance for Arts Education website: www.artsed411.org

"Every child has the urge and capacity to be expressive. ...for most children the universal language of the arts is suppressed, then destroyed, in the early years of learning, because school boards consider art a frill." – Ernest L. Boyer

Did you know?

The State of California has content standards for the Visual and Performing Arts. These may be viewed at: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/vpastandards.pdf>. According to Education Code, all California students must have a course of study in the arts.

Online Advocacy Resources

Arts Education Partnership: <http://aep-arts.org/>

California Alliance for Arts Education: www.artsed411.org

California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) Arts Initiative: www.ccsesaarts.org

California State PTA SMARTS: <http://www.capta.org/sections/programs-smarts/index.cfm>

Critical Links: <http://aep-arts.org/files/publications/CriticalLinks.pdf>

Kennedy Center ArtsEdge: <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/>

When speaking with school leaders, it is critical to be prepared with facts regarding arts education.

- ❖ Use arts research and the CA State Content Standards to help strengthen your argument.
- ❖ Prepare a summary of your research that you can leave with the school leader.
- ❖ Know what programs currently are in place at the school site.
- ❖ Determine if school has an art specialist or teachers with art expertise.
- ❖ Involve the PTA, Site Council, and English Language Advisory Committee in planning process.

- ❖ Contact your local arts organization for planning ideas and costs. Or visit the California Alliance for Art Education website and view “The Insider’s Guide to Arts Education Planning.”

Local Arts Organizations

There are a variety of local arts organizations in the Sacramento region that can assist you in planning , budget, and implementing an arts education program. These organizations can also direct you to local museums and performing arts organizations that offer programs for students.

Arts Council of Placer County: <http://www.placerarts.org/>

El Dorado Arts Council: <http://www.eldoradoarts.com/>

Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission: <http://www.sacmetroarts.org/>

Sierra North Arts Project: <http://education.ucdavis.edu/cress-center/cress-professional-development/sierra-north-arts-project>

Solano County Arts Council and Creative Arts Consortium: <http://solanocreativearts.com/>

Vacaville Arts Council: <http://www.vacaarts.org/>

YoloArts (Yolo County Arts Council): <http://yoloarts.org/>

Information compiled by Janelle Davila. For more information, contact Janelle at 530-400-7426 or Janelle_davila@hotmail.com.

"The arts are fundamental resources through which the world is viewed, meaning is created, and the mind developed."

-Elliot W. Eisner

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