The Final Showcase:
Addressing School Inequalities through Performing Arts

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Ed. 200: Thematic Curriculum Project
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Introduction:

Our thematic curriculum will use the performing arts to portray important current events in the subject of Social Studies. Our main outcome will be to create critical thinkers, and expose students to the many benefits of arts programs in schools. We will attempt to both give students a creative outlet to explore the field of performing arts, as well as introduce them to the concept of project researching, and effective team work.

Context:

The setting would be a seventh grade public school classroom at McDonough Upper School in Hartford, CT. Each class period is fifty minutes long, and students will participate in this thematic unit for five consecutive days. There are four seventh grade classes at the school we will be working in. Each class is comprised of roughly twenty students. Each class will have the opportunity to participate in choosing a topic and/or event they are interested in learning about. This unit will culminate in a final performance open to the school community and parents. It is important to note, that the seventh grade students at McDonough have been re-distributed into core groups, based on reading ability (Read 180). This project will address tracking and social inequality in the classrooms. It will promote diversity in creativity, also.

Objectives:

In August of 2008, Connecticut Education Commissioner Mark McQuillian unveiled the Scientific Research Based Interventions (CTDE SRBI) Framework for Connecticut Schools. This framework opens up by providing some context on Connecticut schools: “Results of the 2008 Connecticut Mastery Test showed large gaps in [academic] performance at all grade levels rested, third through eighth…demonstrating the continued disparity in student achievement by
race in our state…in terms of percentages…the differences were 30 to 40 percent more…” (CTDE SRBI, 7). We will also use the Connecticut Framework k-12 curricular goals and standards. In this paper they will be referred to by CT CS: Connecticut Content Standard, and will have a specific standard number cited, as well. Given this framework, we have disclosed our curriculum objectives.

The first objective: Students will learn elements of the performing arts and will use these elements to effectively create their own performances. The elements will include, but are not limited to: script writing, stage placement, collaboration, voice projection, dramatic focus, awareness, body language, and stage design.

The second objective: Students will “apply research from print and non-print sources to script writing, acting, design, and directing choices” (CT CS, 5). They will essentially explore current issues/events impacting the city, state and country, respectively and will demonstrate how these issues affect their own lives. They will also explore methods of research, using important findings to create the presentation. (For example, if they choose to research Hurricane Katrina we would provide the sources: journals, websites, etc., and they would need to filter through the material to determine significant parts.)

The third objective: Students will create a script, stage set, and agree on costumes. This will not only allow for creative expression, but will also teach students the “production” work of performing, such as the work of a stage hand. This aspect of performing arts is just as important as being on stage. We will highlight the importance of team work through this objective.

Our fourth objective: Students will develop interpersonal and intrapersonal skills through the collaborative piece of the performance. As defined by Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences Theory (The multiple intelligences proposed by Gardner include: Linguistic, Musical, Logical-
Mathematical, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist. Gardner’s theories provide a unique context in determining how and why it is that students learn), interpersonal skills create “awareness of other’s feelings, emotions goals and motivations...” (Gardner, 2). Intrapersonal skills, however, create “awareness of one’s own feelings, emotions, goals and motivations” (Gardner, 2). These skills will allow students to value the opinion of their peers as well as their own opinions and goals while creating their projects and essentially break any barriers created by social inequality. In this classroom, everyone is equal. They will all contribute equally – since social inequalities such as socio-economic status, will not be problematic here. By giving students the opportunity to grow in a non-judgmental classroom setting, we will be promoting and producing well-rounded students who respect diversity.

At the culmination of the unit, students will “reflect on and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of their own and others’ work using specific criteria” (CT CS 5). This reflection helps illustrate the events’ relevance to their own lives or impact on the Hartford community. The audience will be informed about current events from a personal perspective.

**Activities:**

Please note: this curriculum is to be used at your discretion, according to your class dynamics. Our curriculum provides a wide array of activities, and attempts to cover many objectives. The curriculum is meant to provide students a creative outlet, and teach them about performing arts/current events, subsequently. We are aware that some classrooms, according to size, and pace of classes, may get more or less work done. We encourage the instructor to use activities of the curriculum proposed which are most conducive to their classroom atmosphere.
Monday will include a general introduction to performing arts and the different elements they will be using. About ten minutes can be spent playing a theatre improvisation game to allow students to interact with each other in a more personal way and become comfortable sharing ideas and taking risks. Each of the four classes will choose a topic area: Natural Disaster, Human Rights, Political Elections, or Social Controversy. Since there is limited computer access in the schools, students will be given resources such as journal entries, articles, newspapers and books, in both Spanish and English. Students will then look through the available resources to gather details about their topic from two different sources. They should each summarize both of the two sources, taking note of people, places, and important moments. They will be evaluated on the criteria of the Connecticut writing framework. (CT CS, 3) This segment should last about half an hour, allowing the last ten minutes of class to be a group discussion about the findings and remaining questions.

Students may continue to research on their own or informally interview parents about their knowledge of the subject. This would be an interesting dialogue for the parent and child to have regarding current events and impact at home. The students should be reminded to take notes on any additional findings and bring in physical copies of information, if possible.

According to the Connecticut SRBI Framework, “For writing, 73 percent of white students met the state goal, compared to 42 percent of black and Hispanic students [combined]…” (CDE SRBI, 7) The special emphasis on writing and reading is not only because they are essential for this project; furthermore, we will attempt to address the discrepancy in the percentages according to the SRBI framework, and prepare students for the reading and writing portions of the Connecticut Mastery Test, through this project.
On Tuesday, students will finalize the key components, characters, locations, and timeline (if applicable) of the particular event they choose. They will be provided with examples of short stories in the form of scripts or dialogues and hence begin the initial stages of their own script writing. This may be in the form of: deciding on the sequence of events that will take place in the actual performance and determining the influence of each character within the storyline. They may assign/choose characters to portray but each student must speak at some point in the performance and play a role in script writing. They may draw diagrams or meet at different corners of the room to claim their own work space.

They will then agree on two elements of the performing arts which they need to incorporate into their performance (ex. Movement, dialogue, interactions, stage placement/usage, voice projection, dramatic focus/awareness, body language, stage design, props, breathe, confidence, costume, performer-audience relationship). Although each element should be attempted as part of the performance only two will be the focus per group. At this point, the teacher may spend a few minutes discussing the performance day and the evaluation process to give students an understanding of the major goals for achievement. They should look at the evaluation sheets to see exactly what the criteria they will be judged on and discuss among their groups ways to accomplish meeting the criteria.

On Wednesday students will complete and finalize their 10-minute scripts, in preparation for the performance. Characters should be assigned and interactions decided upon. Each group should run through the skit amongst themselves, making alterations to the script as necessary. This should include improvisation of character interactions or movements, taking into account the two performance elements they have already agreed to focus on. Students are not required to
memorize their scripts, but they should be very familiar with the storyline events, dialogue, and their particular character’s role.

Students may also choose to discuss scenery or simplistic prop ideas in the last ten minutes of class. They can make a list of the ideas and materials needed but should narrow down the itinerary to the most essential elements to the common good of the story line. The teacher may assist students in narrowing down this list by prompting them to explain the purpose of each additional piece and the possibility of alternatives.

On Thursday, students will design the minimalistic sets (using props, if needed) as well as decide on (feasible) costumes for each character/participant. They can use posters to establish time or location changes, construction paper or cardboard to build 3D objects, and practice on stage. It will be a class decision if presentations will be held on the school stage, in the front of the classroom, or outside the building in the playground etc. Students will also hand in the summaries for each source, as part of the evaluation. These creative activities will be followed by a reflective free-write and class discussion for the last twenty minutes. Students write about how their particular event influences their own lives, families, or community. Then they should write about the impact/importance of the event on the nation as a whole. These reflections will be shared aloud to the class.

Friday is dedicated to the presentations themselves. Students will perform their events for a live audience (the rest of the class and teacher) and immediately following the performance, participate in a post-show discussion. They will answer questions from the audience regarding their topic or the presentation elements. Questions and comments should reflect the event/story, dialogue, process of creating, compliments on what was done well, and suggestions about what
could be improved upon if the performance was to be done again. Performers may also pose questions to the audience about reaction.

After all the performances and critique sessions are complete the class can then conclude together on the successes and challenges each group had to face to accomplish this task. They may also state their own self evaluations.

**Evaluation**

Throughout this curriculum we employ multiple methods of evaluation, as tools to create better projects, increase cooperation, and have students contribute their own opinions. Given the employment of cooperative learning as the basis of this curriculum, it is important the teacher play a minimal role in the production of the performance and final evaluation of the students. The students need to understand the importance of each member in the group, including how they weigh in on the decisions made and efforts to complete the project.

During the final performances each member of the audience will be given a survey-evaluation (Supplementary Attachment 1) to complete. The surveyors will look specifically at the performance elements and script content itself, critiquing the group as a whole. Similarly, each member of the group will be given an evaluation to reflect on the groups’ work collectively (to be handed in to the teacher). This will be used primarily to see how well the groups worked within the classroom and to gauge their reaction to cooperative learning (Supplementary Attachment 2). Students will also be required to evaluate themselves and reflect on their own work (Supplementary Attachment 3). They will have the opportunity to use these evaluations at the post-performance wrap-up activities and/or discussion.
Our resources will consist of well-known informational resources such as Times Magazine and the New York Times. Although not always “kid-friendly” our seventh graders would have the opportunity to look through various materials such as these higher level articles and entries to find information that is pertinent to them, such as bullying, school system reform, and natural disasters, for example. We have also included resources such as the National Geographic Kids website and Scholastic’s global literacy campaign website. These resources are particularly beneficial to us because they are provided in both Spanish and English. Please see below for more details:

To address current events, analysis of stories impacting students, and families, and developments on policies and laws, as well as local news, the following sources are appropriate. Many of these sources provide bilingual article translations.


If your students are looking to learn more about a certain country, geography or animals, the following source is appropriate. The source is a bilingual source.

If your students are looking for more information on performing arts specifically, the instructor may assign chapters (and appropriate page numbers) in this source.


If students are interested in learning more about the national illiteracy rates, and more information on reading and learning campaigns, the following source will be helpful. The source is a bilingual source.


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**Curriculum Sources:**


“Using Scientific Research-Based Interventions: Improving Education for all Students.”

Attachment #1

Audience Evaluation
To be completed by students while viewing performances.

Group: ________________________

Please rate your classmates on a scale of 1 to 3 (3 being the best)

Overall Presentation…………………………………………………………...1 2 3

What do you think the group did well?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What should they improve/change?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What was the main point of the event/issue?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Attachment #2

Group / Self Evaluation

Name: ______________________

What do you think your group did well?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What should you improve/change?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How or why is the issue or topic you chose important?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What did you learn through this project? What would you have done better?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What overall grade do you deserve on this project? __________
Attachment # 3

Rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teamwork</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Minimal Participation in group work.</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Participated irregularly. Attempted to contribute some original ideas.</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Active participation. Good collaboration with teammates.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Participation during performance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Minimal participation during performance.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Inadequate incorporation of performing arts elements into performance.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Implemented elements well. Understood and took on an active role during performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Expressed little to no creativity throughout the project.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Attempted to contribute creative, original ideas.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Contributed many creative and original ideas to the project. Accepted and supported the ideas of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content of Script/ Use of class time (research periods)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Script was poorly prepared. Inadequate or inaccurate information was provided. (Missing major components of topic) Student did not take advantage of research time.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Script shows some structure. Topic is missing some details. Student showed effort during research time.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Script is completed and fully prepared. Most (or all) of the major details regarding the topic are included. Student effectively used the research time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Summaries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Summary was poorly prepared. Inadequate or inaccurate information was provided. (Missing major components of topic)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Summary shows some research. Effort is evident. Lacks some details.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Summary is well prepared. Most (or all) of the major details regarding the topic are included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Discussion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Did not actively participate or contribute during discussion. Did not understand topic they were performing.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Participated during discussion to some extent. Basic understanding of topic – could relate significance of topic, minimally.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Actively participated during discussion. Clear understanding of topic and was able to relate the significance of the topic to own life well.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total score: _______/ 18
### Five Day Activity Forecast:

**The Final Showcase: Looking Ahead...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students will perform their events for the rest of the class and teacher.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immediately following each group performance, participate in a post-show discussion about audience reaction. (Groups will answer questions from the audience regarding their topic or the presentation elements. Questions and comments should reflect the event/story, dialogue, process of creating, compliments on what was done well, and suggestions about what could be improved upon).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Introduction to performing arts elements**
- Theatre improvisation game (icebreaker – 10 minutes)
- Determining groups by topic area: Natural Disaster, Human Rights, Political Elections, or Social Controversy.
- Explore provided resources in both Spanish and English to gather details about their topic from at least two sources.
- Summarize important ideas of each source!!
- Students may continue to research on their own or informally interview parents about their knowledge / perspective of the subject.

**Finalize the key components, characters, locations, and timeline (if applicable).**
- View examples of short stories, scripts, or dialogues and begin initial stages of script writing.
- Delegate responsibilities for during performance (who is performing on stage & who is a stage hand at what moments).
- Incorporate two elements of performing arts (ex. Movement, dialogue, interactions, stage use, voice projection, focus & awareness, body language, stage design, props, breathe, costume, confidence, performer-audience relationship).
- Look at the evaluation sheets to understand judging criteria and discuss ways to accomplish meeting the criteria.

**Complete and finalize the 10-minute scripts, in preparation for the performance.**
- Run through script once to get familiarize students.
- Student groups may also choose to discuss scenery or simplistic prop ideas.
- Make a list of essential materials, props, etc.
- They’ll need to support the story line. (The teacher may assist students in narrowing down this list by prompting them to explain the purpose of each additional piece and the possibility of alternatives.)

**Design the minimalist sets or props and discuss costumes for each character/participant.**
- (They can use posters to establish time or location changes, construction paper or cardboard to build 3D objects)
- It will be a class decision if presentations will be held on the school stage, in the front of the classroom, or outside the building in the playground etc.
- Practice skit on 'stage'
- Hand in summaries for sources for evaluation.
- Following activities, have reflective free-write (how their event impacts their own lives, families, community, nation.)
- These reflections will be shared aloud to the class in general discussion.