Using Music and Art to Reach Language Minority Students  
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Rationale

The place of Fine Arts in education has long been a center of debate. Fine Arts’ contribution to student learning has always been difficult to prove in standardized tests. In the 21st century, the scope of education has broadened to now include the Fine Arts as an important area of study.

Educators, such as Howard Gardner, have opened our eyes to the importance of teaching the Arts independently as well as using them as a teaching tool to assist in other areas of curriculum. Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983), strongly supports the teaching of the Arts because the Arts touch all different types of intelligence that a child may relate to (linguistic, musical, logical, spatial, kinesthetic, and personal). Bloom’s Taxonomy, (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, syntheses, and evaluation) happens automatically, as children are actively engaged in learning the Arts and thus higher order thinking skills are used. Music allows students to explore and express themselves internally, and provides students with a sense of beauty that is essential to all human beings (Roter, 1981). As Loyacono explains,

Art education is basic because it extends our language. It enlarges the store of images we use. It makes our understanding discriminating and comprehensive (Loyacono, 1993).

After two years of successful cross-curricular units that incorporated Fine Arts and Language Arts at the fifth grade level, this year the Fine Arts department decided to develop a unit in conjunction with the ESOL/HILT specialists and general education classroom teachers that targeted a younger age group. We choose to develop a unit for second grade that was based around the music and art curriculum and used it as a knowledge base for language arts activities with the classroom teachers and the ESOL/Hilt specialist. “The Color Factory,” a musical, used songs and drama to teach about the importance of colors. Students were also involved in creating costumes and backdrops. This gave them ownership and application of the art objectives that were being taught.

Goals

The goals for the music component were for students to be able to demonstrate understanding of the elements of music (rhythm, dynamics, melody, tempo, texture, pitch, harmony and form). The goals for the art component where to give students a thorough understanding of the use of color, (mixing, tints, shades, creating mood, and contrasting colors). This lends an opportunity
for language minority students to be able to effectively communicate through the expressive uses of color and music.

Art and Music cultivate an environment that enables students to achieve personal enrichment through preparation and participation in the culminating performance, and give language minority students an opportunity to develop English proficiency in a non-threatening environment.

**Approach**

Working within the Arlington County Art SOL’s a series of lessons were developed to give the students a basic knowledge of the primary and secondary colors. Then we used that information to create a variety of projects that focused on mixing tints shades and the use of color to create mood. The art department prepared students to gain an understanding of what they were also performing within the musical

The music department focused on music and drama. First, the students listened to the prerecorded full performance musical on CD and followed along with the score as best they could. Students were used to following written music in their books, but this was the first time students had a complete musical score. Once they heard the musical, students were given the choice of deciding what area they would like to participate in. Due to the wide variety of characters, every student had the opportunity to be on stage, however, students could choose to have a silent or speaking role. Every student participated in singing. The musical, consisting of seven songs, was about primary colors learning the lesson of having to work together to create new colors. Students examined how the elements of music affected the mood and message of the song.

**Results**

The students were anxious and excited to perform their show. They truly had a sense of ownership since they were the stars and they created the costumes and props to be used. Students showed a greater understanding of how colors work together to create a broader palate. Learning was evident by the way in which students worked on the backdrops and developed ideas for their character’s costumes in and out of the art classroom. Students were fascinated by the use of form, rhythm and melody by the composer. The second language students loved the songs and sang just as well as the English-speaking students. They wanted to sing the songs over and over again. The results in the changes of our student’s behavior were fascinating, as well. Students who were shy in the beginning, had a chance to, and did, shine on stage. Many students, who had limited English, wanted to and did perform a speaking line on stage. Students, who would never have thought to try to be on stage, rose to the challenge. They were excited to come to school and by their newfound connection between music and art. The students were excited to be putting together such a performance and they took complete ownership of that performance. The musical became a knowledge-based experience that the classroom and ESOL/HILT teachers later
used as a writing prompt in language arts. The written product showed student understanding self-satisfaction of what they had accomplished.

**Reflection**

The Arts are a universal language. Every culture uses the Arts in some way, and children respond to music and art. Children learn more when they are in a non-threatening environment. Music and art teaches children to work together and provides an atmosphere that encourages communication. To produce their performance, students had to work closely with classmates, learn to trust one another and build friendships. Students discover who they are through the arts and self-esteem increased as they are successful in their artistic creations. Music is the beginning of communication. The Virginia Music Standards of Learning (1999) states, “the goal of music education is to empower students to experience music as a source of personal enrichment, as a vehicle for expression of emotions, as an intellectual discipline. Students may relate music to foreign languages through music terminology and some texts, and through musical expression, understand the history of various cultures.” Visual arts naturally encourage students to be risk-takers and creative thinkers in any language.

**Reference List**


