


SUMMARY OF PCCY APRIL 29, 2010 ARTS FORUM: BREAKING CULTURAL BARRIERS THROUGH THE ARTS

Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY)
invites you to a forum:



Breaking Cultural Barriers Through the Arts

A chance for practitioners and policy makers to share stories and recommendations on how students in our public schools can build connections and break down cultural barriers through the arts.

Thursday, April 29, 2010
4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

United Way Building
1709 Benjamin Franklin Parkway
Philadelphia

Forum sponsored by:
William Penn Foundation and
HEALTH PARTNERS FOUNDATION

Info / R.S.V.P. by April 27:
gretchenelise@pccy.org
www.pccy.org
215 563 5848 x 22



Trong Tran, Nick White and John Russino (S. Philly High) look on as fellow Boogie Tunez member Juan Luna breaks

Summary

On April 29, 2010, Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY), the region's leading child advocacy organization, hosted a Forum on *Breaking Cultural Barriers Through the Arts*, which provided 65 students, educators, artists, administrators and advocates the opportunity to:



Students, educators, artists, administrators and advocates gathered at PCCY's Breaking Barriers Through the Arts forum on April 29, 2010

- share successful examples of how the arts are being used in Philadelphia schools to introduce students to varied cultures and to promote intercultural connections and collaborations, and
- identify barriers to sustaining and expanding these efforts and recommendations to overcome these barriers.

The Breaking Cultural Barriers Through the Arts Forum grew out of a PCCY report released October 2009 entitled “Listen To My Story...Tell Me Yours: Breaking Cultural Barriers Through the Arts,” which showcased schools and programs that have forged intercultural student connections through creative and performing arts. Concerned about ethnic tensions in many neighborhoods and persistent student-on-student ethnic violence in several schools, PCCY hoped that this report would shine a spotlight on innovative ways of fostering student understanding and respect and support through arts learning. In addition PCCY hoped to highlight the opportunity that the 180 new arts teachers hired by the District since 2008 have to promote intercultural harmony through the arts.

The Forum: Interactive Performances and Discussion

The Forum opened with an intricate hip-hop dance performance by a group of four students from South Philadelphia High School and La Salle University who met through their common interest in hip-hop and became close friends sharing their diverse cultural perspectives (black, white, Latino and Asian). An audience Q & A session with the performers followed. After brief comments from PCCY’s Executive Director Shelly Yanoff, Education Specialist Dennis Barnebey and Picasso Project Coordinator Gretchen Elise Walker, Magda Martinez (Director of Education & Community Engagement at Fleisher Art Memorial) led the next segment.

Magda facilitated a partner hand drawing exercise which triggered conversations between pairs of participants. Magda’s exercise demonstrated how a simple arts learning activity, accompanied by a nuanced series of guided questions, can open communication between strangers about each other’s personality and cultural background, breaking barriers in the meantime.

“It was satisfying to talk while drawing. We learned a lot about each other and our background, and our conversation spread to the whole table. It built a common thread among us all.”

The Forum then turned to extended small group discussions facilitated by some of Philadelphia’s key teaching artists, arts educators and administrators. Participants explored successful strategies that have been implemented in schools and neighborhoods around the city to cross cultural divides. Next, they identified obstacles that must be overcome to sustain and expand these efforts.



Magda Martinez leads pairs of participants through an exercise in figure drawing, connection and diversity

Breaking Cultural Barriers: Successful Examples in Philadelphia Public Schools

Classroom Activities

- Students draw their hands using the colors of the flags of the countries from which their families come and then present one cultural tradition.
- During African American History Month, students search for elements of Latin heritage that are represented in varied African cultures and depict them in posters and reports.
- Students in dance class learn how break dancing provides a common language and ability to communicate without words across cultural boundaries.
- A student draws typical scenes from his/her own culture to discuss with a student from a different culture.
- Students use geography lessons to study cultural patterns and migrations and traditional crafts.
- Students debate the positive/negative values of rap music and graffiti.



Curry Bailey and Jordan Harris converse about each other's culture while drawing each other's hands

“Students themselves are our most powerful assets and allies in promoting dialogue and creating change. They’re all into crossover music and dance and dress. They don’t share a lot of adult hang-ups about other people’s different ways.”

Performances and Exhibits

- Student work fills the bulletin boards of day care centers and schools, making the students feel like real artists.
- Students from diverse cultural backgrounds represent their school in the Puerto Rican Day parade.
- Students create posters to combat bullying, cultural stereotyping and conflict.
- A senior project explores a cultural theme through the arts and is presented to a panel including teachers, artists and ethnic



“I Come From...” posters decorate the room courtesy of Spiral Q Puppet Theater

organization leaders.

- Students design and paint murals which tell the story of the diverse cultures in their schools.
- Students use words, art and music to explore behavioral health issues and promote understanding of mental health problems.

“Creating a talent show or art exhibit builds an environment where successful dialogue can flourish. Cultural harmony can’t happen without dialogue.”

Mentoring/Professional development

- Older students teach younger students.
- Experienced student artists teach novices.
- Art teachers mentor visiting artists and vice versa.
- Art teachers collaborate with basic skills teachers in integrating the arts into their lessons.



Germaine Ingram leads one of many small group discussions with Danielle Gallagher, Naomi Leapheart and others

“The arts are such a great way for people to help each other. And we need to help each other learn our cultural similarities and differences.”

Community linkages

- A community-based Arabic music ensemble from Al-Bustan Seeds of Culture expands to a diverse group whose participants develop friendships and want to learn more about each other.
- The Mural Arts Program convenes community dialogues in planning public art projects which portray varied cultures, sexual minorities, and other marginalized groups.



- A Germantown church assembles 125 students and 5 adults who meet every Friday for food and music from different cultures.
- Bainbridge House, an interfaith organization in South Philadelphia, writes grants to support school/community arts projects.

In foreground, Rachel Marianno leads a discussion with Claudia Tucker-Keto, Gerald Branch, Paul Fink, Liz Grimaldi (with 3-week-old daughter), Tiye Thompson and Deb Weiner

Obstacles to Sustaining and Scaling Up Success

Participants cited barriers to increasing the work of breaking cultural barriers through the arts, and expressed what they need to overcome these barriers:

District arts educators need

- opportunities to work with their colleagues to shed light on how arts can be connected with the core curriculum
- access to data to spread awareness of how the arts can build basic skills and, in fact, help students become more engaged in school and successful in PSSAs
- recognition of their importance despite the District-wide focus on standardized testing
- support in building bridges to community arts resources
- to build bridges within the school itself to gain a community of colleagues within each school that engages all students in the arts
- professional development in cultural diversity of music and art to expand their repertoire
- more funding for supplies and partnerships



ArtsRising's Varissa McMickens shares impressions

- creative colleagues and administrations

Teaching artists need

- professional development in classroom management to ensure that their talents are not diverted by disruptive student behavior
- collaboration with schools to introduce students to community arts resources

Students need

- to have a chance to be heard from their own perspective, rather than be objects of adults' agendas
- exposure and accessibility to a wider slice of the city to address their lack of familiarity with diverse cultures. "Most kids only travel 6 blocks from their home, so they first encounter true diversity in school, where it hits them hard."
- more networks to plug into to stay connected to other youth with a positive outlook via the arts. Arts are a pathway to success, i.e. college.
- recognition and support for their arts talents at the same level and frequency that is routinely accorded to athletes: a system of Arts Teams supported by the District was suggested



Amalfi Ramirez Finnerty-Giotto and Mary Pat Coyle listen as Nathalie Baker films



A student shared, "It's 'WACK' to strive and achieve—we need to reverse the reverse psychology of 'haters' in school and neighborhoods who 'hate on' kids who want to achieve"

John Russino and Shelly Yanoff exchange impressions about how each holds his / her hand

Parents/Families need

- exposure to the arts to encourage their children to pursue artistic expression
- interaction with parents from different ethnic backgrounds so they will encourage their children to pursue intercultural experiences.
- avenues to gain interest in students' academics—but this can be achieved by hosting student performances where families eagerly get engaged.
- support to combat anger and economic pressures



Michelle Ortiz and Maneesha Sane render each others' hands

“Parents who may not know how to support their children’s academic development will come to school when their kids are excited about being in a concert or play or art exhibit.”

Legislators need

- opportunities to see how the arts contribute to students' academic success and the community's economic development
- encouragement to invest in the arts as a basic need of all children and families



Tessie Varthas shares the district's efforts to use the arts to break cultural barriers between students

Next Steps

What will change as a result of the Breaking Cultural Barriers Through the Arts Forum? Several participants noted in their written evaluations of the Forum that they planned to follow up in their schools by sharing information with the school leadership team, by broadening the cultural repertoire of their arts teaching and performance, and by reaching out to new cultural groups to become involved with their students. One participant will set up a mini-committee in her school to encourage the integration of arts into the core curriculum.

Several attendees plan to set up teacher workshops to reinforce the importance of the arts, and at least one teacher was inspired by the forum to set up a new artist residency at her school.

PCCY and ArtsRising will strategically attempt to address the obstacles identified at the Forum beginning in Summer 2010 in collaboration with the District and the arts community as it continues an ambitious arts advocacy agenda supporting arts teachers and collaborations between schools and the arts community PCCY carries out its arts advocacy work within the scope of ArtsRising, an initiative that aims to improve and expand equitable access to arts education for children in the Greater Philadelphia region, and PCCY's own Picasso Project, an initiative increasing support for arts education in Philadelphia's public schools. A fall PCCY 2010 report and action plan suggesting policy changes to support collaborations between artists, arts organizations and schools is planned.



Magda Martinez discusses obstacles to breaking barriers with Trong Tran, Hazami El Sayed, Fran Connelly and Linda Porch

The Breaking Cultural Barriers Through the Arts Forum was supported by the William Penn Foundation and

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