

Parkwood Intervention Program

Dramatic arts are often not seen as a sustainable form of non-traditional learning in the classroom. It seems it is kept as an experience for those that can afford after-school curricular activities or who are specifically gifted in the performing arts. The trouble with this is that the performing arts requires *many* skill sets, not just the gregarious or extroverted enthusiasts. It also suggests that the arts are not necessary for intellectual growth. We believe dramatic arts, used in conjunction with other necessary academic material, can bolster student confidence and ultimately their academic performance.



Students who excel get recognition for their successes and those who greatly struggle with academics receive attention for their hardship. What about the students in the middle of these two extremes? What if we could step in and encourage these students testing in the middle-of-the-road to reinvigorate their learning and experience in school? Would it help them get over the hump and into the category of excelling? These students are often tired of school because they don't feel like they achieve well in it. How can we offer them the same academic curriculum they're getting in the classroom but present it to them in a new way?

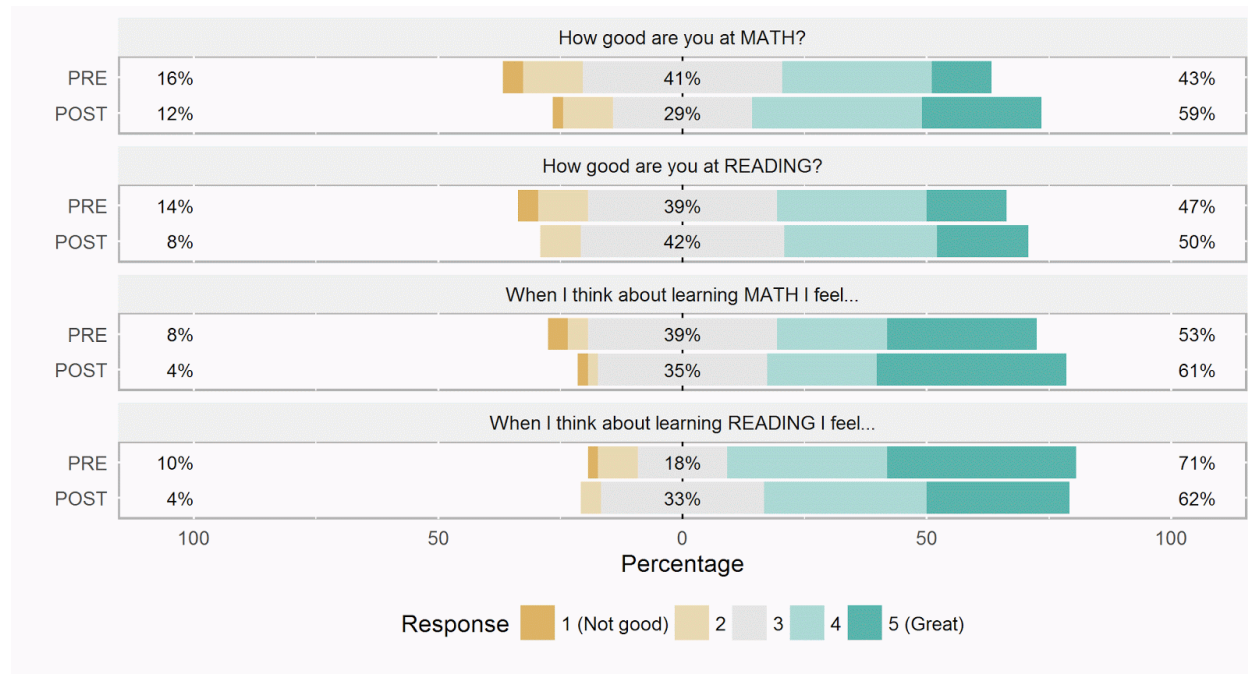
Shoreline Schools Foundation and foundry10 partnered to create an original program at Parkwood Elementary School Spring Break 2016 where we joined creative/dramatic arts with traditional CORE curriculum for 5-days over Spring Break. Students testing at the cusp of being able to pass the SBAC in April were invited to the week-long intervention. In this program, dedicated teachers were paired with passionate teaching artists for ten full hours of preparation in the months leading up to the week-long experience. We found that providing this amount of time for creating imaginative curriculum between

two different talented and capable educators would provide the unique context for a week-long break camp where traditional classroom curriculum could be experienced in an artful way.

Teachers expressed enthusiasm for the professional development and the time to try new and more creative approaches to the material they normally feel pressured to teach so rapidly. Additionally, the students' attendance was almost at 100% all week and their verbal comments about the week followed suit. And it's no wonder! Students transformed their classroom into kelp forests and wrote a rock song they played on air guitars all citing facts about kelp. Fourth grade students solved a crime scene where a stuffed animal owl was ultimately rescued. Sixth graders went to the moon and made recipes for dehydrated foods. Fifth grade used hip hop as class breaks and used boat-making and bingo to learn fractions.

Students verbally and emotionally expressed excitement about coming to school and even about the subjects of Math and English. Several students commented that usually they don't like math but now they do...or "it's okay, now. I like it this week." A group of students expressed concern that "other kids at other schools don't get to have this same spring break camp." One student admitted, "we feel ready for the SBAC tests now, right guys?" The group of friends this particular student was asking, all nodded their heads in agreement. But more than getting ready for the state-standard tests, we were interested in providing a program that bolsters their confidence in what they already know and will allow them to catch up to the upper echelon of their peers in their particular grade.

Through our research, surveys showed students improvement in their perception of their skills in the arts as well as in their actual performance of their academic skill in just one week. Although the results were not extreme, the gradual increase was the vast majority.



This graphic shows student perceptions and attitudes towards math and reading before and after the dramatic arts intervention. We observed small positive shifts in self-described math and reading ability and in self-described attitudes towards math and reading.

Renita Ng, the 6th graders teacher for this Spring Break camp put it well, “All students according to pre and post tests made growth although the students did not reach mastery in a week. The students really benefitted from a new and a different way of learning by approaching concepts with an out of the box thinking, having a smaller class size, co-teaching and collaboration by very skilled individuals, integrating the arts, and applying real life activities to teach various concepts. Students were constantly amazed by their own abilities once trust was established and found a fresh way of practicing academic concepts. Students viewed learning as fun and wished traditional school was just like spring break camp. During the day students were active, engaged, were encouraged to work with each other to accomplish tasks, and best of all students found themselves liking school especially since academics were generally not their strong suit.”

Teachers cited this as professional development and a positive experience for them. Third grade teacher, Renee Iverson, wrote, “Having the artists come in and co-teach for the week was wonderful! I learned many strategies and "tricks" for adding these things into my instruction. They brought in new ideas and their craft added to instruction for all students. I also loved having a small group of kids in the class. I was able to teach in new and different ways that is not allowed on a daily basis, because of time, size of class and requirements by the state and district. I loved it!”

The overwhelming response to this program was positive both from students, parents, and education faculty. Our plan is to follow up with the teachers throughout the year and see if they can use any assistance in further implementing the creative practices in their traditional classrooms, as well as looking into further sustainability measures for the break camp itself in the years to follow.



Students were challenged creatively and academically through this week long pilot program. They were able to engage with the arts within the framework of traditional academic material, providing a perhaps more transferable skillset for both the arts and STEM academics. Student and teacher perception of the arts and their place in the arts may be more open and hopefully the academics that are most challenging have become more accessible to students. Whether you have access to dramatic arts training or teaching artists, it doesn't seem to matter as much as time, space, and inspired teachers in the classroom who can with the right tools, engage students in an imaginative way when teaching traditional classroom curriculum. The hope is that the arts can continue to be brought into the classroom as a necessary tool for learning, which based on the evidence of this program, it seems having time, creative space, and inspired teachers in the classroom can make for that tool to be put to use whether it's with specifically dramatic arts or not.