

Creating Our World: An Art Program for Alternative School Students

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A partnership between the Morehead State University Art Education Program and the Lake County Alternative School (LCAS) (pseudonyms are used for the school name and county where the school is located) was established in Fall 2011. This ongoing collaboration provides opportunities for Art Education students to teach art and work with at-risk middle and high school students. It also allows LCAS students, who otherwise have no coursework in art, the opportunity to work creatively with visual art media. In addition, Art Education students work toward meeting the Kentucky State Teacher Education field experience hour requirement of 200 contact hours in schools prior to clinical practice. LCAS students apply this art experience toward earning humanities credit.

CASE STUDY

Setting

The Lake County Alternative School is a public alternative middle (grades 6-8) and high school (grades 9-12) serving students in Lake County, which is located in the Appalachian region of Eastern Kentucky. Lake County is largely rural and thirty percent of the population lives below the poverty line (U.S. Department of Com-

merce Census Bureau, 2014). Typically, there are approximately fifteen students in the middle school class and fifteen students in the high school class. Even though some students attend the LCAS long term, much of the student population shifts frequently as students are transitioned back into the mainstream student population at the high school or the middle school. Some students also drop out. The LCAS is located in a decommissioned middle school building, which lacks amenities such as up-to-date, reliable technology and classrooms equipped for experiential study in many required subjects including the arts and sciences. One advantage to working in this building is the extraordinary amount of available space to make art and store it. There is a designated classroom to store art, a designated room for art with the high school students, and the middle school students can be moved from their classroom to the hallways and cafeteria for projects that require more space. Art supplies are purchased with funding from the Morehead State University Center for Regional Engagement and Department of Art and Design.

LCAS Students

Alternative schools can be “last chance” teaching and learning environments for students (Morrissette, 2011) and are typically viewed as, “places for students whose behaviors are disruptive, deviant, and dysfunctional” (Kim, 2011, p. 78). This is an apt description for LCAS students. This school serves students who have experienced a variety of difficulties in school and in their lives outside of school. Students are placed in this setting because they are at-risk of dropping out for issues including truancy, teenage parenthood, involvement in the criminal justice system and lack of motivation. Male students consistently outnumber female students. For instance, there are currently two female students and ten male students in the middle school group. There are five female students and eleven male students in the high school group. While keeping exact statistics is difficult with a shifting student population, the LCAS lead teacher reports only one student currently attending does not qualify for free or reduced meals.

Intentions and Goals

The goals for this program are two-fold because they address the learning experiences of both pre-service art teachers (referred to as student-teachers) and students who attend the LCAS. Relationship building is foundational for both groups.

The primary goals for student-teachers include the development of empathic and inclusive teaching, receptivity and responsiveness to the individual experiences and needs of LCAS students, and the creation of meaningful art experiences that take these needs into account. Student-teachers work in teams of 2-5. Each team works

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