

Promising Practices Series: Curriculum Integration

Center for School Success



Center for School Success Promising Practices Series

College Preparation

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Each publication in this series includes a brief overview of research relating to the practice featured, descriptions of one or more schools using the practice, and resources for finding more information. For access to a library of materials that schools have created in relation to the practices, visit our Center for School Success website at www.newvisions.org/schoolsuccess.

To get the most information about these practices, we encourage you to visit the schools. You will find school contact information listed within each publication. We have also developed a Guide to School Visits (see Appendix) to assist you in arranging and planning a school visit.

For more information about New Visions for Public Schools and our programs, please visit our main Web site at www.newvisions.org.

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Center for School Success Promising Practices Series

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Center for School Success Promising Practices Series: Curriculum Integration
By Dr. Josephine Imbimbo and Naomi Knopf

Acknowledgments

A special thanks to all the people who contributed to the development of this series: Maud Abeel, Tracey Marie Allen, Velma Bowen, Vivian Brady, Lili Brown, Drew Dunphy, Maggie Eng, Molly Hershey, Jossie O’Neill, Eileen Plaza, Sarah Ruegger, Leanne Shimabukuro, Michael Webb, and Alisha Yadali.

New Visions would like to especially thank the principals and teachers who contributed their valuable time to help us capture the stories of their schools. Their dedication and hard work are the reasons we have many exemplary schools from which others can learn.

These publications have been produced with the generous support of The Atlantic Philanthropies and The Clark Foundation.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Promising Practices Series! This series will introduce you to some innovative New York City public schools and the instructional practices they use to help students learn and achieve. The series is intended for anyone who is or wants to be involved in improving schools, from administrators and teachers to parents and community partners. Our goal is to support people doing the challenging work of school development, and our message to you is: “You are not alone!”

There are many New York City public school teachers and administrators who have worked hard to develop instructional practices that help their students succeed. We want to provide opportunities for you to learn from them. Our goal is not to offer “models” to replicate. Rather, we want to provide information on the experiences of a wide range of schools in order to stimulate thinking and innovation. Some of the schools featured in this series have existed for less than five years, while others first opened more than 15 years ago. Regardless of their age, they are all works-in-progress, a distinguishing characteristic of effective learning communities. They have all had to face the many demands of an urban educational system -- from changes in policy and funding to staff shortages -- and these are reflected in the how they have modified their practices throughout the years.

This publication focuses on curriculum integration. Integrative curriculum focuses on a theme or themes upon which two or more disciplines is organized. Curriculum integration has been proposed as a way of organizing the life skills, or “common learnings,” considered essential for citizens in a democracy. The curriculum is organized around real-life problems and issues significant to adolescents and adults, applying pertinent content and skills from various subject areas or disciplines. The goal is to reflect the interdependent real world and provide greater understanding than could be obtained by looking at the parts separately. There are three schools featured in this publication—two middle schools and a high school. Each school approached its development of integrative curriculum differently to reflect its particular instructional philosophy, school mission and capacity.

New Visions for Public Schools is the largest education reform organization dedicated to improving the quality of education children receive in New York City’s public schools. Working with the public and private sectors, New Visions develops programs and policies to energize teaching and learning and raise the level of student achievement. New Visions started the Center for School Success (CSS) in 1999 to document and disseminate innovative educational practices demonstrated by New Visions’ schools that hold promise for increasing student achievement throughout New York City. The success of these schools should serve as examples that New York City public schools, serving the full range of students in New York City, can work.

CRITERIA FOR PROMISING PRACTICE

A school's instructional model should aspire to meet the following criteria in order to be considered a "Promising Practice."

1. Curriculum integration is consistent with the school's mission. There are clear and specific goals for the integrative curriculum and they are described in the school's official plan (e.g., Comprehensive Education Plan).
2. A broad-based concept, theme, or essential question that goes across two or more discipline areas is the driving force of the curriculum. The curriculum engages students in the "big ideas" of a discipline or disciplines, encompasses critical skills, and fosters habits of mind that will produce lifelong learners.
3. The curriculum has carefully conceived design features: a scope and sequence, a cognitive taxonomy to encourage thinking skills, behavioral indicators of attitudinal change, and a solid evaluation scheme.
4. Staff are sufficiently supported to implement curriculum through common scheduling of prep time, professional development, and control over resources. Three to four weekly meetings of at least 30 minutes each is recommended.
5. Student scheduling is consistent with goals for integrating curriculum (e.g., there is block programming, or teachers teach the same set of students).
6. The curriculum is aligned to the standards in each of the disciplines involved. There is a process in place for teachers to examine the standards within their discipline and share them with their peers in other disciplines. Together they determine the overlap of knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that cross-cut their disciplines.
7. Sufficient time has been provided to pilot, evaluate, and modify curriculum units.
8. Teachers have sufficient autonomy to design, shape, and modify the curriculum according to their students' needs.
9. There are sufficiently rich resources to support the curriculum.
10. Students are engaged in the curriculum. Students have input into identifying topics, developing questions of study, planning the inquiry, assigning tasks, selecting and gathering resources and information, and developing the assessments.
11. Parents are informed and understand the curriculum. They know what their children will be expected to know and do, and how they will be assessed.
12. A variety of assessments (formal and informal) are incorporated into the curriculum to determine what students know and can do.

EXEMPLARY CURRICULUM INTEGRATION AT . . .

I.S. 30

Linda Viggiano Guarneri, Principal
415 Ovington Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11209
718.491.5684

Year Started: Fall 1997
Enrollment: 309 Students
Grades: 6th-8th

OVERVIEW

I.S. 30 serves the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn. The school adopted the Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB) program, which asks students and teachers to draw on the resources found within the community to meet challenges, solve problems and arrive at learning goals that at first seem unattainable. Each Learning Expedition is a metaphorical learning adventure designed to improve student achievement, and uses an integrative, or interdisciplinary curriculum to enhance student learning. The expeditions need to be hands-on, interesting, and actively involve students. By working collaboratively, gaining hands-on experience, and having clear expectations, students learn to make connections between their different classes and take what they have learned and apply it to other learning situations.

DESIGN OF THE INTEGRATIVE CURRICULUM

The interdisciplinary curriculum is modeled after the school's ongoing work with the ELOB program. The program emphasizes authentic learning experiences, community building, peer critique, assessment with rubrics, service, and self-reliance.

In developing an integrative curriculum, the principal notes that there are several key elements that need to be established in the school community:

- clear routines and expectations for teachers, staff, and students;
- support for the philosophy and mission of the school from staff, students, and parents;
- climate of respect and safety;
- vitalized curriculum through a strong focus on standards, curriculum, and interdisciplinary work;
- common planning time;
- teachers work as facilitators; and
- sufficient instructional materials to support the curriculum and instruction.

In addition, it is important to remember that these elements cannot be established all at once. Focus on one aspect of an integrative curriculum, and master that one part before taking on more.

At I.S. 30, all teachers on a grade contribute to the expedition, even if their subject is not directly included. It is difficult to find a theme that works for all subjects. Mathematics seems to be one of the hardest subjects to incorporate. Teams try to rotate roles, so that they take turns being one of the “major” subjects for a theme. The librarian works with the teams to find Internet projects, resources, and books for the expeditions and also tries to use Project Art to link to the Humanities curriculum.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Students start the year with team building activities designed to establish respect and cooperation among students. This year, the sixth grade worked with an ELOB facilitator at the school. The seventh graders had an intense ELOB experience, complete with climbing the 55-foot tower. It helped students to understand a little more about expeditionary learning and helped to develop tenets of collaboration and trust within each class so that they would be more ready for their class expeditions.

An example of a recent expedition is the “Discovering Democracy” expedition that was done in the seventh grade. It focused on democratic ideals and political realities and was conducted during the past presidential election. Every teacher in the grade team was involved in some way. The primary content areas for this unit were Humanities, Art, Spanish, Math, and Science. The guiding questions for the expedition included: “Is democracy freedom?”, “What does democracy look like?” and “What does freedom feel like?” Students learned about the growth of American democracy, how it compared to political systems in Latin and South America, and how to understand media representations of the political process. The expedition was kicked off with a trip to Owl’s Head Park to view the Statue of Liberty, with quiet time for personal reflection in their student journals. Students followed the pre-election coverage, learning about issues and politics. They learned about the voting process and conducted a community public opinion poll. They learned to analyze media representation and current events by reading the New York Times, learning about photojournalism, and writing persuasive essays. They learned that every vote counts. They discussed the issues around the right to vote and the rights of citizens. Students wrote a “Bill Of Rights” book in Spanish. Trips to The United Nations and historical sites in Philadelphia helped to give students a sense of purpose. Students read *The True Confessions* on Charlotte Doyle, *Sign of the Beaver*, and Kipling’s poetry. They wrote and performed a play on the Boston Tea Party, and wrote a “Magna Carta” in Humanities class. The mathematics teacher used students to count and analyze the votes, and he produced all of the models and charts for the teachers to use in their lessons.

Another example of a recent theme was “Moving on Up.” This expedition centered around movement and travel. The guiding questions were “What forces spark the human journey?” and “How do we get from here to there?” It included the Science, Spanish, and Humanities curricula. Science focused on force and motion; Spanish focused on vocabulary and trip planning; and Humanities focused on the Western Expansion and the Underground Railroad. During this expedition, the Science classes focused on machines. In Spanish class, students learned to study maps and tourist brochures to develop detailed itineraries, maps and budgets for trips. They learned Spanish

vocabulary and read Spanish readings on travel. In Humanities, students focused on understanding rules of the English language, response to literature, and persuasive writing. They also looked at the meaning of American culture, ideas, and traditions; the roles and contributions of individuals and groups in relation to social, political, cultural, and religious practices in history; and the sources of a nation's values as embodied in its Constitution, statutes, and important court cases.

PLANNING PROCESS

Each grade is responsible for designing their own expeditions. Each expedition should be a part of the standard curriculum, serving to further the lessons, rather than a separate program. Teams struggle to find ways of bringing together strands from each of the subject areas, so that students can both see and draw upon the connections between classes.

Every grade has a dean/coordinator. All of the teachers on each grade level organize in a grade team that designs an interdisciplinary theme twice a year—once in the fall and once in the spring. Grade teams meet during a common prep period, every day of the school year. Common planning time is facilitated by block scheduling. In addition to facilitating better expeditions, common planning time also assists in team building among the staff.

Another key component of the design of I.S. 30's interdisciplinary program is the use of the school librarian. The school has a full-time librarian who meets with all of the grade teams and serves as a resource for information, materials, activities, and other support. She writes grants, helps with planning, develops book lists and web bibliographies for the expeditions, arranges for speakers, finds relevant videotapes, identifies and contacts cultural institutions, serves as the Project Arts coordinator, and helps grade teams in any way that she can. She even tries to tie in her library displays to expeditions that are taking place in the school. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the expeditions, the librarian plays a crucial role in tying together the often disparate subject areas.

Planning begins before the semester starts, with teachers from all subject areas for the grade coming together to discuss connections and themes that link subject areas. Every teacher comes to these planning meetings with a curriculum map for their subject, which outlines the major areas, ideas, and academic standards that they will be addressing during the coming year. The grade team looks at all of the curriculum maps and tries to find a common theme that cuts across all of the subject areas. This theme becomes the interdisciplinary focus for all teachers of that grade for the semester.

For the fall 2000 theme, teachers met over the summer to pore over the curriculum maps. The seventh grade team realized that, when looking at Social Studies, they did not need to go chronologically. Instead, they looked at the "big picture" or the "big ideas." The idea was to draw out the parts that they wanted students to remember. They focused on bringing in the standards and making the process an authentic learning experience. They also wanted to pick a theme that had relevance, e.g. the Democracy unit that was more global than one presidential election—it had relevance for the democratic process and elections every year.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The key to this design is the collaboration that occurs between team members. The grade team and common planning time structures lend themselves to professional sharing between colleagues. Teachers report that they learn the most from their colleagues. Teachers receive professional development opportunities for training and networking with other practitioners; they also participate in national conferences.

The school has recently hired several new and inexperienced teachers. New teachers are provided with support and guidance from mentor programs, and they receive peer coaching through class inter-visitation programs. Interdisciplinary curricula are hard to implement even for experienced teachers, so new teachers need extra support in this learning environment. The team structure and expedition planning process help to give new teachers a critical support network.

The integrated curriculum works well because teachers have “bought in” to the idea. Teachers need to see themselves as facilitators of reflective and cooperative learning, and they need to learn to work together. One of the harder battles was getting the more experienced teachers to think about “my classroom” in a different way, but, once past the initial wariness, they were happy with the results. New teachers are selected through a School Based Option staffing process, where the school interviews and selects its teachers based on specialized criteria. For I.S. 30, teachers must be willing to commit the time and energy required to collaboratively plan an interactive, interdisciplinary curriculum every semester with their colleagues.

In terms of expeditionary learning, ELOB has been the greatest source of professional development for the staff. An ELOB facilitator works with all of the teachers, in groups and individually.

STRUCTURING STUDENT TIME

The school uses block scheduling and flexible scheduling to facilitate in-depth study, provide common planning time for teachers on each grade to develop interdisciplinary expeditions, and conduct grade advisories to facilitate community building. English and Social Studies are taught in one Humanities block, where students have the same teacher for both subjects in a longer period, so as to create stronger links between and more time on task for both subjects. Students also have an extra period of a core subject each day. In this way, they receive instruction in each core subject for six periods a week—rather than the traditional five.

Flexible scheduling allows students to go to the library during “zero-period” and lunch to conduct research, study, and gather with friends. This further supports the interdisciplinary curriculum. The librarian works to keep the library relaxed, open, and friendly for students—they are allowed to have fun, talk, and browse the Internet. She hopes that students will learn to see libraries as good places to go for both information and enjoyment.

Having this complicated schedule, while critical, has been a challenge. I.S. 30 recently brought in a consultant to help reschedule and program the school.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE STANDARDS

Each of the subject areas are aligned with the New York City and State Standards. The teachers utilize the Standards Books to develop their curriculum maps for each subject area.

In addition, each expedition is designed in keeping with the principles developed by ELOB. There are ten design principles of ELOB: The Primacy of Self-Discovery; The Having of Wonderful Ideas; The Responsibility for Learning; Intimacy and Caring; Success and Failure; Collaboration and Competition; Diversity and Inclusivity; The Natural World; Solitude and Reflection; and Service and Compassion. Teachers incorporate these design principles into their learning expeditions.

ADAPTABILITY TO STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT NEEDS AND ABILITIES

In addition to their planning roles, grade teams are responsible for ensuring that students' needs are being met. Smaller class size and block scheduling means that there is more of a focus on each child. Teachers meet in the grade teams to look at individual students and how to help them. The Resource Room teacher has conducted workshops on helping grade teams to look at the different needs of students. They examine what has been done to help a troubled student and determine what else can be provided to support success. Instruction is individualized, to the extent possible, to meet the individual needs of all students.

The most academically at-risk students receive an additional period of communication arts, which focuses on writing and building of literacy skills. The Resource Room teacher has been conducting training on how to address the new special education continuum. Currently, Resource Room services are provided through a blended push-in model, which utilizes a consultant teacher who works as an extra teacher in the classrooms. English Language Learner needs are served through co-teachers and a push-in model.

The staff tries to develop a culture of respect and safety as a way of reducing incidents and problems. All children meet in the morning for a relaxed group time for reflection and learning about respect, caring, and team building.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

Students are involved in many aspects of the expedition planning. Teachers give students different roles in the planning process, depending on the expedition. Some students help to develop rubrics. Students help to plan kick-off and culminating events. Students often develop activities around the expeditions; there are many different ways that students can design their own work within a expedition. In addition, students are always welcome to bring their ideas to the teachers and the principal.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Student work on the expeditions is assessed in several ways. Most assessments are accompanied by a rubric. Teachers continue to receive professional development on the design and use of rubrics. Student homework assign-

ments are assessed against a rubric. Teacher-designed tests are given to assess understanding of the “big ideas” and key points of the curriculum and are assessed with a rubric. Each student, or a group of students, gives presentations on the work and is assessed based on a rubric. Informal assessments are also conducted, which look at areas such as team work, cooperation, attitude, and other social interactions. Staff is beginning to learn about and use portfolios for student work. In addition, at the end of each expedition, the grade holds a celebration. At this culminating event, students share their work with the school, parents, and the community.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

At the beginning of each year, parents are sent contracts from each teacher outlining the expectations and responsibilities of the school, teacher, parent, and student. Each class has a volunteer parent. Curriculum nights are held to familiarize parents with what is going on in the school and what the expectations are for the expeditions. Parents are given surveys and asked for input at meetings. Parent workshops are held on various topics for parents. However, the school does not get much parent turn-out for these types of events. Parents come for celebrations, but generally they do not come to meetings and workshops. Parents on the School Leadership Team and in the PTA are naturally more involved than other parents.

FUNDING

In addition to the regular school budget, I.S. 30 manages to pay for parts of the interdisciplinary program with other funds. Project Arts funds are used for expeditions, with each grade receiving an equitable share of funds. The district pays for the ELOB staff developer. In addition, the school uses money from New Visions for Public Schools to pay for special projects, such as supporting the humanities teachers to write a humanities curriculum during the summer of 2001.

School Statistics: I.S. 30

SCHOOL MISSION/VISION*

The mission at Intermediate School 30 is to provide a collaborative atmosphere in which students, parents, and teachers may reach their maximum potential. I.S. 30 believes that the foundation for success now and in the new millennium is achievable through innovative, interdisciplinary and cooperative methods of instruction that include: Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, Service Learning, Real World Experiences and Instructional Technology. These practices engage students, making them active participants in learning. Students work with school staff, their parents, and the community to construct their knowledge and apply it to the world, inside and outside the classroom. The staff maintains a sincere commitment to academic excellence and social success for all students.

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS**

- Teacher Characteristics: 21 teachers
71.4% Fully Licensed and Permanently Assigned to This School
33.3% More Than Two Years Teaching at This School
28.6% More Than Five Years Teaching Experience
66.7% Masters Degree or Higher
- Student Characteristics: 8.8% English Language Learners
61.6% White
1.7% Black
23.9% Hispanic
12.8% Asian and others
46.9% Eligible for Free Lunch
94.6% Attendance Rate

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT***

City CTB-Reading Tests Grade 7

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	92	3.3%	35.9%	50.0%	10.9%	60.9%
2001	88	9.1%	33.0%	43.2%	14.8%	58.0%

City CTB-Mathematics Grades 6 and 7

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	176	15.9%	38.6%	31.8%	13.6%	45.5%
2001	199	16.9%	36.7%	35.2%	11.6%	46.7%

State ELA Test Grade 8**

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	117	7.7%	29.1%	47.0%	16.2%	63.2%
2001	81	4.9%	42.0%	34.6%	18.5%	53.1%

State Mathematics Test Grade 8

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	119	13.4%	38.7%	42.0%	5.9%	47.9%
2001	81	19.8%	46.9%	24.7%	8.6%	33.3%

* Obtained from the 2000-2001 CEP.

** Obtained from the 2000-2001 School Report.

*** Obtained from the Department of Education Website. Some ELL Students not tested.

EXEMPLARY CURRICULUM INTEGRATION AT . . .

Jonas Bronck Academy

Mercedes Boothe, Principal
4525 Manhattan College Parkway
Bronx, NY 10471
718.884.6673

Year Started: Fall 1997
Enrollment: 159 Students
Grades: 6th-8th

OVERVIEW

Jonas Bronck Academy, which started in 1997, offers middle school students of District 10 a student-centered, inquiry-based approach to learning. Instruction is structured in interdisciplinary thematic units with an emphasis on the use of technology across all disciplines. By teaching students to see connections among the curriculum areas, they will be better prepared for learning outside the classroom, since life is not isolated or compartmentalized.

DESIGN OF THE INTEGRATIVE CURRICULUM

The Jonas Bronck faculty are in the process of instituting integrative projects as a regular part of their curriculum. Since the school was started, they have used interdisciplinary approaches in their instruction. Two fully comprehensive integrated thematic projects have been implemented to date. The goal for next year is to increase the number of projects to four per year, with at least one per grade.

Each project includes all students in one grade level who study a thematic unit across various disciplines over the same time period (e.g., four-six weeks). The project is developed through a process of establishing a few essential questions that will be addressed in each of the subject areas. However, one subject area receives a particular emphasis. The entire faculty participates in the initial design process for the project, which includes selecting the grade level, establishing the essential questions, and choosing which subject area themes will be emphasized. Core academic teachers of the chosen grade and other teacher specialists then implement the integrated project. The curriculum team will vary depending upon the focus of the project.

During the 2000/2001 school year, the seventh grade was selected to implement the integrated project. The essential questions for the integrative curriculum were focused around "cause and effect." The humanities, which was the core subject area chosen for this particular project, examined cause and effect in their study of the westward expansion of the United States. In science, students examined the impact of the move west on body systems. In math, cause and effect was addressed through students working on equations, and looking at how different variables affect outcomes. In the prior year the essential questions were focused on "systems", and the main subject area emphasis was science. Each year, students complete the integrative study with a culminating celebration including presentations and festivities. The entire school community, including parents, are invited to attend.

Flexible blocks of time are used to carry out the instructional program. Humanities is taught daily in two-hour blocks. All other academic areas are 65 minute periods.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

The integrative curriculum team for 2000/2001 included the seventh grade humanities, math, and science teachers, as well as the school's physical education, arts and Spanish teachers. The instructional activities designed for the integrated project included the following:

- Physical education focused on the study of dance during the Westward Expansion Unit and included students performing the various dances of that period.
- The Spanish class studied the culinary contributions of Latinos and Native Americans during the Westward Expansion. Students created a recipe book in Spanish and English and prepared a meal as part of their study.
- In humanities, the literature component featured students reading and analyzing American "tall tales," and then writing a tale of their own based upon their research of the period. As part of the history and geography components, students developed a question and answer book on the West and participated in a "round robin" on historical events.
- In math, the integrated project coincided with the students' introduction to algebra and statistics. They used data from the Westward expansion in their analyses, while focusing on the cause and effect nature of equations.
- The science class focused on the effects of the Westward expansion on the human body, including the diseases that affected the settlers as they moved West.
- In art, students explored the art of the Native Americans and Mexicans and examined how parts fit into a whole by learning to weave on a hand-made loom.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE STANDARDS

Each of the subject areas are aligned with the New York City and State Standards. The district's literacy frameworks are used to guide the language arts tasks within the Humanities. The State Social Studies Standards are also aligned with the humanities (e.g., American history is part of the state social studies curriculum for the seventh grade). The math tasks, which are part of the Connected Mathematics curriculum, are aligned with the City's performance standards as well as with those developed by the National Council of Teaching Mathematics. The National Science Education Standards and the City performance standards are used to develop the science component. The physical education component is also aligned with the State Standards.

Lesson plans continue to be developed as the unit develops. Teachers refer to the standards books as they design the different activities and lessons within the thematic units. For example, students are required to write a reflection piece that is consistent with the writing standard for developing a point of view. In Spanish, students write recipe books which are part of the writing standard for developing a narrative account. The faculty would like to work toward making the standards more publicly explicit and easily understandable so that students can move toward self-assessment.

ADAPTABILITY TO STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT NEEDS AND ABILITIES

Classrooms at Jonas Bronck Academy are comprised of students at a range of academic levels. Students with special needs and English Language Learners are mainstreamed in general education classrooms and receive special services through a pull-out model. Regardless of ability level, all students participate in the integrated projects. The literacy framework, which runs across all curriculum areas, is used to address students' learning needs. For example, read-aloud, group-work, writing conferences, and visuals are some of the literacy strategies that are used to assess and address specific needs. Cooperative group work is another strategy for meeting the needs of students with different abilities and interests. All students contribute something to the project and are able to help one another. For example, in order to develop a recipe book written in English and Spanish, students with different language abilities will have to work closely together. Strategies to address differentiated learning will be more of a focus over the next school year. This is necessary due to the new continuum in special education.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development occurs as part of the instructional planning process. The school principal has the most experience developing integrative curriculum and instructional approaches and draws upon her experiences and the resources that she has accumulated to guide the staff in professional development activities. As staff gain experience in developing integrative curriculum, they also take on leadership roles and provide support to staff with less experience. Outside staff developers have not been used.

INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING

The Jonas Bronck faculty participate in an in-depth planning process to design their integrative project(s) each year. Planning activities begin as early as September, even if the project is not launched until the Spring term. When teachers begin the school year, one of their first tasks is to individually map the curriculum they will be teaching over the course of the year. That map becomes the blueprint for planning the thematic unit.

As the start date for beginning the project approaches, the school administrator works with one of the teaching staff, typically one with prior experience in developing a unit, to develop the structure for the full-staff meeting that will be devoted to planning the unit. The designated teacher organizes the information that will be needed for the meeting. This includes collecting teachers' individual curriculum maps and consolidating them. The meeting is scheduled on a professional development day so teachers have a full day to devote to planning.

The planning meeting includes an introduction to the design process. Since a number of the teachers may have had little prior experience in developing integrative curriculum, the staff review a video on how to do this. The staff then examine the curriculum maps across the subject areas for each grade. The goal is to find connections in each discipline area that enhance each other. The staff also discuss how the integrative project will best complement overall instruction in the school. By the conclusion of the meeting, the staff decide upon a theme and the grade for the interdisciplinary project. For example, during the 2000/2001 school year, after examining the curriculum map, the staff concluded that the sixth grade had the benefits of other integrative work over the year. They also felt that a

Spring project might not be best for the eighth-graders who have a particularly heavy course load and academic testing that time of year. In this way, they came to the decision to focus the project on the seventh grade.

In subsequent meetings, teachers work in small teams and in larger groups to develop the essential questions that are posed to the students and used in each of the subject areas. The faculty estimate that it takes the equivalent of about a week of shared planning time to fully design the project. Although ongoing common planning time is essential to the development of the project, it is sometimes difficult to schedule due to the school's small staff size. Most of the staff also teach in the after-school program making after-school meetings also difficult to schedule. Teachers have only a common lunch period to use for planning of the integrated curriculum unit. As the amount of planning time can influence the amount of overall time it takes to initiate the unit, the school would benefit from more common planning time. Once the thematic unit is developed and the project starts, teachers keep each other informed of their progress, informally and as part of weekly meetings. Once this unit is complete, the teachers will re-examine the planning process.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

Student involvement in developing ideas for the integrative curriculum has not been formally established and varies by classroom. On occasion, students have completed questionnaires or have participated in a brainstorming process from which the themes emerged. In some classes students may brainstorm inquiry questions which then become the basis of questions that are used for the unit. Students then choose which question they will address in their research. Students can also make some choices with regard to which resources they will use or which literature to read on the theme. Students can select reading material in line with their interests. In terms of feedback, there is no formal process for eliciting students' reactions to the thematic unit. Teachers try to get a sense from the students of what activities seemed to work and what interested their students most.

The Jonas Bronck faculty intend to develop a thematic unit which is based upon student interest. This would include a formal idea-generating process as well as a process for eliciting student feedback when the unit was completed. This is something they will address as part of next year's work.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Students' overall academic achievement is assessed through the mandated City and State exams. The thematic unit is assessed using informal measures, which vary by class. Some teachers use checklists to approve that students have completed the steps required for a particular assignment (e.g., writing a research report). There are teacher-made pen and paper tests in some subject areas (e.g., science). In other subjects (e.g., physical education) class participation and cooperation are assessed through teacher observation. District 10 has developed a rubric for assessing cooperative learning which is also used.

The faculty also uses rubrics to assess students' work. They use an adapted version of the Vermont Rubric for Writing, a standards-based rubric which is used across the curriculum areas. The goal is to help students learn to use the rubric so they will know how to judge the quality of their own work. Teaching students to assess their own work

takes even longer than it would take teachers alone to assess it. Jonas Bronck is moving toward using portfolio assessment. Last year was the first year they implemented the use of portfolios in every grade. However, because the process is so new, portfolios do not yet factor into students' grades.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Information regarding the integrative curriculum is shared during Parent Association meetings. Just prior to the beginning of the thematic units, parents are sent a package of letters explaining the course of study and inviting them to attend the culminating event. Each teacher sends a separate letter explaining the activities that will occur in their class. Parents are asked to contribute their time, share their experiences, or visit the classes to observe the activities. Some parents get involved in the classroom, although a large number do not. Other parents support the project by sending different items or materials to school.

FUNDING

Jonas Bronck does not have a special budget for the integrative curriculum. The school relies upon whatever equipment and materials are available to implement the integrative curriculum unit. During the planning process, the staff discuss what resources are available to help carry out the proposed activities. Having more resources would be preferable and would allow teachers to organize field trips and purchase additional materials such as music or videotapes for the dance component.

School Statistics: JONAS BRONCK ACADEMY

SCHOOL MISSION/VISION*

The mission of the Jonas Bronck Academy (JBA) is to create a learning environment in which students discover who they are as learners and unique individuals. Building on the theme of biography, students, staff and Manhattan College partners will work collaboratively to develop responsible, independent learners who develop an understanding of who they are and how they fit into society and who perform at grade level or above. Students will work independently as well as collaboratively in an inquiry-based approach to hypothesize, investigate, design, create and assess their work as they continually stretch themselves as reflective life long learners. Technology will be integrated across the curricula as a tool for learning. JBA will provide students with standards based, rigorous, holistic, interdisciplinary curricula in a safe and nurturing environment. Students will be prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS**

- Teacher Characteristics: 8 Teachers
62.5% Licensed and Permanently Assigned to this School

37.5% Have Less than 2 Years Experience
 62.5% Have More than Five Years Experience
 62.5% Have Masters Degree or Higher

- Student Characteristics: 4.4% English Language Learners
 24.7% White
 29.4% Black
 43.2% Hispanic
 2.6% Asian and others
 40.0% Eligible for Free Lunch
 95.8% Attendance Rate

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT***

City CTB-Reading Test Grade 7

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	52	3.8%	53.8%	28.8%	13.5%	42.3%
2001	48	14.6%	56.3%	25.0%	4.2%	29.2%

City CTB-Mathematics Grades 6 and 7

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	103	27.2%	48.5%	22.3%	2.0%	24.3%
2001	96	29.2%	56.3%	11.5%	3.1%	14.6%

State ELA Test Grade 8****

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	56	5.4%	44.6%	44.6%	5.4%	50.0%
2001	46	10.9%	41.3%	37.0%	10.9%	47.8%

State Mathematics Test Grade 8

Spring	Number Tested	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Levels 3+4
2000	56	39.3%	41.1%	17.9%	1.8%	19.6%
2001	46	39.1%	43.5%	17.4%	0.0%	17.4%

* Obtained from the 2000-2001 CEP.

** Jonas Bronck is housed in the Bronx New School. Obtained from the 2000-2001 CEP and the 1999-2000 Bronx New School Annual School Report.

*** Statistics for the Bronx New School. Obtained from the Department of Education Website.

**** Obtained from the 2000-2001 School Report.

EXEMPLARY CURRICULUM INTEGRATION AT . . .

El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice

Alfa Anderson, Principal
Frances Lucerna, Founding Principal
211 South 4th Street
Brooklyn, NY 11211
718.599.2895

Year Started: Fall 1993
Enrollment: 137 Students
Grades: 9th-12th

OVERVIEW

Founded by a community-based organization, El Puente Academy has strived to create a comprehensive community learning institution to support the holistic development of young people and adults living in the low-income, predominantly Latino neighborhood in which the school is based. Instruction is structured through an arts-based interdisciplinary approach focusing on the school's themes of social justice, community, and cultural/historical analysis.

DESIGN OF THE INTEGRATIVE CURRICULUM

Integrating the arts across all academic disciplines through thematic, project-based activities was part of El Puente's original vision for instruction. Over the years, as the El Puente community worked toward increasing the academic rigor of the courses offered to its students, the integrated arts courses became more separate from the core academic curriculum. Currently, curriculum integration primarily occurs within the integrated arts project, although connections with other disciplines areas are made when possible. The 2000/2001 school year marks the fifth year the school has implemented an integrated arts project.

As part of the integrated arts project, students have the option of taking one or more elective art courses (called "Ed Ops") each year, all of which are based upon an overriding, school-wide theme. Past themes have included sugar, garments, bio-diversity, and technology. At the end of the term, there is a culminating production which includes a series of performances and presentations from each of the different classes. Nearly all of El Puente's faculty teach one of the Ed Ops courses. Other professionals, such as artists and community organizers, also teach the courses. Most of the courses have a team-teaching structure.

During the 2000/01 school year, self-determination and, by extension, "power" was the school's overriding theme. The integrated arts program, launched "The Power Project" in the Spring semester, a selection of 17 Ed Op courses that used the performing, visual, literary, culinary, and technological arts to investigate the nature of power in personal and community life. Curriculum integration occurred within each of the Ed Op classes. Discipline areas including English language arts, social studies, science and mathematics were integrated with the arts, as appropriate, to examine the topic of that Ed Op class. Course examples include the following:

- The course "Wooden Heads and Empty Stomachs" integrated theater, visual, English language arts,

history, and political science. To examine the relationship between hunger and power students studied the work of authors such as Franz Kafka and Jonathan Swift, who both used hunger as a metaphor for different aspects of the human condition. They also studied the relevance of fasting in the lives of political leaders such as Martin Luther King and Gandhi. Students then wrote an original play, *The Temptation of Cesar Chavez*, based upon what they learned. Part of the course was devoted to the study of puppetry, including traditional and contemporary forms of puppetry from around the world. Students created the puppets for their play, built stages, and ultimately performed their puppet show.

- The course "Power Jam" focused on musical theory, history, and performance. As a final project, the students from "Power Jam" composed and performed an original piece of music for the puppetry performance.
- The course "Skate and Create" combined math, physics, social science, and English language arts. Working with community organizers and landscape architects, students planned, designed, and created a proposal for a skate park to go beneath the Williamsburg Bridge.

Having a common school-wide theme every year (e.g., self-determination and power) promotes linkages between the Ed Ops courses and the core discipline courses. For example, during the 2000/2001 school year, the topic for the required senior research paper was movements for self-determination in the Western Hemisphere. Some of the integrated arts teachers used the students' papers to generate ideas for the projects in their courses. Another example is the Senior Math Portfolio project which looked at community gentrification. Working with a community organizer, students assessed the empty lots in the community, then projected what it would cost to build and refurbish homes for that area. Other linkages occur when teachers expand the topic of a core academic area in one term to an elective in another term. For example, "Making History" was a senior English class in the fall 2001 semester. The class focused on biographies of revolutionary figures and their depiction through the media. This class was continued in the spring of 2001 as part of the integrated arts curriculum. In this class, students made video documentaries of imaginary revolutionary figures that they created.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

A wide range of Ed Ops classes are offered in order to appeal to students' varying interests and to provide them with opportunities for experiencing many different art forms, perhaps for the first time. Art activities during the Spring 2001 term included designing a skateboard park, writing and performing a "spoken word" piece, quilting, studying music, performing a dance, writing and performing a dramatic piece, creating a video documentary, designing puppets, and creating a musical performance.

Through these different art activities, students were expected to develop technical skills and formal knowledge of specific art forms, build their own capacity for collaboration and community-building, develop self-awareness, explore outlets for self-expression, increase their awareness of social issues in the local community and globally, and participate in opportunities for promoting social activism. Students also practiced and applied academic skills from the core curriculum areas including mathematics, reading, and writing, and by conducting research.

PLANNING PROCESS

The planning of the integrated curriculum is a year-long process involving the entire school community. At the beginning of each school year, the El Puente staff selects one particular issue affecting their school community and that issue becomes the school-wide focus for the year. In August 2000, there was an organization-wide retreat (including school-staff and Community-Based Organization (CBO) staff), at which the topic of "self-determination" and, as an extension, "power", were chosen as the theme for the school year. The school community wanted to focus on what was happening in Vieques, Puerto Rico. In the first months of school there was a great deal of teaching on the current and unfolding events and students participated in the demonstration in Washington DC.

The integrated arts program is coordinated by a "design team," a group of Department of Education licensed teachers, artists, and other CBO staff who all teach one or more of the Ed Op courses. The design team has two major responsibilities: to co-create and co-produce the culminating production and to document the project. Part of their role is to keep the entire faculty involved in the thinking through of the integrated arts curriculum and the culminating project, since it is a statement or expression of the overall school theme for that year.

In the beginning of the year, the entire El Puente faculty discuss what they plan to teach over the school year, across all subject areas at full staff meetings. Throughout the fall members of the design team use these discussions to solicit ideas from staff who will be teaching the Ed Op classes in the spring and offer their own suggestions for addressing the selected theme through the Ed Op classes.

In early February there is an "Ed Op Fair" and students select which of the courses they will take. The Ed Op courses begin in February and the final production is typically held in May or June. Planning intensifies in early February. The design team convenes for one-hour weekly planning meetings to brainstorm ideas and begin laying out plans that will lead to the final production. Every two weeks, the design team updates the entire school staff on the progress of their work, and solicits feedback from them during the regularly scheduled staff meetings. Many informal, impromptu meetings among teachers also contribute to the development of the project. One member of the design team takes on the role of coordinating the logistics of the production itself.

Altogether, a great deal of planning is required to implement the integrated arts projects. El Puente staff would prefer that the project start in the fall, but it is difficult to be ready by the first semester. In the past, the school held an Arts and Cultural Bazaar in the Fall semester so that students had experience with arts integration on a smaller scale. However, this year they were short of experienced staff so arts integration was limited to the one integrated project.

For the 2001/2002 school year, the team hopes to start the integrated project in the fall and have a full-time coordinator. They would also like to plan an orientation to the arts program for incoming freshmen so that new students will know what to expect with regard to the arts by the time they start school.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The design team and other El Puente staff, who have prior experience implementing the integrated arts curriculum, take an active role in providing professional development to the less experienced staff through modeling and sharing

ideas. To have an effective integrative curriculum, teachers must share a philosophy of learning that promotes student inquiry and reflection, hands-on instruction, and collaboration among students and faculty. Over the years, El Puente has successfully recruited strong academic teachers who buy into the school's mission, but sometimes they lack the skills or experience to try active-learning approaches that are more consistent with that mission. As a result, the core academic courses tend to be taught in more traditional ways than do the arts courses, which are more "hands-on." The integrated arts teachers, through the work of the design team, help to develop the curriculum and demonstrate to the staff how to conduct integrated arts projects and why they are important for student development.

One of the major tasks of the design team is to document the integrated arts project each year. The team works closely with researchers from a local university who helps them to structure their documentation. These researchers have been conducting a participatory action research project at El Puente over a number of years. As a result of the action research, the design team has greatly increased its capacity to document the curriculum. The design team, working with the other teachers, created course descriptions and weekly lesson plans for each of the Ed Ops courses. They also began an examination of the impact of the curriculum on students. They outlined their expectations of student development in terms of skills, knowledge and conceptual understanding and used a rubric to assess their students in these areas. Each teacher conducted case studies of one or two students describing how their engagement of the arts contributed to their understanding of academic subject matter. They examined how to use multiple forms of evidence as a basis for their descriptions. This work is then shared with the entire faculty.

Although many El Puente staff have had experience in developing and implementing integrative arts curriculum, the design team suggested that a series of workshops provided by an outside consultant might be an effective way to get them moving to a new level. During the school's second year, a principal from another school had initially helped the staff to develop a project-based curriculum. The design team indicated that now that they are more established and experienced they would be able to benefit even more from having that person do a follow-up series.

STRUCTURING STUDENT TIME

Flexible blocks of time are used to carry out the integrated curriculum. Students can choose up to two Ed Op classes, which are offered in a two-hour block on Wednesday and a 2-hour block on Fridays. Ed-Op class-sizes range from eight students to 23 students, depending upon the course. Every student is involved in an Ed-Op class. Students also work on projects after-school and on the weekends. Teachers create opportunities for students to continue their work through El Puente's after-school program.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE STANDARDS

El Puente's core academic curriculum is aligned with the City and State standards. The Academy offers Regents exams so that students may graduate with a Regents diploma. They are also part of the New York State Performance Standards Consortium. The staff have been engaged in an intensive process of designing their own performance-based graduation tasks which are aligned with the City and State standards. Ideally the goal would be to align the

integrated arts standards with the academic standards, as well. The design team would like to do more to explore this over the next school year.

The integrated arts curriculum reflects El Puente's four guiding principles which are referred to as "Soul Standards." These are creating community, love and caring, mastery, and peace and justice. Peace and justice are at the foundation of each of the Ed Op courses. Similarly, across many of the courses, the themes of love and care of self, others, the community, and the natural environment are repeated. Collaborative project work, team-teaching, and grouping students of different ages and grades in the same course all promote community building. Mastery is a key element of the curriculum. Students who have little or no experience in a particular art form by the end of several months are publicly performing, demonstrating what they have learned.

ADAPTABILITY TO STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT NEEDS AND ABILITIES

El Puente does not select students based upon their interests in the arts (e.g., that they plan to become artists). Regardless of their interest or skill, all students participate in its arts-based curriculum. Within the Ed-Op courses, students are mixed across grade-levels. Therefore, the courses have to be structured for students having different skills, content knowledge, and abilities. To accomplish this differentiated learning, teachers base their instruction on their individual knowledge of students and then use the group team-building structure to complement students' different needs and abilities. For example, teacher expectations for students may vary by the student's grade-level (e.g., a third-year student is different than a first-year student) and those expectations are communicated to the students. But in the context of team-building, the academic levels of the students do not matter. Teachers find ways to engage all students and to integrate what each student contributes to the overall group. This approach has always been a part of the overall instructional practice at El Puente.

One issue raised by the design team is that some students, having had the experience of working within the arts, want to pursue the arts more fully or in depth. They would like to see more opportunities available to students, such as internships or special courses offered outside the school, for students who want to pursue their art interests further.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

Student and teacher interest are both considered when designing the Ed Op courses (e.g, the "Skate and Create" class was generated from interest in skateboarding). Class projects also evolve according to student input. Students may come up with their own piece that goes off in a slightly different direction from what was expected at the onset of the class. Teachers are flexible and allow these variations to occur.

Students also have the option of choosing their art courses. They can select two Ed Op courses from a selection of about 17 possible courses. Prior to the selection teachers spend a day presenting the course descriptions to students. Students circulate among classrooms gathering information. At the end of the process they list their top three choices of classes and generally get their first or second choice.

One indication of student engagement in the integrated arts project is the amount of their own time they devote to it. Students continue to work on their projects after-school and on the weekends. Another indication is student motivation to perform year after year. According to the design team, students undergo a transformative process as they start preparing for their performances, then find themselves on stage performing in front of an audience. Because of the level of preparation, the performances are successful; students feel good about the experience and what they have accomplished and strive for more. They feel that the process is especially powerful for high school students who are looking for a sense of identity.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents are aware of what is happening with the project and seem generally pleased about it, but parent outreach and involvement is probably the weakest link in the project. Parents do not receive any formal communication beyond a rehearsal schedule and a permission slip. Some parents come to the performances. El Puente staff discussed the projects with parents informally. Next year they will have a more formal structure in place to inform parents about the project.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Student work in the Ed Ops classes is assessed in different ways. Teachers use rubrics to assess a range of skills, knowledge, and behaviors that they expect students to develop as a result of participation in the course. Elements of the rubrics contain mastery of art techniques (e.g., quality of costume design or script), conceptual understanding of the material (e.g., math concepts used for measurement, use of literary materials), as well as collaborative skills (e.g., team work). Students are assessed on class work, their final reports or projects, and their performances using the rubric.

The design team has been working with a university-based researcher over the past two years to assess the impact of the curriculum on students. The researcher is also conducting an ongoing evaluation at the request of the Center for Arts Education and the New York Networks for School Renewal. The evaluation consists of examining each of the courses and breaking down the lesson plans into specific skill areas, and conducting case studies of individual students. It has been a challenge for the design team to plan and implement the curriculum while simultaneously engaged in evaluation activities. The evaluation is still in process.

Another challenge is tied to the complexity in assessing the impact of the arts. The school community has pondered over how to create a process of assessment to measure students' experience and transformation, as well as how to know if students are meeting the institution's "Soul Standards" and academic standards.

FUNDING

El Puente Academy relies upon a number of resources to plan and implement the integrated curriculum. Their CBO partner, El Puente, helps to staff the courses with community organizers, artists, and research support. The

CBO also gives the school a focus and direction through their shared mission and history. Other notable community partners include consultants such as a landscape architect who taught one of the elective courses, and Brooklyn Academy of Music, an Arts Center which paid for the lighting, sound, and stage design for the production. El Puente has developed relationships with universities (Hunter/Tufts) that help to support the integrated arts project.

The school has obtained a number of grants to fund the arts including Annenberg Center for Arts Education, Project Arts, and a National Endowment of the Arts grant. The staff also use their personal connections to gain support for the project.

Even with all the resources, more support is needed. The design team feels the project needs a full-time coordinator to overview the logistics of designing and implementing such a comprehensive project.

School Statistics: EL PUENTE ACADEMY FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

SCHOOL MISSION/VISION*

The mission of El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice is to inspire and nurture leadership for peace and justice. To this end the Academy is guided by four core principles, which serve as the foundation for all administrative, academic, programmatic, and institutional development. These are: creating community, love and caring, mastery, and peace and justice. The Academy strives to achieve its vision by transforming its members into a comprehensive community learning institution, by integrating the resources of both the school and those of our community-based organization, El Puente, to effectively support the holistic development and the highest levels of achievement of all our young people and adults, including those with physical, emotional, developmental, or learning disabilities.

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS**

- Teacher Characteristics: 12 Teachers
46.2% Fully Licensed and Permanently Assigned to this School
38.5% More than Two Years Teaching at this School
- Student Characteristics: 10.0% English Language Learners
0.7% White
12.3% Black
87% Hispanic
0.0% Asian and others
79.3% Eligible for Free Lunch
85.7% Attendance Rate
80% of the Class of 2001 Graduated in Four Years

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

English Regents Examination

Spring	Number Tested	55-100%	65-100%	85-100%
2000	34	76.5%	50.0%	0.0%
2001	33	93.9%	57.6%	0.0%

* Obtained from the 2000-2001 CEP.

** Obtained from the 2000-2001 School Report.

APPENDIX

REFERENCES

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- Drake, S.M. (1993). Planning Integrated Curriculum: The Call to Adventure. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Jackson, A.W., & Davis, G.A. (2000). Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Jacobs, H.H. (Ed.), (1989). Interdisciplinary Curriculum: Design and Implementation. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Vars, G.F. & Beane, J.A. (2000). Integrative Curriculum in a Standards-Based World. ERIC Digest.
- Walker, D. (1996). Integrative Education. ERIC Digest.
- Zemelman, S., Daniels, H., & Hyde, A. (1998). Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools, 2nd Edition. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

RESOURCES

Internet Resources

American Social History Project
<http://www.ashp.cuny.edu>

Champions of Active Learning (National Program)
<http://www.publiceducation.org/resources/chase.asp>

Champions of Active Learning (NYC Program)

<http://www.newvisions.org/cal/>

Educators for Social Responsibility

<http://www.esrnational.org>

Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound

<http://www.elob.org>

Facing History and Ourselves

<http://www.facinghistory.org>

New York Life Tech Power Program

<http://www.newvisions.org/techpower/>

Outward Bound

<http://www.outwardbound.org>

Teaching Tolerance

<http://www.tolerance.org>

Print Resources

Beane, J. A. (1997). *Curriculum Integration: Designing the Core of Democratic Education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Drake, Susan M. (1998). *Creating Integrated Curriculum: Proven Ways to Increase Student Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Middle School Journal 30(2). (1998). *Curriculum Reform: Disciplinary, Interdisciplinary, & Integrated*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

Guide to School Visits

New Visions has developed this brief guide to help you as you prepare to go on school visits. We hope that it proves helpful to you.

1. SELECTING A SCHOOL TO VISIT:

You should select a school that matches your identified needs.

New Visions' Center for School Success has information on many successful and promising public schools in New York City that welcome visitors. You can find the Center for School Success at: www.newvisions.org, or contact Jody Imbimbo, the Center's director, at (212) 645-5110 for information and assistance in facilitating a visit to these schools.

In addition, you should talk to colleagues and professional experts who may know of good schools to visit.

2. PREPARING FOR A VISIT:

Be clear about the purpose of the visit. This may be your only opportunity to see the school, so plan carefully. You will get the most from your visit if you are focused on what you would like to observe and learn during your visit.

Select a team for the visit.

Think about who should go on the school visit and why they should be included. Depending on the team's goals, the team might include an assistant principal, teachers, guidance counselors, parents, and students. Assign a team leader who will be the contact person for the team and will make the arrangements for the actual school visit. Another team member should be designated the recorder for the visit. Remember to check with the hosting principal to determine how many team members may participate in the visit.

Prepare an outline of key topics and questions.

We suggest that you and your team prepare an outline of key topics and questions to help you during your visit. If possible, share your questions with the school principal before your visit. For help in thinking about key topics, please refer to Section A, Issues to Explore During a School Visit.

Review the school's Annual School Report before your visit.

The New York City Department of Education publishes Annual School Reports for each public school in the city. These reports provide important background information on the school, including student and teacher demographics and student performance data. Annual School Reports may be found on the NYC Department of Education's website: www.nycenet.edu/daa/reportcards

Determine whether you need a half-day or full-day visit.

Please see the descriptions below. Please discuss the purpose of your visit with the school principal beforehand to ensure that the agenda for your visit best reflects your team's needs and interests.

HALF-DAY VISIT

A half-day visit usually lasts between two and three hours. A half-day visitation typically begins with a meeting with the principal during which time s/he will provide a brief overview of the school and inform you about the school's mission, curriculum, and instructional program(s). You will then be given a tour of the school, which should include classrooms, administrative offices, lunch room, auditorium, gym, library/learning center, computer labs, and guidance and college advisement offices. During the tour, some schools encourage visitors to talk with students; please check with the principal to determine the school's policy. After the tour, you should have the opportunity to meet with teachers, parents, administrators and staff to ask questions and debrief.

NOTE: You may want to structure your half-day visit around the activities that you want to observe and learn about. For instance, if you want to see a professional development workshop, you may want to visit in the afternoon so that you see the after-school professional development program.

FULL-DAY VISIT

A full-day visit is generally more intensive than a half-day visit. A full-day visit should include a meeting with the principal and a brief tour. This visit, however, should allow for more in-depth observations of a particular aspect of the school. Examples of in-depth observations include opportunities to shadow a teacher or administrator, and to conduct classroom observations for a full period. During the tour, some schools encourage visitors to talk with students; please check with the principal to determine the school's policy. At the end of the school day, you should have the opportunity to meet with teachers, parents, administrators and staff to ask questions and debrief.

3. CONDUCTING A VISIT:

While you are walking around a school, try to observe tangible evidence of the school's climate and culture. Look for evidence of a welcoming environment, engaged students, and active learning. Please see Section B, What to Look For on a School Visit.

SCHOOL VISIT GUIDELINES:

Be on time. If you are going to be late, or if you will not be able to attend the school visit, call the school principal or contact person as soon as possible.

Be prepared. All team members should have copies of the agenda, the team's outline and/or questions, as well as pens and paper.

Designate a team recorder. The team should select a team recorder who will be responsible for reporting back to the entire team about the site visit.

Be respectful. You should be aware of the time and effort that your hosts put into the visit.

Be professional. Maintain professional conversation in all areas, including classrooms, hallways, and restrooms.

Do not interrupt a lesson. You are visiting a school and observing actual lessons. Do not interrupt during a class unless the teacher or principal signals that you may ask questions. If you talk to students, keep the discussion brief to avoid interrupting the planned lesson.

Debrief as a team. At the end of the visit, your team should meet to talk about what you have seen and what it means to each of you in relation to your school's plan. Debriefing can take place in a room at the school or at an off-site location.

4. FOLLOWING THE VISIT:

Report back to the team. The designated team recorder should report back on the site visit to the entire planning team. The entire team should discuss the visit in relation to the outline and questions that the team prepared prior to the visit. You should consider whether the team members observed practices that might be incorporated into your school's plan. It is also valuable to identify problems and challenges that surfaced during the visit that might be avoided or addressed by further planning.

SECTION A

ISSUES TO EXPLORE DURING A SCHOOL VISIT

RIGOROUS INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM:

Does the school provide all students with a standards-based academic curriculum (i.e., a curriculum which includes requirements for English language arts, mathematics, social studies, and laboratory sciences)?

What types of instructional approaches do teachers use to engage students?

What opportunities are available for students to think critically and become actively involved in problem-solving activities?

What strategies does the school use to encourage students to meet and exceed the standards?

PERSONALIZED RELATIONSHIPS:

How does the school structure time to support personalization (e.g., block scheduling, extended day, after school)?

How does the school structure its instructional program(s) to support personalization (e.g. houses, institutes, student advisory program)?

How does the school identify students' academic and non-academic needs? How are those needs addressed? Are additional supports and resources provided?

How does the school help students who do not meet the standards?

CLEAR FOCUS AND HIGH EXPECTATIONS:

What is the school's mission?

Does the school's mission include high expectations for all students?

Has the school organized all of its functions (including instructional program, student activities, student recruitment and admissions, staff hiring, and budget) around its mission?

How does the school evaluate its progress towards achieving the mission?

Does the school ensure that all students receive the preparation and personalized support needed to set and pursue post-high school goals?

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP:

How does the principal ensure that the school's mission shapes all of the educational programs in the school?

How does the principal exercise leadership in the areas of curriculum and student instruction?

What roles do students, parents, and staff have in school decision-making and governance?

What opportunities do teachers and other school staff have to hold leadership positions in the school?

SCHOOL-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COLLABORATION:

How does the school structure time for professional development (e.g., block scheduling, common preparatory periods, voluntary agreement to meet outside of school hours, and early release of students)?

How does the school use professional development time to focus on teaching and learning (e.g., reviewing student work, developing rubrics, reflecting, and sharing practice)?

How does the school ensure that teachers and staff receive adequate follow-up and support following professional development activities?

What structures have the school put in place to provide teachers with opportunities for peer support (e.g., teachers regularly spending time in each other's classrooms, peer coaching, mentoring, team teaching, and study groups)?

Does the school utilize any outside resources to support the professional development program (e.g., university partnerships, institutes, consultants)? If so, what types of professional development do these outside resources provide?

How do professional developers and the principal provide feedback to teachers?

MEANINGFUL CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

How does the school assess student needs and progress over time?

In addition to standardized tests, what measures are used to assess student progress (e.g., portfolios, performance-based tasks, and teacher tests)?

How are student achievement data reviewed and analyzed?

How do teachers and staff use student achievement data to plan curriculum and instruction?

SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY AND PARENT/CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT:

What roles do parents/caregivers and community members have in the school?

What partnerships and alliances have been created with community-based and other organizations?

What types of resources and activities are offered by the school to parents/caregivers and community members (e.g., GED programs, technology training, workshops)?

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT:

How do students participate in school decision-making and governance?

How are students' interests and needs reflected and integrated into the instructional program?

Is there a variety of extracurricular activities that address students' interests and needs, including after school and extended day programs (e.g., clubs, athletics, arts, academic enrichment)?

EFFECTIVE USE OF TECHNOLOGY:

Do curricula, lessons, and other activities use technologies that accommodate diverse learning styles, academic skills, and technology skills?

What types of opportunities do members of the school community have to expand their learning and use of technology?

Does professional development promote the effective use of technology, and is professional development delivered using technology?

Do all students have equal access to school-based technology?

SECTION B

WHAT TO LOOK FOR ON A SCHOOL VISIT

1. GENERAL SCHOOL OBSERVATIONS

School Climate

What is the climate of the school (this might include the way that students and visitors are greeted upon entry, the cleanliness/orderliness in the hallways and classrooms, and displays in the hallways)?

How do students interact with adults in the building?

How are desks arranged in classrooms (e.g., in rows, or in clusters)?

Expectations

Are there clear expectations and standards posted in classroom? Have teachers posted rubrics in their classrooms?

Are there displays of student work in the classrooms? Are they examples of good student work? How do the displays show students' individuality?

Is there visual evidence of a college preparatory culture, including a college/guidance office, college displays, and bulletin boards?

Are students comfortable asking questions of teachers?

Facilities

How are students using libraries, resource centers, and computer centers during the day and after school?

Did you notice anything in particular about "common rooms" such as the school library, gym, auditorium, and lunch room?

Are computers kept in self-contained computer labs, or are they kept in classrooms?

In schools that share a building, how do schools divide space between them? How do they share "common rooms" and hallways?

2. TYPES OF QUESTIONS TO ASK STUDENTS (IF IT IS APPROPRIATE TO DO SO)

Knowledge and Awareness

What are you learning?

Why do you need to learn this?

What did you need to know in order to learn this?

How will this help you learn in the future?

Clear Expectations

How do you know when your work is good enough?

Do you know how to make your work better?

When you get a grade on your work, do you know why you received that grade and what it means?

What happens when you make a mistake or answer a question incorrectly?

Student Engagement

Do you get to work with classmates on tasks? If so, when and how?

Are you asked to compare concepts, strategies and skills with other students?

Do you learn from other students?

How much time do you spend at your desk?

Do you have opportunities to learn about subjects and topics that interest you?

Supports

When you are having trouble understanding something, how do you get help?

Do your teachers ask how your work is going, and if you need help?

Does your teacher offer you encouragement?

Do you have the things that you need in order to do your work?

Are you asked to compare your work with another students to learn different ways of doing the assignment?

Is there more than one right answer?



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