Peace of the City

Theoretical Framework

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Mission-based Infusion

The mission of Peace of the City is based on a vision of serving those most at need yet with the least amount of resources. Peace of the City (POTC) provides a variety of programs and services to children and teens in some of the hardest hit and depressed communities in the City of Buffalo. This is accomplished through a comprehensive and congruent active learning model that utilizes arts infused educational experiences, social-emotional development, character development, academic supports, literacy development, and career/job readiness programming. This comprehensive approach embraces the vision that every child that is provided love and support can achieve success in their personal, educational, and future professional lives. Utilizing a case-management model, POTC tracks students through one-on-one professional support, family supports, and by incorporating a case-management model that uses a team approach. This model ensures that children are not "lost through the cracks," families are a part of the solution, and group gains are supported at their foundation by individual gains.

Peace of the City understands the importance of self-worth, character development, and emotional intelligence. This aspect is critical to the academic success of POTC participants. Furthermore, through its non-denominational approach, it encourages children and teens to cultivate their "spiritual self" however they define that. Spiritual awareness and development provides an opportunity for students to incorporate various strategies for self-awareness, character development, and emotional growth that support better behavior choices, decreased stress, and a better ability to cultivate other developmental domains like cognitive and academic skills, relationship management, and higher order skills like analytical thinking, problem solving, and decision making – the same skills necessary for post-secondary and work success. This allows POTC participants to view their future more positively and consequently place greater priority on academics, personal accountability, civic engagement, and ownership of self.

Active Learning Model

There are three models of learning that help to explain the value of multi-faceted learning experiences: intuitive, passive, and active learning (Sigette, 2009). The simplest form of learning, intuitive, begins at birth and can be compared to stimulus and response learning or habit forming (Slavin, 2008). This type of learning occurs with little cognitive activity on the part of the individual and is learning in its most basic form. Passive learning is the second phase of learning and largely depends on the motivation and engagement of the learner. Individuals who are being taught information on a topic they are uninterested in tend to be passive learners (Sigette, 2009; Newell, 2009). Active learning is the highest form of learning and occurs when an individual is motivated by the topic or information that is being learned. It is characteristic for active learning to provide students opportunities to make choices in their learning environment and thereby engaging a high level of cognitive engagement that includes

questioning, innovation, problem solving, communication, conceptualization, and other higher order skill sets (Ornstein, 2006; Harvey, 2012; Getch, Sherrod, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009).

When an effective active learning model is engaged, a "community of people" comprises the learning environment and there is a blurred line between teacher and student (Van Brummelen, 2008). Essential to this active learning model is how safe a student feels and the trust he or she has in those providing the active learning experience (Newell, 2009). POTC provides this type of environment in all of its programs and participants, regardless of age, repeatedly report that they feel safe and trust POTC staff.

Active learning experience rely heavily on the mentor/teacher/activity leader to cultivate a trusting environment; to incorporate a variety of learning tools; and to allow for self-directed learning, experimentation, and a fluid experience from start to finish. POTC utilizes this approach throughout its programs. Participants benefit greatly from this infused active learning model (Slavin, 2008; Parker and Parker, 2007).

Arts Integration

The integration of the arts into an educational environment enhances the academic and emotional development of students who without such experiences would not find the same opportunities in a traditional educational environment. This highlights the benefits that POTC participants gain through various activities like Shakespeare, Zieani Jewelry, Homework Club, and Music Lessons. Researchers have long found a connection between arts and academic success and social-emotional development (Scott, Harper, and Boggan, 2012; Amorino, 2008; Brouillette, 2010).

Binder and Kotsopoulo (2010) draw linkages between the arts and "helping children understand their own inner landscapes and validate their social and cultural ways of knowing." (Scott, Harper, and Boggan, 2012, pg. 84). Their work was validated by Browne (2000) and Reynolds (2004) who also drew a positive connection between arts, the ability of students to self-express, and succeed inside and outside of the classroom. These abilities are congruent with POTC mission and vision and the comprehensive impact POTC programs have on participants including but not limited to academics, social-emotional development; higher order skill sets, and self-identity/self-ownership.

Building on our understanding of the impact that arts infused education has on students Holzer (2009) extended our knowledge when he examined a curriculum with an integrated arts program. Holzer's conclusion was that integrated arts programs provide a strong support for academic success. However, even with this evidence that support the need for a strong arts program, many districts are no longer providing for the cultural development of their students. What is occurring is the marginalization of arts programs through the creation of educational movements like No Child Left Behind and the new Common Core Learning Standards. These academic movements, strongly linked to the financial support districts so desperately need, prioritize human and financial resources on academics like math, ELA, and science at the expense of arts and music programs and other "extracurricular" activities (Spohn 2008; Harvey, 2012). This reality places even greater importance on programs like POTC's that support the arts while simultaneously providing for the overall development of students.

Emotional Intelligence & Character Development

There has been an evolving body of literature that examines the impact of programs on emotional intelligence and its influence over academic achievement. Ashdown and Bernard (2012) examined the impact of a program on elementary grade students that purposefully sought to develop emotional intelligence skills and, as a result, increased academic achievement. The Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) for young children defines "social-emotional development as developing the capacity…to form close and secure adult relationships; experience, regulate, and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways; and explore the environment and learn" (2008). CASEL (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning has outlined five core social and emotional competencies that are "important foundations for young people's well-being: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making" (Ashdown and Bernard, pg. 397, 2012). As young people develop these skills they also expand their perspectives, develop confidence, expand their ability to develop healthy adult and peer relationships, resolve conflicts, increase their ability to persevere in the face of adversity, cope well with anger and hurt, and more times than not, successfully manage their emotions (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000; Parlakian, 2003). These findings coincide with a variety of researchers who have conducted extensive studies on the development of emotional intelligence in adults like Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee (2002) and Collins (2001). The contrast in what the overall impact on emotional intelligence ultimately influences is not as great as one would expect given the age differences. Essentially, those who are capable of recognizing their own feelings and managing those feelings are better positioned to recognize other's feelings and emotions and develop positive relationships based on those recognitions and abilities. Whether young or old, the context in which one develops positive relationships is essentially the same with similar influences over abilities and achievements.

For young children, evidence suggests that when a child successfully developed his or her emotional intelligence, they are more likely to realize positive outcomes on academic success. Research supports that "in conjunction with cognitive competence (reading, writing, and critical thinking skills), social emotional competence (collaboration skills, motivation, and study skills) is an important predictor of academic achievement" (Ashdown and Bernard, pg. 398, 2012; DiPerna and Elliot, 2002). Bernard (2004) explained that students who demonstrated higher levels of emotional intelligence, particularly those who were at-risk, demonstrated greater levels of academic achievement in comparison to those students with low emotional intelligence. These findings have been similarly demonstrated by Payton et. al. 2008; Joseph and Strain 2003). In a meta-analysis examining 34 academic sites, Nelson et al. (2003) "found that, overall, social and emotional learning programs had positive effects on both cognitive and academic outcomes in the short term (pre-school), medium term (primary school) and the long term (high school) (Ashdown and Bernard, pg. 398, 2012). Therefore, and with a significant amount of research backing up the findings, emotional intelligence (social emotional learning) has a long-term positive influence over academic achievement and future success.

POTC has always focused on cultivating self-awareness and ownership over one's actions. In order to "own" one's actions you must be able to manage your feelings. This ability to understand why you feel the way you do, manage those feelings and respond accordingly assists POTC participants with understanding how others feel and developing peer and adult relationships accordingly. This focus is

infused throughout all of POTC programming and is enhanced by the safe and trusting environment that POTC staff create and maintain.

Academic Supports & Literacy

Academic supports like homework help, literacy development, tutoring, and mentoring have long proved to be effective tools in the future success of students (Reinheimer and McKenzie, 2011). Furthermore, research also supports the impact of academic supports on persistence and retention and therefore, demonstrates the positive impact on students' current and future academic success (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, any program that is considered comprehensive must also include an academic support component. POTC embraces that responsibility by implementing Homework Help sessions, literacy development, tutoring, mentoring, and other academic supports.

Career Readiness

Career readiness has an impact on Career Decision-making Self-Efficacy (CDSE) or a person's confidence in making their career decisions. Students who begin the process of exploring what the work environment entails through career related activities are better positioned to experience higher CDSE. This is critical because those who have higher CDSE scores also believe more strongly about their future success and therefore are more apt to be intrinsically motivated toward activities that will benefit their futures (Paulsen and Beltz, 2004; Harvey, 2012; Pink, 2009; Burns et al., 2012). This research supports POTC's efforts to expose participants to real-life work activities and environments that demonstrate skills that are needed, employer expectations, and employee expectations. These activities also tend to "demystify" the world of work and allow students to base career decisions on actual experiences rather than what they learn through media like television, magazines, and the internet. By providing career readiness activities, POTC better prepares its participants to make better decisions about their work/career futures.

Summary

The ultimate goal of POTC is to help children and teens to develop into capable and responsible adults with the potential to achieve their personal and professional goals. This well-thought out and comprehensive approach to POTC programming lends itself to the enhancement of intrinsic motivation which is linked to greater success in our heuristic or organic work environment (Pink, 2009; Harvey, 2012). Jobs are no longer marked by a "predictable path" for workers to follow. Today's collegiate environment and work environment depend largely on the ability of students and workers to utilize higher order skill sets. These skill sets are not cultivated in today's passive K-12 educational environment marked by aggressive testing and an effort on the part of teachers and districts to impart enormous amounts of content on students. However, organizations like POTC are providing the missing link to its participants in order to cultivate higher order skill sets, civic pride and self-worth which are critical to long-term success in our society. In the future, it will be individuals like POTC participants who are fortunate enough to cultivate these skills who will be self-driven, successful, and most importantly, happy in their lives.

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