



Fostering Arts Education Through a University-Afterschool Partnership

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The arts, long a staple part of afterschool programming, continue to offer an engaging way to enrich curriculum, impart content, and develop skills in K–12 students. Arts experiences can positively affect young people’s developmental, behavioral, social, and intellectual capabilities (Afterschool Alliance, 2012; Montgomery, Rogovin, & Persaud, 2013; Stiegelbauer, 2008).

The broad range of afterschool arts activities can be divided into two basic types. In the first, visual and performing arts education, children explore the techniques of specific forms, such as sculpture or dance. The second, arts integration, uses the arts as a strategy for engaging children with content from other academic disciplines (Stiegelbauer, 2008).

Regardless of the type of arts activity, the importance of the arts in afterschool programs cannot be over-

estimated. As the arts are increasingly marginalized in public school systems, afterschool arts education can be an alternative way to integrate the arts into children’s academic experiences or build on their in-school arts experiences (Briggs & McHenry, 2013; Charmaraman & Hall, 2011; Eckhoff, Hallenbeck, & Spearman, 2011; Stiegelbauer, 2008). Enhancing young people’s exposure to and engagement with the arts has therefore become a priority for many afterschool programs.

However, logistical and resource constraints challenge afterschool programs looking to provide and maintain quality arts education (Montgomery et al., 2013). The success of content delivery generally rests

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with afterschool staff, whose training and educational background may be limited (Fleming & Felak, 2012). Many programs rely on arts and crafts activities that do not connect to state and national arts standards. Professional artists may be brought in as teaching artists (Anderson & Risner, 2012), but afterschool staff are not likely to be arts educators. Our experience suggests that professional development for afterschool educators is often centered on core subject areas, leaving staff charged with arts integration to find resources and curriculum ideas on their own. In addition, high turnover among afterschool program staff complicates the delivery of quality enrichment experiences (Asher, 2012).

One solution to the challenge afterschool programs face in providing high-quality arts education is to partner with a university. In the model featured in this article, a university teacher education arts course brings its students into elementary afterschool programs at local Title I schools. These students participate in arts-oriented field experiences that both enhance their own education and provide quality arts activities in the afterschool programs. This ongoing university-afterschool partnership, now in its fifth year, is presented as a model partnership for enhancing arts education after school, one that presents unique opportunities and challenges and that suggests best practices in such partnerships.

University-Afterschool Program Model Partnership

The GoalPOST (Goal-Oriented Performance in Out-of-School Time) program is a unique partnership between Clemson University and three local school districts. The collaboration offers limitless possibilities, enabling university students to engage in real-life educational experiences while children benefit from academically sound and research-based instruction.

The GoalPOST program is staffed by certified teachers, noncertified staff (generally support staff from the school), university students, and volunteers. The schools provide the certified teachers, who serve as afterschool staff. The school district supplies program space in the schools. The district interacts with the university to discuss teacher schedules, budgets, curriculum, supplies, programming details, and so on through Clemson's proj-

ect directors, who serve as program coordinators of all nine programs.

Clemson supplies university students who serve as noncertified afterschool teachers. Although most are preservice teachers in Clemson's College of Education, GoalPOST has also hired students from other majors, such as engineering, psychology, nursing, conservation biology, and parks and recreation management. In addition to these afterschool teachers, the university provides teacher education students who facilitate arts lessons, supported by their arts education instructor.

The university administration works with schools and local site coordinators to set up trips to the university and on-site experiences for the art lessons. It works with the arts education instructor to develop a schedule that suits the needs of both the teacher education students and the afterschool programs. Arts education lessons are conducted either at program sites or at Clemson's Arts & Creativity Lab (AC Lab), a dedicated lab classroom designed for educational exploration in the visual and performing arts. (See <https://www.clemson.edu/education/arts-creativity-lab>.) The university administration serves as fiscal agent for the partnership.

All GoalPOST employees receive specific, targeted staff training that addresses topics such as classroom management, professionalism, and lesson plan development in various content areas including arts, physical activity, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics).

The GoalPOST afterschool program enrolls more than 450 children at nine school-based sites every week-

day afternoon from September to April. The program components include quality afterschool programming based on state academic standards, including homework assistance, academic enrichment, and recreation. For the academic enrichment component, university students or teachers design 30–45-minute activities that explore content the program participants are learning during the school day or that provide enriching experiences they might not receive in school. For example, one

year university students taught classes in American Sign Language.

In addition to these regularly scheduled enrichment activities, during a three-week period every semester,

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teacher education students teach arts lessons to GoalPOST participants.

The Arts-in-Education Course and Its Field Component

In Clemson's teacher education program, students majoring in early childhood, elementary, and special education take an arts-in-education class as one of their required methods courses during their sophomore or junior year and prior to their student teaching. These teacher education students will not be certified to teach arts classes. However, classroom teachers who have not been fully trained to teach the arts can share an important role, along with arts specialists and community arts organizations, in providing quality arts education (Americans for the Arts, 2014; Gibas, 2012; Jeffers, 1993; Leonard & Odutola, 2016; UNESCO, 2006). Such arts-in-education courses, which are offered or required in most teacher education programs, can therefore provide a sustainable resource for afterschool arts education.

Clemson's arts-in-education course focuses on the arts disciplines as modes of inquiry, exploration, and assessment. It encourages teacher education students to use the arts to explore curriculum content, making connections across disciplines. One of the major projects for the course requires students to design and implement either an arts lesson or an integrated arts lesson for children in grades 2–6 in the GoalPOST afterschool program. Arts lessons focus on dance, drama, music, visual arts, or some combination of these; integrated arts lessons involve arts disciplines and another discipline, such as math, science, social studies, or English language arts.

Arts Lessons Delivered by University Students

For this arts-in-education project, groups of three or four elementary or special education majors design an arts lesson to deliver to a class in the GoalPOST afterschool program. Most classes include only one grade level, but some have two. The lesson plan, its objectives, and its formal and



Figure 1. Guided by Clemson teacher education students, GoalPOST students use visual art and math skills to scale their self-portraits into giants.

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informal assessment must be based on South Carolina academic standards in the visual or performing arts. If the lesson integrates another discipline, the lesson plan must also include the relevant standards of that discipline. Taking children's artistic development into consideration, students include in their lessons visuals, presentations, teacher samples, and other resources. Lessons culminate in an actual art-making experience or performing arts activity.

Throughout the arts-in-education course, student groups research, design, draft, receive feedback, and revise their lessons. Prior to teaching in the GoalPOST program, the students practice teaching their lessons in class to their peers.

Finally, the teacher education students teach their 45-minute lesson to children in the afterschool program. The afterschool staff learn alongside the children. All lessons provide an arts framework and additional learning ideas that program staff can use in future activities, whether or not they have arts or education training. During the lesson, the teacher education students are observed by both their arts education professor and a small group of peers, who provide feedback following the lesson. The students conclude the project by writing a critical reflection on the experience and making a

presentation to their arts-in-education class including an overview of the lesson, their assessment of how it went, and a brief reflection.

The varied lesson topics and activities are chosen by the teacher education students with guidance from their arts-in-education professor. For example, a lesson for fourth graders used dance to explore the solar system. In a lesson based on math standards, children in fifth and sixth grades scaled their own measurements to paint “giant” versions of themselves (Figure 1). Other examples include a lesson uniting history and arts in which children wove paper baskets based on a local artistic tradition, a lesson in creative movement and drama that taught children a relaxation technique to help them deal with anger and stress, and a performing arts lesson in which children explored Civil War history by creating props for a dramatic scene.

One group’s project, titled “Messy Mono-Printing,” illustrates an integrated visual arts and English language arts (ELA) lesson for third graders. The lesson encouraged creative thinking using the parts of speech and abstract art with printmaking.

To begin the lesson, the teacher education students reviewed parts of speech, particularly the term *adjective*. They wrote children’s definitions of adjectives on the board. Then they passed around “mystery bags” containing various textured objects. Children brainstormed adjectives describing the textures they felt in the mystery bags; the teachers then gathered the texture adjectives into a master adjective word bank on the board. Each child was asked to choose at least four adjectives from the master bank as the inspiration for his or her artistic creation.

A large piece of plastic wrap was placed at each desk. Children painted an expression of their first texture adjective onto the plastic, using not only brushes but also feathers, forks, and other objects. While the paint was wet, they pressed their piece of paper onto the plastic, transferring the paint to the paper to make a print (Figure 2). They followed the same procedure for all four of



Figure 2. Afterschool participants created “messy mono-prints” in a lesson that integrated visual art and ELA.

their adjectives, transferring all four designs to the same paper in whatever way felt pleasing to them.

The teacher education students conducted informal assessment during the lesson by monitoring children’s participation in the adjective discussion and their completion of the prints. A more formal assessment involved having participants analyze one another’s prints to create a poem. In responding to their partner’s print, the children filled in a seven-line poem template that asked them to demonstrate their knowledge of the parts of speech by using adjectives, nouns, and verbs.

This lesson integrated the following South Carolina Department of Education standards for the visual and performing arts (South Carolina Department of Education, 2017):

- Use of the student’s own ideas in creating a work of visual art

- Safe and responsible use of materials and tools
- Identification of connections between the visual arts and another curriculum subject

The lesson also integrated ELA standards, particularly one about explaining the functions of the parts of speech, along with the creation of a written poem.

Opportunities

Partnership between an afterschool program and a local teacher education program offers unique benefits for both. The afterschool program provides the university with field education opportunities for its students. The university students, for their part, provide standards-based arts activities for afterschool participants, in the process sparking new ideas and demonstrating new processes for the afterschool staff. Ultimately, the goals of this field experience requirement in the arts-in-education course are to help both the teacher education students and afterschool program staff build their lesson planning skills and, more importantly, to bolster their confidence in engaging children with the arts.

Benefits for the University

The most obvious benefit of the university-afterschool partnership for the teacher education program is that it provides field education experiences beyond the basic requirements. Research has suggested that the frequency and depth of field experiences make a difference in preparing novice teachers for the classroom (Zeichner, 2005). For Clemson undergraduates, the arts lesson they prepare for the GoalPOST program is often their first lesson planning experience.

The afterschool context gives these teacher education students opportunities to engage with children in ways that are not possible in their future practicum and student teaching experiences. Having field experiences after school hours is typically more convenient for them than during the school day, which often conflicts with their own university classes. More importantly, the students often get more opportunities to work with individual children or small groups in the afterschool program than they could during school-day field experiences. They learn more about individual participants and gain experience with personal and focused interactions. Furthermore, the teacher education students don't have

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access to the individualized education programs of GoalPOST children who have special needs. They therefore have to observe how afterschool participants are learning or struggling and then adapt their lessons by, for example, repeating instructions, physically demonstrating, or providing one-on-one support. These afterschool field experiences enrich these soon-to-be teachers' apprentice perspectives to give them a broader picture of children's lives, both in and out of school, than they get from their later in-school only placements.

Another benefit to the teacher education students is also a benefit to the field of afterschool education. Few university students are aware of the field of youth development or the job opportunities it offers. This field experience provides that exposure. Many students who prepare arts lessons for the GoalPOST program apply to work in the program after the course is over. Some have even joined the staff as employees. Those teacher education students who end up working for GoalPOST then enter their future field placements and student teaching having had an abundance of experiences working with elementary school children.

Benefits for the Afterschool Program

The benefits of the university partnership for the afterschool program go well beyond the opportunity to provide high-quality arts instruction.

A big benefit for program participants is the opportunity to interact with university students and visit a college campus. The GoalPOST program capitalizes on the reciprocal relationship between the schools and the university by alternating sites. During one semester, the teacher education students travel to the schools to teach

their arts lessons; the next semester, children are bused to the AC Lab at the university. During these visits, they also tour the campus and can use resources outside the AC Lab. For example, afterschool participants have been allowed to use the university's digital media lab to compose their own music or print their creations on a digital printer. In the past, the university

has scheduled a panel discussion with current students in which afterschool participants can learn what college is like and what pathways the students followed to get there. As many GoalPOST participants have never experienced a university environment before, these visits can dispel some of the mystique associated with college and

enable the children to envision themselves as future college students.

Another set of benefits accrues to the afterschool staff and volunteers. GoalPOST participants are accompanied to the arts lesson by their afterschool teachers, both university students and certified teachers. Observing and assisting with the university students' arts lessons serves as a form of on-the-job professional development. As the teacher education students develop their arts education skills by preparing and teaching the lessons, the afterschool staff are developing their own skills alongside them. The arts lessons become an exchange of ideas not only between the university students teaching the lessons and GoalPOST participants but between the university students and certified teachers working for GoalPOST. Sometimes afterschool staffers who are also school teachers replicate the university students' lessons in their own classrooms. For example, one teacher adapted an integrated arts lesson in which children reviewed the geography and characteristics of South Carolina by piecing together puzzle pieces of the state's distinct regions and making collages on each piece to represent that region's landscape, agricultural products, and industries. Given the challenges of scheduling professional development that works not only for staff members who teach during the school day but also for others with different work schedules, opportunities for staff development *within* program time are invaluable.

The final benefit of this university-afterschool partnership is financial sustainability. Many afterschool programs rely on external grants from school districts, state agencies, or national programs such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers. These funding sources often provide time-limited seed money with the expectation that programs will develop other funding for ongoing sustainability. University courses that require a field experience constitute a renewable low-cost resource for instruction in specialized program areas such as the arts.

Challenges

Although the model university-afterschool partnership has been quite successful, it is not without challenges.

One set of challenges involves logistics. Schedule changes in the afterschool program due to such variations as snow days, field trips, or schoolwide events can wreak havoc with the schedule of arts lessons—on which the teacher education students are being evaluated for their arts-in-education course grade and toward their licensure. To be effective in their delivery of arts instruction, the novice teachers need consistency in the afterschool schedule, facility, supplies and equipment, and participants. For example, a GoalPOST class with 20 fourth-graders may have only half of its participants present on the day of an arts lesson. If classes end up being too small, two grade levels may be combined. The teacher education students often need to make quick adjustments to their lesson plans to accommodate the number of children present.

Transportation is also likely to be a challenge. GoalPOST sites are anywhere from four to 31 miles from the Clemson campus. When the university students travel to the schools, their lecture and lab sessions need to be extended. When the children come to the campus, much of their program time can be spent on transportation. On rare occasions, the buses have returned to schools late, inconveniencing the participants' families. To allow enough time for the arts lessons, early dismissal has been utilized—sparingly and with the full support of the school administration and district transportation services.

Another issue the GoalPOST program has encountered is that afterschool staff may conflate the teacher education students with program volunteers, especially when the volunteers include other college students. Community volunteers in afterschool programs improve adult-child ratios while serving as caring mentors. They are also often asked to fill in wherever staffing is short, from taking over a class to making photocopies or cleaning up after snacks. Teacher education students are also volunteers in that they are not paid, but their role in the afterschool program is prescribed by their academic requirements. Their role should be protected so that they can observe and teach as mandated by their arts-in-education course.

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Best Practices for University-Afterschool Partnerships

Our experience with GoalPOST suggests best practices for partnerships between universities and afterschool programs to foster arts education. Thorough planning and consistent communication are key.

The planning process should involve the afterschool program director and, for multi-site programs, the site coordinators. For GoalPOST, the project directors who serve as program coordinators are affiliated with the university, but in other settings they are likely to be employed by the school or afterschool provider. The school administrator, and perhaps members of the afterschool program staff, should also be included in planning. On the university side, the instructor of the arts-in-education or similar course is a key player. Afterschool program leaders interested in exploring a university arts partnership can initiate this relationship by contacting faculty members directly.

All stakeholders must be on the same page regarding the objectives of the field arts experience. The ability of the university students to meet their academic requirements must not be compromised for the sake of the afterschool program. For example, if lessons need to be cancelled due to weather, then a make-up class time should be agreed upon. Meanwhile, the arts experiences of the afterschool participants should not be compromised for the sake of university requirements. Though the teacher education students design and teach the arts lessons as a learning experience for themselves, the lessons need to be carefully planned with age-appropriate activities for the learning and enjoyment of afterschool participants. The afterschool program and the university can specify solutions to possible pitfalls in the collaboration by agreeing on a memorandum of understanding (MOU). The MOU must specify, among other stipulations, who pays for what. In our partnership, university arts course fees pay for arts materials, and the afterschool program pays for buses during the semester when the afterschool sites travel to the university.

Once understandings are codified in an MOU, constant communication becomes the key to maintaining a successful relationship. Communication between the afterschool site coordinators and the university instructor is key. For example, if their arts lesson involves a dance

routine with music, the teacher education students must tell their arts education instructor that they need a music player in a suitable location so that the instructor can inform the site coordinator. The education students need to be focused on teaching a quality class rather than searching for equipment in an unfamiliar facility. Since each lesson is unique, several such requests are likely to arise each semester, such as smocks for work with paint or a particular configuration of desks to make space for dancing. If the arts lessons take place in a university lab

like Clemson's, the teacher education students can deal with their own space and equipment needs; however, for classes in schools, the arts instructor serves as the single point of contact to streamline communication.

A Partnership with Mutual Benefits

Many afterschool programs are staffed by certified teachers and volunteers who may have little or no experience with facilitating

learning in specialized areas such as the arts. However, afterschool programming is often more flexible than school curricula, allowing time for enriching experiences in such specialized areas—if only appropriate staff can be found. Meanwhile, students in teacher education programs are learning to teach in these specialized areas. They need field experience to develop their pedagogical skills (McDonnough & Matkins, 2010), become socialized into their vocations (Bullough, 2005), and learn to bridge theory and practice (Ohana, 2004).

Partnerships between university teacher education programs and afterschool programs, like the one presented in this paper, can meet both needs. In the GoalPOST program, afterschool participants receive high-quality arts instruction that would not otherwise be provided by their program. Meanwhile, teacher education students gain pedagogical experience supported by feedback and supervision. University-afterschool partnerships thus can be of mutual benefit to both parties.

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