Summer Program Report
Academic Secondary Enrichment
Performing Arts Intensive

Student:  
Dates:  June 24 – July 4, 2013  
Teacher:  Robert Pierson, TVI, and Jane Rundquist, TVI  
Teaching Assistant:  Scott Kelley and Camille Smith

Program Overview
The Academic Secondary Enrichment (ASE) classes are designed for middle and high school academic students. These students work hard in school to learn regular core curriculum subjects such as language arts and math in classrooms with their sighted peers. In TSBVI summer programs, they have the opportunity to practice these academic skills within meaningful, high-interest activities. At the same time, they learn and practice skills in the Expanded Core Curriculum for Blind and Visually Impaired Students (ECC). The ECC includes skills that are unique to the needs of students with visual impairments. ECC skills enhance an individual’s ability to access the regular core curriculum, live independently, and enjoy social and recreational activities. Skills in the ECC include compensatory academic skills (e.g., braille and tactile graphics), orientation and mobility, social interaction skills, independent living skills, recreation and leisure skills, career education, assistive technology skills, sensory efficiency skills, and self-determination skills.

Each ASE class has a unique theme, and students participate in a wide variety of activities related to the theme of their class. During these activities, students learn and practice specific ECC skills such as applying math and literacy skills when creating and following a budget), food shopping and preparation, managing and organizing their living area, planning and evaluating a project, using public transportation, keeping up with belongings, and using technology for various purposes including research and communication with family and friends.

An additional benefit of the program is the opportunity to interact with other students with visual impairments. For many, talking with other students about the challenges they face at home and school may both alleviate feelings of isolation and increase self-confidence.

The ASE classes taught during the summer of 2013 were: Camp Challenge, Camp Fine Arts, Catching Some Rays: Space Weather, Community Independence, Adventure/Outdoor Education, Middle School Enrichment, Performance Arts Intensive, Problem Busters, Video Production, Visual Arts and More, and Wildcat Catering and Bistro.
Class Description: Performing Arts Intensive

“Art isn’t something you do, it’s a place you go.” –(Student’s name removed)

This two-week intensive class was designed for high school students with a strong interest in the performing arts. The program began with one week of exploration in theater, music, chorus, movement/dance and writing, followed by a week focused on the skills used in performing one’s work. This included understanding the importance of commitment to discipline, rehearsal, taking direction, working in cooperation with fellow artists, the promotion of one’s talents, and future educational and career opportunities in the arts. Students were able to focus on and expand current areas of expertise, or to use this opportunity to explore new areas of creativity.

On the final day of the program, students presented an auditorium performance for peers, families and staff. They performed their own work or worked on other parts of the production team if they were not comfortable being on stage. This class was taught by teachers who have experience working with visually impaired students and who are involved in the Austin music and theater community.

Activities

On Monday morning, the students and teachers gathered to introduce themselves and discuss the parameters of this new program and to share ideas for the final performance. Each following morning of class, the students met as a group and were invited to share their ideas, feelings, and any relevant information in a daily “check in”, and perform vocal and physical warm-ups. The students concluded each school day with another full group meeting during which everyone contributed to a summary of the work so far, plans for the next day’s work, and visions of the final performance.

On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of the first week, the students were divided into three groups, which rotated through exploratory sessions of creative writing, music, and performance. Through these rotations, each student was able to explore different areas of creative expression and find out where their talents and interests lay. Several of the students found they had a natural affinity for an area they’d never before explored. These breakout sessions proved incredibly valuable by not only allowing creative exploration but also providing the students with a safe environment in which to share and collaborate with people of similar abilities and life experiences. The bonds that were formed during these sessions led to many group projects and evoked emotions that helped fuel the creative process.

The remainder of the first week was spent organizing the students’ ideas into cohesive acts for the final performance. During the second week, the students refined their acts by rehearsing in performance groups and continuing to work on their collaborative movement, music, theater, and writing projects. On the final Wednesday, the students spent the day doing a run-through of the final performance and pinning down areas that needed extra attention. Thursday morning, the day of the performance, was devoted to a dress rehearsal. After the 12:30 performance all of the attendees were invited to a reception in the cafeteria, during which students, families, and staff visited with one another and celebrated the students’ successes.

Breakout Sessions

Creative Writing

Each student participated in a creative writing workshop on Monday and Tuesday. On Monday, students were asked to free-write on a variety of open-ended prompts. These prompts ranged from, “I am thankful for…” to “Write about one of the most difficult decisions you’ve made in your life,” and “Write for 10 minutes with, ‘I used to think…’ as a starter.” Students had the freedom to apply the
writing prompts in any writing style they chose. Some students chose stories, while others preferred to write song lyrics and poems. On Tuesday, students continued work on the pieces they had started, or began new work. Several students worked on song lyrics they had developed in the music breakout session.

Focusing on subjects that were personally meaningful and working together as a group helped students see writing as a positive means of self-expression rather than an unpleasant, required assignment. Several of the students went on to expand initial ideas—both individually and in collaboration with others—into stories, poems, and original lyrics for songs they performed on Friday. The students wrote using a variety of technology including Braille note-takers and computers equipped with ZoomText, JAWS and Windows adaptations. The purposes of this breakout session included exposure to the creative writing process, increasing fluency of creative ideas, and exposure to technology and adaptations for people with visual impairments.

**Musical Instrument/Ensemble/Songwriting**

This first class of Performing Arts Intensive students had very eclectic musical tastes, and definite ideas about what they wanted to pursue musically during our week together. Students divided into small groups on Monday and Tuesday, with each group spending about an hour and a half in the music room. Students were given the opportunity to explore several instruments, many of which they had never had a chance to play before. These included drums, piano, guitar, bass, French horn, tuba, ukulele, marimbas, and a variety of percussive instruments. Everyone was invited to try new things musically, and to consider the feelings they wanted to convey via their music, as they composed lyrics and tunes with an emphasis on creative emotional expression.

While some students chose to explore instruments they had never tried before, others were adamant about what they wished to do and began writing songs and musical pieces. They determined what pieces they wanted to perform early in the week. Some were original pieces, with the lyrics having been worked on in writing sessions, others were developed during their time on the dorm. Students were encouraged to work cooperatively with one another and all of the students were supportive and respectful of each other’s musical efforts. They demonstrated curiosity, patience, a sense of humor, and a willingness to listen to others.

The students were very good about using their time to practice their chosen instruments and songs. They all met the challenge of trying new activities, and surprised themselves with what they were able to do musically in a short time. The show on Friday reflected an abundance of creativity.

**Performance**

During the performance breakout session, the students enjoyed a variety of theater and performance-related activities such as improvisation exercises, physical and mental warm ups, storytelling activities, and movement to varying genres of music and sound. In the performance breakout class, we strived to create a safe environment to allow for self-discovery. We used blindfolds as a tool to create a sense of equality among the students and also eliminate the pressure of being watched by others. This allowed the students a chance to explore movement in ways some of them normally may be too embarrassed to do. The sessions occasionally evoked emotional reactions from the students, and created a platform for sharing their experiences, causing them to grow both as artists and also fostered a stronger group dynamic. The students also explored areas of movement and music they had never experienced, and this encouraged the creation of unique pieces to present in the final performance. One exercise we did in a breakout session was turned into the opening piece of the final performance.
Throughout this class, students were able to choose areas of interest on which to focus their energy—anything from writing and composing songs to practicing the reading of their stories or poetry. In this creation, they learned about different types of theater and possible performance styles for the final performance. They also engaged in voice and stage presence development. Throughout the program, much emphasis was placed on working as a group to present a cohesive final performance, and the students were involved in the entire decision-making process.

EXPANDED CORE CURRICULUM
Students in Performing Arts Intensive participated in a wide variety of performance-related activities that are recreational, leisure and vocational skills for many adults. They all practiced skills which required choice making and independence, such as getting ready and being on time to workshops and rehearsals, planning individual and group projects, being responsible for any equipment or props they needed, and working with others collaboratively while advocating for their ideas and needs within the group. They also practiced the skills of following directions, keeping up with personal belongings, working with others, writing, reading, negotiating a cafeteria line, clearing the tray at the end of each meal, following written and verbal schedules, and advocating for and communicating special needs and capabilities.

INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS
(Deleted)