Summer Program Report 2012
Academic Secondary Enrichment
Writers' Workshop

Student: 
Dates: June 17 – 28, 2012
Teacher: John Rose, TSBVI Short-Term Programs Teacher
Teaching Assistant: Christina Blair

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, getting places on time, 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 2012 were: Austin Adventures, Camp Challenge, Camp Fine Arts, Community Independence, Individual Sports, Middle School Enrichment, Problem Busters: Energy Brigade, Radio Station Production, Voices in Song, Web Design, Wildcat Catering, and Writers’ Workshop.
DESCRIPTION OF CLASS: Writers’ Workshop
The Writers’ Workshop class cultivates young writers in many ways: as creative writers, as editors of their own work, and also as active workshop collaborators. John Rose, a published writer, language arts teacher, and teacher in the Short-Term Programs department at TSBVI, and Christina Blair, a teacher aide, guided the students through the creative writing process through brainstorming, free writes, and revision sessions. The students read and discussed poetry by notable authors as examples of different styles, influences, tone, etc. Students were able to experience literacy as a meaningful, highly motivating, personal life journey -- leading to the view of written language as exciting and dynamic, not just a skill needed to pass a course or a test. At the end of the two-week program students published a collection of their literary pieces and celebrated the end of the workshop by reading their work to an audience of teachers, friends, and family.

Student Activities and Skills Practiced
Writers’ Workshop
Each workshop day began with a free-write exercise where the students were given a prompt and asked to write on the topic for 30 minutes: change, home, discovery, etc. Students then had the option to share their work or not. More often than not, all the students chose to share and discuss.

Students then read and discussed various writings by published poets as a model and preparation for the day’s writing activities. Examples included literature of a particular genre, poems that made use of a particular poetic or literary device (e.g., metaphor), and lyrics to songs. The class then discussed the work: What is the speaker’s perspective? What happens in the piece? What really happens? What could have happened?

The students were then asked to write their own piece in the style of, or informed by, the piece they had just read, and/or the free-write prompt. Afterward, they were asked to share their piece with the rest of the class.

After the students had written a few pieces based on the daily activity, they would workshop their writing. The workshop was a process whereby two or three students a day chose a piece of their own to be read, reviewed, and constructively criticized by the rest of the class.

There were certain ground rules for the workshop and feedback. The author was asked to remain quiet during the workshop -- no explanations, no comments. Everyone read through the piece first without writing anything. Then the students were given 10 minutes to work through a response worksheet that asked several questions about the work. After the 10 minutes, feedback from the worksheet was given to the author: what is working in the piece, the use of sensory details, new metaphors and/or similes, reconsidering word choice, rearranging lines to make the piece more interesting or exciting, adding details for clarification, rewriting the last line, etc. It is often difficult to get student writers to talk about each other’s work, especially when it involves asking them to change something that they have written. Because of the strong feeling of community these writers developed, this class had little difficulty with giving and receiving feedback.

As the class neared the end of the two-week workshop, they were asked to choose three to four pieces for self-publication in an anthology for them to take home. The anthology is also placed in the TSBVI library collection. The students used the peer feedback from the workshop to make this decision. The work was then proofread, edited, and given a final proof by the authors.
Additional Activities
Other activities in Writers' Workshop included:

- From a discussion on “Inspiration,” the class took an off-campus trip to Erlewine Guitars, where students got a hands-on tour of a guitar builder’s shop. We focused on how we can derive inspiration for our writing from new experiences.
- On the day the students discussed lyrics and songwriting, singer and songwriter Darden Smith visited the school and spoke to the class about his craft, and then performed a brief concert.
- Students participated in a presentation on creativity by published poet, lyricist, and jazz singer, Suzi Stern. Following the presentation, the class discussed improvisation and rhythm in poetry and prose.
- In the afternoons after class, the workshop participants were encouraged to continue working on and revising their writing projects, or they could spend time reading.

Concluding Activities
The students performed their work at a reading held on the final day of the class and attended by parents, school staff and students. In preparation for the reading, each author rehearsed their work to perfect the most effective ways to present it.

EXPANDED CORE CURRICULUM

Independent Living Skills
Although the focus of our class was writing, students had ample opportunities to develop Independent Living Skills. Students began their day by independently preparing their own breakfast. They planned their menu, assigned duties, and developed a plan for preparing the meal and cleaning up afterward. During this activity they practiced critical thinking skills, organizational skills, team building, interpersonal skills, ways to make best use of their resources, and problem-solving strategies.

Orientation and Mobility
Students walked to and from the Erlewine guitar shop, where they received a tour. This experience gave them navigating an unfamiliar environment that included major street crossings, areas without sidewalks, stairs, and sidewalk travel.

Self-Determination
Self-determination highlights the importance of believing in oneself while understanding personal abilities and limitations. Skills include making decisions and setting goals to determine what will happen in one’s day. Opportunities to practice self-determination included classroom discussions about self-awareness and individual abilities and challenges. Students were encouraged to self-advocate for their needs, including being able to discuss modifications and accommodations they needed to participate in the workshop and being able to make choices about what role they would take in breakfast preparation.

INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS
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