Amplifying Youth Through Art:
A Social-Emotional Learning and Arts Plan

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Introduction

To uplift and empower student voice in schools, while increasing the social and emotional well-being of students, I propose a program called "Amplifying Youth Through Art" (AYTA). AYTA cultivates community within a classroom through arts-based activities and discussions centered around social justice and student experiences. AYTA is dedicated to uplifting student voices for issues they care about utilizing artistic practices. AYTA is rooted in social-emotional learning practices to enhance students' understanding of self and others. Through its design, AYTA promotes collaboration between students of different backgrounds, disciplines, and experiences.

The Issue

Young people are invested in social justice issues and movements online and in the streets, but they are also overlooked by decision-makers and adults. This can push youth to feel as though their thoughts, opinions, and experiences don't matter, or that things will never change. This presents an issue when students come of the age to vote. They don't register or don't cast their votes because they feel as though they don't matter in the larger system. Thus, young people have the lowest voter turnout. For example, young people ages 18 to 24 had a 51.4% turnout in the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election compared to the 76.0% turnout from those ages 65 to 74. Colorado's young people are among the most politically involved with 63% of folks ages 18 to 29 coming out to vote in the 2020 Presidential Election. However, there's still a lot of work to be done in engaging the voices of young people.

We can tell through social media presence and activity that youth are interested in changing the world around them. This includes fighting climate change, racism, violence, sexual assault, and other systems youth encounter daily. They do care, but they aren't involved in politics or legislation - two ways they can create impactful change. We can get youth engaged in their communities again by empowering their voices through art!

Philosophy & Approach

Amplifying Youth Through Art engages youth in discussions and artistic forms of expression to get community members to care about the social issues students are invested in. Through AYTA, students will explore the power of their voice and the impact they can have on their communities. Therefore, increasing young people's sense of activism and promoting involvement in local/state politics through voting or advocacy efforts.

The pilot year of this program concentrates on two art forms: photography and theatre. It involves two school partners including Rangeview High School Yearbook and DSST: Byers Drama Club. The Yearbook students will participate in a photovoice project to capture evocative photos related to issues they care about. They will share their work with the community in the form of an art gallery, virtual photobook, or something else determined by them. The Drama students will use some photos taken in the photovoice portion of the program to begin devising a short play that highlights social issues they are concerned about.

The photovoice portion of this program aims to capture a student's perspective through still images and short photograph descriptions. However, behind the final product will include several discussions around the topics students are gravitating toward. Some questions to consider throughout this process are: Why are students choosing these issues? Why are these issues important to students? What do these photographs bring up for students? To continue building empathy, we also want to consider how others might experience some of the photography.

The theatre portion is focused on devising, a form of theatre that means making something out of nothing. Devised theatre can center on a social justice issue with the intention to leave the audience and cast feeling like they understand an issue and have action steps to do something about it. Our devising process utilizes work and activities from *Theatre of the Oppressed* author, Augusto Boal. It is also rooted in forum theatre, an art form that allows audiences to ask questions and engage with theatre in non-conventional ways. We know that the arts promote empathy, but forum theatre puts empathy into practice by encouraging audience participation and integration.

Project Objectives & Evaluation	
Objective	**Evaluation**
Empower youth to realize their voice matters in social movements and their communities.	Comparing the answers to "my voice matters" in the pre/post-program surveys.
Cultivate a community based on trust and respect by integrating social-emotional practices.	Observing how youth react to the integrated SEL activities from class and from devised theatre practices. Analyzing how young people respond to "my peers care about what I have to say" and "I care about what my peers have to say".
With input from youth, create and share a final project with the public to spark conversations.	Observing how youth engage with one another when collaborating on their final sharing.
Social-Emotional Learning Goals & Evaluation	
Objective	**Evaluation**
Students feel a sense of belonging at their school.	Comparing the answers to "I belong in my school community" in the pre/post-program surveys.
Students explore their own feelings and emotions around social issues.	Observing how students engage with each other during discussions about their

	photographs and writing prompts.
Educators, administrators, and adults promote relationships with students by attending final sharings and performances.	Offering adults a short questionnaire to see how they responded to youth's artistic expression. Will consult with students to see what questions they are most curious about.

Student Surveys

There will be a pre-program and post-program survey for students to fill out anonymously, they will consist of the same questions to track student growth if any. The surveys serve to indicate how students feel about their school and local communities and their place within those systems. Ultimately, we are wanting to know if students felt seen, heard, and important to their communities. Through observation and discussion, we'll discover how students respond to the artistic outlet in conjunction with activism and social change movements, this does not need to be captured in a survey format.

Student Survey Questions

1. I am in the ___ grade.
   a. 6th
   b. 7th
   c. 8th
   d. 9th
   e. 10th
   f. 11th
   g. 12th
2. In my school community, I feel seen.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Maybe
3. In my school community, I feel heard.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Maybe
4. In my school community, adults listen to me.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Maybe

5. I am engaged in my community.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Maybe
6. My peers care about what I have to say.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Maybe
7. I care about what my peers have to say.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Maybe
8. I belong in my school community.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Maybe
9. My voice matters.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Maybe
10. My name is _____. (Optional)
    a. Fill in the blank

Timeline & Methods

Amplifying Youth Through Arts is a fluid and flexible program that can implement a multitude of different art forms. This first project is 10 weeks long, 6 weeks are dedicated to the photovoice portion and 4 weeks are set for the devised theatre portion. The photovoice portion meets twice a week for 58 minutes each session. The theatre portion meets three times a week for 90 minutes each session. AYTA should be implemented and encouraged for as long as a school community finds it beneficial. The table below captures our timeline as well as our objectives and activities for each session.

Part 1: Photovoice Project			
Wk	**Dates**	**Objectives**	**Activities**
1	Tues 3/22	Students will learn the basics of photovoice and see examples. Students will explore themselves through writing.	● Pre-program survey ● What is photovoice? (Examples) ● What is this project? ● Free-write activity ("I am" poem)

	Thurs 3/24	Students will explore themselves through writing.
		
		Students will discover how they play a role in larger systems.
			● Share a photo from your camera roll that represents who you are
			● Revisit "I am" poem
			  ○ What words appeared the most? Discuss.
			● Collaborative poem based on themes/words that came up
			  ○ What does it feel like to have us create together?

2	Tues 3/29	Students will strengthen photography skills.	● Photographer workshop ○ Local photographer comes to share what makes a captivating and impactful photo
	Thurs 3/31	Students will work collaboratively to find what issues are most important to them. Students will begin to apply photography skills. Students will apply photography lessons.	● Brainstorming conversation about what issues or topics are important to students ○ What gets them fired up? ● Select 3-5 main words/themes to focus on ● Begin collecting photos to share next session
3	Tues 4/5	Students will engage in discussion to better understand themselves and others.	● Share photo collections ● Discuss what is coming up for students when engaging with the photo collection

		Students will reflect on their experiences.	● Writing prompt ○ Related to photos

	Thurs 4/7	Students will explore themselves through writing.
		
		Students will apply photography lessons.
			● Revisit writing prompts. Pick out words that stick out.
			  ○ Capture photos of what those words mean to you.
			● Collect more photos related to the chosen topics.
			  ○ Ask students if they want to continue with their original topics or if they want to pick new ones.

4	Tues 4/12	Students will engage in discussion to better understand themselves and others. Students will reflect on their experiences.	● Share photo collections ● Discuss what is coming up for students when engaging with the photo collection ● Writing prompt ○ Related to photos ●
	Thurs 4/14	Students will apply photography lessons. Students will explore what their work means to them. Students will conceptualize their work for others. Students will work together to determine how to share with their community.	● Collect more photos related to the chosen topics. ● Revisit the writing prompt from last week. Choose 2-4 photos from your entire collection that you enjoy the most, are most proud of, etc. ● Create a piece of writing related to your selected images. ○ Hold on to for next time. ● Decide as a group how you would like to share your work with the community.
5	Tues 4/19	Students will explore themselves and reflect on their experiences. Students will work in a collaborative environment.	● Collect all writing prompts and activities and the 2-4 images you selected ● Last group discussion ● Revisit "I am..." poems ○ How does this appear in your photos? Writing? ● Create collective group poem
	Thurs 4/21	Students will share their work with their community.	● Begin preparing the final sharing
6	Tues	Students will share their work with	● Complete the final sharing

	4/26	their community.	○ If this is a gallery, set up the gallery and talk with those who come to see!
	Thurs 4/28	Students will celebrate the work they completed. Students will reflect on their experiences.	● Post-program survey ● Group celebration ● Discussion 　○ Takeaways 　○ Improvements 　○ Questions

Part 2: Devised Theatre			
Wk	**Dates**	**Goals**	**Activities**
6	Mon 4/25	Students will engage with the basic practices of devised theatre and learn its historical impact on activism.	● Pre-program survey ● Introduction to devising 　○ Grounding exercise ● Examples of devising work 　○ *Karmic Meter* 　○ MIA video ● Activities from *Games for Actors & Non-Actors* by Augusto Boal 　○ Columbian Hypnosis
	Tues 4/26	Students will engage with the work from Rangeview students. Students will participate in a writing prompt to explore themselves and their experiences.	● Experience the photos from the gallery; discuss feelings 　○ Generate words/feelings related to the photos 　○ Activate words ● Writing prompt + discussion 　○ Activate responses
	Thurs 4/28	Students will further explore themselves through writing and activities. Students will share their voices through group poetry.	● Writing prompt + discussion 　○ Relate it to feelings discussed at last session ● Activate writing responses ● Collaborative poetry 　○ Related to words generated ● Discuss work that youth enjoyed
7	Mon 5/2	Students will begin writing their script using the work they've written and done so far.	● Read a devised script 　○ ● Begin piecing writing prompts into a script
	Tues 5/3	Students will collaborate through an editing/revision process.	● Editing day ● Some more poetry or free-write activities as needed ● Complete draft of script

	Thurs 5/5	Students will read through their script and make any final changes. Students will stage their script to form a play.	● Read-thru of script ● Begin staging script
8	Mon 5/9	Students will stage their script to form a play.	● Finish staging
	Tues 5/10	Students will rehearse their play and fix things along the way.	● Rehearse the script with staging
	Thurs 5/12	Students will rehearse their play and fix things along the way.	● Rehearse the script with staging
9	Mon 5/16	Students will rehearse their play.	● Rehearse performance
	Tues 5/17	Students will rehearse their play.	● Rehearse performance
	Thurs 5/19	Students will rehearse their play.	● Rehearse performance
	Fri 5/20	Students will share their work with the public.	● Final sharing! *Students aren't expected to be off-book*
10	Tues 5/24	Students will reflect on their experiences. Students will celebrate the work they've done.	● Post-program survey ● Group celebration ● Discussion of takeaways

Resources
- https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-018-5335-7
- https://socialwork.du.edu/research/project/asking-change-photovoice-project
- https://www.du.edu/ccesl/ourwork/amplifying_voices/photovoice.html
- https://dugis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=524bfd8164594cb185cd890f8566d48b
- http://anyflip.com/mpry/dirc/
- YELL Handbook (downloaded PDF)
- https://cefellowsdu.com/2019/06/07/learning-about-photovoice-as-a-community-engaged-fellow/
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Photovoice
- https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/state-state-2020-youth-voter-turnout-west-and-southwest
- https://www.denverpost.com/2020/11/19/colorado-youth-voter-color-turnout/

- https://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/2020/11/06/colorado-among-states-highest-voter-turnout/6191489002/