

# Rock and Roll Academy

## Case Study

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### Introduction

Rock and Roll Academy (RRA) is an experiential music program that emphasizes Social Emotional Learning (SEL), through the experience of playing in a rock band. Students form bands, choose songs and instruments, and develop confidence and teamwork skills as they collaborate and negotiate from the first session to a full-blown rock concert. The objectives of the RRA are as much about self-awareness, social responsibility, and creative problem solving as they are about playing music.

The RRA curriculum consists of 18 rotating lesson plans that take students from first-class meetings to winter and spring rock concerts. Through research-based professional development, a comprehensive facilitators guide, and access to online forums, teachers gain confidence in knowing they have the training, resources, and support to deliver the program successfully.

Students do not need any prior music experience to join a band and begin to develop musical and life-skills in RRA. A program that is social, play-based, and student-driven, RRA quickly impacts overall school culture, allowing students a deeper sense of ownership and identification with their school...attitudes that research shows contribute to higher rates of retention.

RRA has been implemented as both an in-school program and an after school program in the Telluride Mountain School in Telluride, Colorado and as an after school program in Aspen, Colorado for ten years. The program is in the first year of implementation in the University Lake School in Hartland, Wisconsin.

### History

The original Rock and Roll Academy was established by Mark Galbo as a supplementary program with an in-school and after school component in Telluride, Colorado in 2003. The program grew out of Galbo's vision of democratic education and the need of the Telluride Mountain School for innovative arts programming. Galbo designed an intentional facility that reflected his goals of play-based learning in an emotionally secure environment. Initially, there were 70 in school students and 50 after school students. Students in grade levels 1-12 are involved in the program. Telluride Mountain School is a values-based, experiential private school. The experiential nature of RRA made for a good fit.

The Aspen Rock and Roll Academy was founded in 2010 as an after school enrichment program. The Aspen school is an independent RRA franchise that is owned and operated by its facilitator, who has received RRA Facilitator training. The Aspen RRA program consistently enrolls approximately 40 students, grades 1-12 in its spring and fall programs.

A Rock and Roll Academy was implemented in the University Lakes School (ULS); a private school located in Hartland, Wisconsin, a suburb of Milwaukee, in the fall of 2012. ULS became interested in RRA after the ULS head of school visited the Telluride facility in the spring of

2012. A beautiful 800 square foot dual room facility was built inside the ULS middle school and a candidate search was initiated by ULS with support from RRA. The chosen candidate was selected and visited Telluride for on-site training in August 2012. ULS made the decision to launch the program at the beginning of the school year in a low key manner so as to not generate significant questioning or resistance prior to the initiation of the program. The school also decided to implement the program incrementally, starting with grades seven and eight at the beginning of the school year, and adding grades five and six for the second semester.

### Methods

As an empirical inquiry that investigated the implementation and impacts of the Rock and Roll Academy, the design of this evaluation was primarily a case study (Yin, 1984). As such, the evaluation used multiple sources of evidence and a combination of approaches to collect data to answer the questions posed in this report. The evaluator reviewed historical documents and the descriptions of the program and its training program prepared by the founder. The evaluator visited the Telluride (original) location, the Hartland location, and interviewed the Aspen location coordinator by phone. During each of the on-site visits, the evaluator observed various grade level classes of the Rock and Roll Academy in action, interviewed groups of students, parents, other teachers and school administrators in a focus group or individual setting. The evaluator also conducted telephone interviews with a set of RRA alumni. The small size of these schools and the comprehensive coverage of these interviews obviated the need for sending out confirmatory surveys, which would target essentially the same individuals previously interviewed. There was not a possibility of performing either a non-equivalent control group or a longitudinal study to investigate the relative contribution of the RRA. For both the Telluride and the Hartland location, the program is implemented as a whole school program, eliminating the ability to identify a suitable control group. At the Telluride location, the program has been continuously implemented for ten years and the Hartland location has not yet completed its first year of implementation. These two facts precluded a longitudinal analysis of the program's impact in either location.

### Results

#### 1) *What has been the impact of the program on student outcomes?*

Students were observed in the RRA classes in Telluride to walk in, group themselves in their bands, and begin quickly to rehearse their songs or begin to learn new songs. The students were introduced to the evaluator and responded courteously, but did not appear to be fazed by a strange adult hanging out in their room. The bands were observed to organize themselves, decide what song(s) to practice and/or learn and who would play each instrument. The individual band members would frequently change instruments when playing different songs. The coordinator was always present and available for assistance when asked, but allowed the individual bands to organize their activities and help each other out with their parts. This "being present while not appearing to interfere" nature of the coordinator's comportment during the time that the students were working in their individual bands (typically two were working independently) appears to be a key to the success of the program. The environment is one of freedom (and responsibility) on the part of the students to organize themselves,

choose their songs, learn the parts and practice together, and work out any conflicts within a well-controlled environment. The coordinator responds to student's requests for help, particularly with re-arranging equipment and in figuring out the process of playing a new song or reviewing those processes. The coordinator appears to be aware of everything that is going on with the students and has the knowledge and skill to determine when to let the students figure things out on their own or offer to assist, whether it is in the learning of new material or resolving group conflict.

Each of the stakeholder groups reported similar impacts, but gave primary focus to different areas. The students in Telluride unanimously identified the fact that the program was "fun" and allowed them a time to de-stress from their more traditional classes. They reported that the RRA was frequently the primary reason that they wanted to go to school. They indicated that it was rewarding to be able to discover what they liked (e.g. instruments and songs) on their own and to have the freedom to choose their bands. The students reported that they looked forward to their RRA time and that it was the highlight of their day. All of the students interviewed emphatically expressed these points regarding enjoying the RRA and its approach.

The students were able to reflect on the impacts of the program on their socialization and emotional growth. They indicated that they had learned how to work in groups, communicate effectively, resolve issues, and feel comfortable with performing in front of others, including their peers. They had become more aware of their emotions and thoughts and had learned how to maintain control when disputes arose. The students also indicated that they had learned that, if they stuck to it, they could learn to master that difficult song and experience the joy of accomplishment. Some of them indicated that this had transferred to their other subjects when they faced a particularly challenging lesson.

The alumni reinforced these observations on the part of the current students with a greater emphasis on the long-term impacts of the program. The first things mentioned by the alumni as an impact of RRA was "learning about music" and "figuring out life". One alum described the program as "the most fun thing that a kid can do that has lasting value".

Some of the alumni came into the program having taken music lessons previously (most hated them) and some had no knowledge about playing an instrument. They all mentioned how much they appreciated the methodology of the RRA in that they could experience success early while they began to realize how deeply they could go into music if they chose (one of the alumni went on to study at a top tier music conservatory). They all have kept up with music to some degree, ranging from a professional career in music to playing in pick-up bands to just using their skill to entertain friends and others from time to time. Those that have moved on to an academic study of music or to regular performance indicated that their experience with RRA had taught them the value of learning the technical issues and reading music and actually helped them in those endeavors. They also indicated that they observed that the RRA had given them a better "feel" for music than their peers in that they were more comfortable with performing new material and reacting positively and creatively to the unpredictable events that happen during performances. One student attending music school

observed that developing an “ear” for music was critically important but seemed to be lacking in many of her peers that had gone through programs that were more traditional.

The alumni made comments like “RRA made me who I am” and it “changed my life completely” and was “a huge factor in my life – shaping me into what I am today”. They stated that the RRA experience helped considerably with their socialization in school and with their peers. They reported that through the process of forming bands, selecting songs, and preparing for performances, they learned how to succeed in a social setting, work cooperatively in groups, resolve conflicts, help each other, and gain confidence to perform in public. They gained the motivation to stick with it when the going got rough or a new song turned out to be more difficult than it seemed. This led to learning the personal rewards of finding success after a great amount of effort. They reported that this knowledge translated into their attitudes towards their educational endeavors, both in the Mountain School and in their postsecondary pursuits. They reported that they had learned that they could succeed in mastering a difficult task, whether it be a particularly difficult song or a particularly difficult course. They also learned that giving up was not an option as they had to keep on playing during a performance even if they made errors on their instruments.

The alumni felt that their RRA experience had helped significantly in their transition to college and that they had significant advantages over their peers in college. These advantages include self-confidence, ability to concentrate on a task for a long time, ability to work together with different groups doing vastly different things, being comfortable with making presentations and being comfortable and successful with their peers. Their ability to pick up a guitar and entertain others was reported to be a plus in the collegiate socialization process.

The parents in the Telluride focus group interviews stressed the social and even academic skills that their children were acquiring through their participation in the RRA. They were more divided regarding the long term music education benefits of the program due, primarily, to the lack of explicit teaching of site reading of musical scores.

The parents described the RRA as a crucial part of the Mountain School community. The parents reported that their children loved the program and that they complained strongly when they could not attend school on a RRA day. They expressed that their children had learned teamwork and teambuilding, how to find success, how to sort out conflicts, and how to stand up for themselves in a positive manner. They felt strongly that the program teaches children group dynamics, how to determine their own strengths and weaknesses as well as those of others, and how to meld these into the creation of a group performance. They expressed how they observed the performances being very empowering for their children as they learned confidence and the benefits of sticking with something through mastery. They indicated that participation in the program helped kids develop and understand their own intrinsic motivation.

The parents also shared their observations that the success that their children experienced through music practice translated into a change in their attitude toward education overall. They had learned that they could master any subject if they tried hard enough. They expressed that their children had learned how to figure things out on their own and observed

an increase in concentration and on-task behavior while they were studying. One parent observed that her child began to look at patterns and sequences in a more fundamental and concrete manner and expressed that it had helped in pursuing a love for physics. Another parent observed that, contrary to most other types of group projects, the structure of the bands did not permit any student to slack off. Everyone had to do their part for the performance to be successful.

The school administrators at the Telluride school also expressed that the RRA was an integral part of the academic and social structure of the school. Students learn by doing and the program incorporates a strong peer learning component. They reported that the students come together in the RRA and develop an increased closeness. They feel that students gain self confidence through the performances and that this confidence will serve them well during their lifetimes. The school comes together as a unit for the performances resulting in a greater sense of school identity. The students also learn the rewards of sticking with the process of figuring out a difficult song and this transfers into their academic pursuits. They have noticed an increase in concentration and on-task behavior during the more academic settings. The RRA helps to make school fun and adds a synergistic component to a student's career.

The implementation at the University Lake School in Hartland, Wisconsin is the first in-school program replication of the RRA and is in its first year. The interviews reflected the inevitable issues surrounding a new program, particularly one this different, and provided the foundation for a number of "lessons learned" that can inform future implementations.

The RRA in Hartland was initiated for Middle School students, with seventh and eighth graders starting during the first semester. These students, when interviewed, appeared to fall into two distinct camps. Those students that were musically inclined, or open to becoming so, loved the program and indicated that they found it a wonderful way to get to learn and play music. They reflected the same comments heard in Telluride regarding how the program was fun and how they enjoyed the freedom to choose their instruments and songs. They indicated that (frequently in opposition to previous music lessons), learning was fun and the process of figuring out and playing new songs got easier during the semester. These students indicated that they learned that hard work contributes to success and that they had gained valuable experience with performing in public. They had gained significant experience in resolving problems, although they found that the program sometimes intensified pre-existing issues between students in their class.

Those students that indicated "music is not my thing" were much more critical of the program. They didn't want to be in the program and expressed resentment that it has replaced their study hall. They also expressed the concern that the program was too loud for the school and interfered with some of their other classes. Those students that didn't want to be in the program created difficulties with the functioning of some of the bands. These students would prefer that the program be optional, perhaps with a two-week introduction so students could know what they were choosing.

The sixth grade class that was observed and interviewed (during the second semester of implementation), however, demonstrated almost identical behavior to that described for the

classes in Telluride. They came in, grouped themselves into their bands, and began to work on their songs. They also expressed that they thought that the program was “fun” and that they enjoyed the opportunity to choose their instruments and songs and to figure things out on their own. This was obviously a significant change from the experience of the seventh and eighth graders during the first semester.

The parents in the Hartford focus group reflected the uncertainties and confusion surrounding the “drop in” style of implementation in the school. By the time that the interviews were held, they had come to understand the social emotional learning component of the program and felt that it had great potential in that area. Many of the children of the parents attending the focus groups loved the program, while some did not. They all indicated that it could be an excellent experience in conflict resolution and could teach important life skills. However, they also suggested that there was too little guidance and facilitation at the beginning, so that it became a little like “Lord of the Flies”. They felt that children were given freedom without boundaries rather than freedom with boundaries. They also expressed concern that some of the song lyrics were inappropriate for children of this age group and suggested providing a list of pre-vetted songs from which the students could choose.

The significant differences between the first and second semester were reflected in the parents comments. While parents with students that had taken the program in the first semester tended to discuss potential impacts, those with students currently in the program (second semester) spoke of actual impacts. They felt that the program provided a positive celebration of performance art and resulted in the same degree of enthusiasm as do sports. They all felt that their children significantly increased their confidence level as a result of the public performances. One parent suggested that the initial implementation of the program in the seventh and eighth grades may have been one of the reasons for the rocky start. Students at this age are becoming very self-conscious and concerned about their image with their peers. Students with no musical knowledge may be fearful of trying and afraid of making embarrassing mistakes in front of their peers. This can result in aggressive and/or passive-aggressive resistance.

The administration and staff of the University Lake School in Hartland report that the program has begun to show its potential after a rocky start but it is too early to really tell what the long term impact will be on the students and the school. The “drop-in” implementation, whereby the program seemed to appear at the beginning of the year, meant that the program was not coordinated with the rest of the Fine Arts and other programs of the school, resulting in some misunderstandings, resentment, and defensiveness. Both the language and theatre arts teachers observed that they would not initiate performance-based programs at the middle school level.

2) *What has been the effectiveness and results of the professional development provided for program facilitators?*

The professional development program has provided the facilitators with a good introduction to the basic concept and philosophy of the program and the methodologies of assisting (rather

than telling) the students as they learn to play their songs. This is, in other words, the pedagogical aspects of the program.

What has been missing, as reported by the program coordinators and the leaders at the University Lakes School, is the behavioral management aspects of facilitating this program. Unless a new facilitator is already a seasoned K-12 teacher, there is a need for explicit training in behavior management. This would include standard classroom management practices, setting boundaries within which the freedom of the program can be expressed, knowing when to intervene with student problems (as well as when not to), and basic counseling skills. These are not skills that necessarily come along with the musical and performance skills that are the obvious prerequisites for an RRA facilitator.

3) *What has been viability of the RRA business model for the participating schools?*

The Telluride administrators express the belief that the RRA is a major part of their marketing efforts. Not only does the program make the school unique, it has a significant positive reputation in the community, both through the in-school and the after school programs. The in-school program holds two in-school concerts and the after school program holds two concerts in a local theatre. The head of school indicated that the program directly recruits 10 – 15 percent of the school enrollment.

The RRA is the music program of the school and the Business manager indicated that the independent contractor nature of the relationship actually saves the school money. The head of school expressed the opinion that the “program is a steal” given all that the school gets from the program.

### Summary and Conclusions

The Rock and Roll Academy is highly successful in Telluride, bringing both music education and social emotional learning opportunities to the students of the Telluride Mountain School. After a rather rough start, the program in Hartland, Wisconsin appears to be well on its way to becoming successful in the same manner as the program in Telluride.

The program appears to be replicable and not totally dependent on the unique skills and talents of its founder. This case study showed that the proper recruitment, training, and support for the RRA facilitator is the primary key for the success of the program in any location.

Many of the implementation issues that arose in Hartland can be viewed as learning experiences and steps can be taken to ameliorate them in the future. There is strong evidence to suggest that implementing the program in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade may have contributed to the initial problems. A comparison of the experience in Telluride with the experience in Hartland that, when students at this age level enter the program with years of experience, they do extremely well. New students, as well, can be integrated into a pre existing RRA program and culture through peer teaching. When all students are new to the program the issues of self-confidence and image come to the fore. There are also significant indications that the professional development program should contain a solid behavioral management component.

The program demonstrates outcomes that include and go beyond the concept of social emotional learning. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social emotional learning as being composed of five competency clusters: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. All of these competencies have emerged clearly in the self-reflection of both students and alumni and the observations of the parents and school administrators. These competencies represent some of the factors that the alumni identify as the advantages that they received from participation in the RRA.

The students emerge from the program with a deep understanding of music, its creation, and performance. They have the skills and confidence to perform for their friends and in public and a substantial foundation for further study and/or professional performance. They have the confidence to perform (present) in public and to work in groups cooperatively and resolve any issues that come up. They have learned that sticking to something results in competence and even excellence. The RRA is a powerful educational tool that has the potential to provide significant support for achieving a school's mission.

### Recommendations

1. Implement an expanded professional development program that includes explicit instruction in behavior management along with the pedagogical training. Consider implementing an internship period whereby the new facilitator teaches a number of classes with the founder or an experienced facilitator.
2. Plan to implement new programs in a collaborative manner with the parents and faculty of the new school.
3. Manage expectations by being more explicit about the performance goal and what it looks like and recognizing that the implementation of a new program is inevitably disruptive and the first year of a new teacher can be rocky.
4. Consider implementing the program in a staged manner starting with the earlier grades and moving forward through the middle and high school level.
5. Consider furthering the integration of the RRA with other subjects. Music tells a powerful story and can be integrated with subjects as diverse as social studies and mathematics.
6. Consider allowing students to choose their own songs from a given playlist provided at the beginning so that students can listen to them and decide which one they wish to play. These playlists could be based on a particular sub-genre, social theme, or other relevant taxonomy. This method could increase the possibility of integrating music with other disciplines and solve the issue of inappropriate lyrics.
7. As the program expands, develop a method (e.g. on-line video conferencing) to facilitate in-service professional development and the establishment of a network of RRA facilitators to provide mutual support and consultation. Promote regular interactions (meetings) between members of this group.

### References

Yin, R. (1984). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing