



Rock and Roll Academy

South Tech Academy
Case Study
First Semester

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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 an end of term rock concert. 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, as an in-school program in the University Lake School in Hartland, Wisconsin and as an after school program in Aspen, Colorado. The program has just completed its first semester at the South Tech Academy in Boynton Beach, Florida. This report is an initial evaluation of that implementation effort.

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.

Description of the Program

The Rock and Roll Academy was implemented in the South Tech Academy located in Boynton Beach, Florida. South Tech Academy is a charter high school operating under the auspices of the Palm Beach County School District. South Tech Academy is structured into twelve career academies including Auto Body Repair, Automotive Technology, Cosmetology, Culinary Arts, Business Management, Commercial Arts, Information Technology, Marine Technology, Medical Sciences, Motorcycle Technology, Recording Arts and Veterinary Assisting. These academies are a high school program that combines job skill training with all the requirements of the traditional high school diploma. The location, public school governance, and academy orientation makes South Tech Academy a very different environment from the other RRA locations and provides a test of the portability of the program.

Two large rooms at South Tech were converted to an RRA facility and two facilitators were hired by South Tech with support from RRA. The program was initially implemented as a one semester elective for students in any of the academies. A typical day (except for Performance Friday) starts with a mini-lesson or other brief activity followed by the bands rotating between the activity stations (song research, quiet performance (with headphones) and a full performance station). Performance Friday is a weekly event where the two classes come together to watch each other perform the songs that they have been working on during the week. The course culminates with a concert in a large public venue where all of the bands perform for the school, their parents, and other members of the local community. Students are graded regularly based on their contributions to the success of their band, their degree of improvement, and on brief music related activities. The students are not graded on the absolute quality of their performance.

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 site at the beginning, mid-point and end of the semester. During all of these visits the evaluator interviewed the facilitators and the school leadership and observed the program preparations and operation. During the mid-point visit, the evaluator interviewed the students and a group of parents. During the end of semester visit, the evaluator interviewed the students.

An initial student survey was constructed jointly by the facilitators and the evaluator and was administered in hard copy form in order to provide baseline information regarding the students. An end of term survey was developed by the evaluator that included the questions from the initial survey that dealt with students' attitudes about their ability to work in a social setting and their flexibility.

Results

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

Students were interviewed during both the mid-semester and end of semester visit. Since the results of the interviews conducted during these two visits were similar, they are summarized together. A Performance Friday was observed during the mid-semester visit.

During the Performance Friday, the attentiveness of the students in the audience, the support that they gave to their peers, and the willingness of all of the students to perform in front of their peers, regardless of their skill level, was impressive. Some of the bands were obviously struggling (certainly to be expected only nine weeks after the start) and some had members who had well developed musical talents. There did not appear to be any reluctance on the part of beginning bands to perform, even when following an outstanding band populated by skilled musicians. There were over fifty high school students in the room and even during the gaps between performances, there was very little rowdiness. The movement and activity was mainly focused on preparation for performances. The variety of music that was performed during the day was remarkable.

About half a dozen parents came in to see the bands play during Performance Friday and were interviewed by the evaluator. The parents were excited that their children enjoyed being in the program. Some of the parents indicated that they were able to use their childrens' desire to practice their music as a way to get them to finish their homework (e.g. no practice until homework is completed). One of the parents stated that the RRA "plays a more significant role than I expected" in the academic and social development of her child. They observed that the students are starting to learn group processes, with one parent expressing this change by stating that her son is "starting to say we".

The students were interviewed at the end of each of the performance pieces at the mid-semester visit and during class time at the end of semester visit. The students at South Tech. mentioned many of the same things that characterized the student discussions in Telluride. The students expressed that they love the program and enjoy being able to learn to play a variety of instruments. Many of the students commented on the fact that they had become much more comfortable with performing in front of their peers. Some of the students mentioned how shy they had been before being in the RRA and how participating during the semester had changed that aspect of their personality for the better. They mentioned that they had learned how to work in groups and how to reach a group decision. When asked how the groups made a decision about which song to perform, there was a striking diversity of responses including rotating song choice among band members, voting, discussing the choice until the group reached consensus, etc. This clearly indicated that the groups were

functioning on their own without choices or decision methodologies being imposed on them. Some of the students indicated that the RRA was a big motivator for them to come to school every day and they indicated that their enthusiasm for RRA positively impacted their approach to their other classes. The students had a great regard for the facilitators and it was clear that there had been a personal bond developed. Students described them as outstanding teachers but “tough”. One student went so far as identifying discipline as one of the major aspects of the program. These comments regarding toughness and discipline were made in the context of a positive note of appreciation for how the classes were run.

The public concert held close to the end of the semester was perceived by all stakeholders in the school as an outstanding success. All of the school staff that encountered during the end of semester visit went out of their way to express how impressed they were by the students’ performances. This concert is sure to become a major part of the school’s social calendar and outreach efforts.

Table 1 presents the results on both the Initial and End of Semester surveys on the social skills items that were contained in both surveys. The only individual item where the difference between the two survey results was statistically significant was the “I am a creative Person” item. Students reported a significantly higher level of agreement with this statement on the end of semester survey.

Taken as a whole, however, the fact that all six items relating to social skills have a higher agreement rate on the end of term survey is a statistically significant result and indicates that the students reported a perceived increase in their social skills from the beginning to the end of the semester. If we take into account that the agreement rates with these social skill items was high at the beginning, this represents quite an accomplishment over the space of eighteen weeks of program operation.

Table 1
Social Skills Reported Changes

Statement	Initial Survey					End of Term Survey					Significant?
	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	
	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1		
I consider myself a good communicator	23.30%	54.40%	17.50%	3.90%	3.08	32.30%	51.60%	14.50%	1.60%	3.15	N
I consider myself a good negotiator	22.80%	51.50%	19.80%	5.90%	2.91	29.30%	52.00%	14.60%	4.10%	3.07	N
I consider myself a good collaborator	29.30%	59.60%	8.10%	3.00%	3.15	38.70%	50.80%	8.90%	1.60%	3.27	N
I am a creative person	34.00%	41.70%	22.30%	1.90%	3.08	44.40%	43.50%	9.70%	2.40%	3.3	Y
I am a good leader	30.70%	49.50%	14.90%	5.00%	3.06	33.10%	47.60%	16.10%	3.20%	3.1	N
I am capable of adapting to a new environment	43.10%	44.10%	9.80%	2.90%	3.27	37.90%	55.60%	5.60%	0.80%	3.31	N

Note: SA – Strongly Agree A – Agree D – Disagree SD – Strongly Disagree N(Initial) = 103, N(End of Term) = 130.

Table 2 presents the results of the items concerning attitudes towards music and the RRA. A total of 98% of the students report that they enjoy music, 93% feel that music classes should be offered in school, 93% feel that participating in the RRA was a valuable experience, 87% would like to participate in a subsequent semester and 92% would recommend RRA to a friend. It is interesting to note that, while 100% of the students found the courage to perform in front of a large audience, 69% report that they are comfortable in doing so.

Table 2
Attitudes Toward Music and RRA

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
	4	3	2	1	
I enjoy music	77.44%	20.30%	0.75%	1.50%	3.74
I feel comfortable performing in front of others	24.81%	44.36%	25.56%	5.26%	2.89
I believe that music classes should be offered in school	67.67%	25.56%	3.76%	3.01%	3.58
.Participating in the Rock and Roll Academy was a valuable experience for me	71.43%	21.80%	3.01%	3.76%	3.61
I would like to participate in the Rock and Roll Academy during a subsequent semester	64.66%	22.56%	9.02%	3.76%	3.48
I would recommend taking the Rock and Roll Academy elective to a friend.	69.92%	21.80%	6.02%	2.26%	3.59

The survey contained open ended questions regarding what they gained from the class and a place for other comments. Of the 120 students that answered the question regarding what they gained, approximately 60% mentioned improved social skills and 60% mentioned learning an instrument (approximately 20% mentioned both). Only three students (2.5%) made negative comments regarding the course.

The vast majority (all but one) of the other comments were positive regarding some aspect of the program (teachers, performance, learning instruments, social skills, etc.). A few contained suggestions of expanding the instrument choice, making the course available to take every semester and establishing a music academy centered around RRA.

2) *What has been the factors that either facilitated or blocked the success of the implementation?*

The comments of the school administrators and the coordinators themselves indicate that the personnel selection process is perhaps the most important key to success. The two coordinators at South Tech are each individually talented and they make a highly effective team. As a team, they combine music performance and individual student music instruction experience with public school music classroom experience. They have a fundamental understanding of how to approach students of this age and the extensive classroom experience of one of the facilitators in a public school setting made the adaptation of the program to this setting go smoothly.

The facilitators identified the concept of “freedom within boundaries” as a major key to the success of the program. The structure of the program (activity stations that the students rotate between each day and the schedule of Performance Fridays) provides a framework within which the students can enjoy their freedom to choose their instruments, songs, etc, without devolving into chaos.

The professional development program instituted by and the guidance of the founder of RRA were identified as indispensable in getting the program started and moving in the right direction. Hand in hand with this was the support of the South Tech administration not only in providing the necessary materials but also in providing leadership so that the school staff and students could quickly realize that the RRA was a valuable part of the school.

The primary blocking factors were the paperwork and other requirements necessitated by the public school environment. The most challenging to overcome was the difficulty in contacting parents in order to gain the required permission documents for their children to participate in off campus activities.

Summary and Conclusions

The program’s implementation was highly successful in its first semester of operation at South Tech Academy. This experience establishes the fact that the RRA can be successfully implemented over a wide variety of schools and school demographics and does not have to be limited to the small private school settings where it was previously established. The observations and student responses have been strikingly similar across all of the locations in which the program has been implemented to date.

It was clear that the teachers were able to create an environment of “freedom within structure” that is a key component of the program. The weekly schedule starting with choosing a new song on Monday and a performance on Friday creates not only a structure but also an urgency to work together without procrastination. They have made good use of the space to create a transition from written, academic work to performance and band related activities. The coordinators seem to have developed a good feel for when to intervene, when to assist, and when to let the bands figure it out. They have the classroom management skills to allow freedom and also be able to bring the class together quietly when they need to.

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 students and the observations of the parents and school administrators.

The students in the program have gained a greater appreciation for music, particularly for its creation and performance. Students reported a greater desire to both experience and perform music and an appreciation for a greater variety of genres than they had before. The students self-reported an increase in their social skills on the survey and over 90% report that they enjoy music, that participating in RRA was a valuable experience, and that they would

recommend RRA to a friend. A total of 87% of the students would like to take RRA in a subsequent semester.

Recommendations

1. Continue to implement the RRA at South Tech in the same manner for the second semester and continue to monitor its performance and outcomes.
2. Consider expanding the RRA into a full academy within the academy structure of South Tech.
3. Utilize the findings regarding the facilitating elements to improve and expand the RRA Manual. A section on the adaptations appropriate for a public school setting will be a useful addition.
4. Seek to expand the program into other settings and continue to monitor the results.

References

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