



**Going on “A Tour of the 20th Century”:  
Examining the Benefits of Collaboration Between Middle School Music and Social  
Studies Departments**

James W. Glaser  
38 Harp Rd  
Levittown, PA 19056

30 May, 2015

Micah Jones, Director of the School of Music  
Elizabeth Sokolowski, Division Head Music Education

The University of the Arts  
College of Performing Arts  
School of Music

Master of Music in Music Education

**GOING ON “A TOUR OF THE 20th CENTURY”:  
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**JAMES W. GLASER**

**Approved as to style and comment by:**

**ELIZABETH SOKOLOWSKI**

**Division Head Music Education**

**MICAH JONES**

**Director of the School of Music**

**JAMES SAVOIE**

**Associate Provost who oversees Graduate Studies**

## ABSTRACT

### **Going on “A Tour of the 20th Century”: Examining the Benefits of Collaboration Between Middle School Music and Social Studies Departments**

#### PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact that occurs when colleagues from different departments create interdisciplinary lessons, events and activities designed to make connections between American History, music and related arts. The study will draw on multiple modes of inquiry, including historical (examining the original intention of interdisciplinary education), philosophical (review of studies and ideas about arts and music Integration) and empirical (survey of Holicong Middle School 9th graders). The study focuses on exploring whether the benefits of arts integration identified by researchers are being recognized by students.

#### RATIONALE

Since Philip Pumerantz and Ralph W. Galano published *Establishing Interdisciplinary Programs in the Middle School* in 1972, hundreds of middle schools and junior highs have implemented their ideas in many ways. Over the last 10 years at Holicong Middle School in Doylestown, PA, we have made an ever-increasing effort to connect music and other arts to 20th century history in 9th grade Social Studies classes, music classes, and special assemblies for the entire 9th grade. What began in 2005 with one special concert assembly has evolved into a year long integration we call *A Tour of the 20th Century*. This study first identifies the goals and intended results of interdisciplinary education and arts integration. Then it examines survey data compiled after the Holicong Middle School 9th grade Protest Day concert to examine how being introduced to 60's and 70's political issues through music will impact their learning about those issues in social studies class.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact that occurs when colleagues from different departments create interdisciplinary lessons, events and activities designed to make connections between American History, music and related arts. The study will draw on multiple modes of inquiry, including historical (examining the original intention of interdisciplinary education), philosophical (review of studies and ideas about arts and music Integration) and empirical (survey of Holicong Middle School 9th graders). The study focuses on exploring whether the benefits of arts integration identified by researchers are being recognized by students.

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When I was first hired at Holicong (in the Central Bucks School District) in the summer of 2000, it became clear that the concepts of interdisciplinary teaming and collaboration were key components of the district's educational philosophy. Though the

“specials” classes (art, family & consumer science, gym, music and technology education) were on the outskirts of this early in my career, the music department was asked to participate in initiatives for reading and writing across the curriculum and other similar programs. I enjoyed hearing about the interdisciplinary units that my colleagues were constructing and could see that it was benefiting the students, but at first I was just an observer.

In my 5th year of teaching, a colleague from the social studies department spoke to me about an upcoming day when all 9th grade social studies classes were going to be participating in a simulation of FDR’s depression-era public works programs. She asked if I would be willing to coordinate a music assembly during the specials block on that day to expose the 9th graders some of the composers, performers and musical styles that were popular during that era.

So began a decade of collaboration with my 9th grade social studies colleagues. That first year, our Public Works Day concert featured songs by Cole Porter, Duke Ellington, Woody Guthrie, and a student-choreographed performance of “We’d Like to Thank You Herbert Hoover” from *Annie*. In addition to the 9th grade choir performing, several soloists and small groups of students also performed for the assembly. We tried to bring important aspects of depression-era arts and culture to life on stage for the entire 9th grade, hoping that viewing or participating in this assembly would help them understand and appreciate this time period in American history in a more meaningful way.

Due to the positive response from students, staff and parents, our collaborations have not only continued, but have evolved and multiplied. Over the last ten years, the music department, social studies department and 9th grade team leader have

developed our *Tour of the 20th Century* program. Throughout the school year, students hear performances from guest artists, view TV shows and movies that reflect the time periods the students are studying, and watch their peers perform in assemblies highlighting the role of music from the turn of the 20th century to the 1980's. Other classes have started to jump on board whenever possible as well, including one of the phys ed instructors teaching popular forms of 20th century dance, from the Charleston to the Twist and beyond.

As an educator, I have certainly seen the benefits of “bringing the 20th century to life” for my students. The goal of this study is to illuminate why such activities are beneficial, beginning with the existing research. Though the *Tour of the 20th Century* program is very unique, it has much in common with arts integration, which has been a major movement in American education over the last 20 years. The *Tour* is also inspired by the longer-standing ideas of interdisciplinary education.

Through research, I have discovered what experts identify as the most significant benefits of these two collaboration-based educational movements. I present this research in chapter two. In chapter three, I present both qualitative and quantitative data from a survey of the current 9th grade class at Holicong. The students completed the survey after this year's Protest Day concert (which featured music and multimedia highlighting the social and political issues of the 1960's and 70's). My expectations for the survey were to identify the way(s) in which this concert most benefitted our students. I was most curious about the difference in impact between the students who participated and students who merely watched the assembly.



## CHAPTER 2: THE CASE FOR INTEGRATING MUSIC INTO OTHER SUBJECTS

My most vivid memory of any assignment I ever completed in school is of my final project for my tenth grade gifted social studies class. The topic was standard: choose a significant individual from 20th century American history and demonstrate what you have learned about his life and the significance of his contributions. However, rather than restricting us to writing a paper, Mr. Longo gave the class the freedom to choose any final product through which we could demonstrate our understanding. That was the year when music transitioned from being one of my many hobbies to truly becoming my main interest, so I chose to research Leonard Bernstein and create a musical theater piece based on his life. My finished product was a script along with a cassette tape of seven or eight crudely overdubbed original songs featuring me singing, drumming and playing multiple keyboard tracks to fill out the instrumentation.

I can still remember how I lovingly spent hour after hour refining those songs and perfecting that script. Reflecting on that assignment, I benefited greatly from ideas borrowed from or inspired by the concepts of interdisciplinary education and arts integration. Motivated by my genuine excitement for composing the songs and script, I connected to the material in a very authentic way and was naturally inclined to spend more time on the project, dig deeper into the content, and create the highest quality final product possible. Not only was I learning about Leonard Bernstein, I was learning about musical form and structure, chord progressions, rhyme schemes and orchestration. Mr. Longo knew that allowing us to choose our final product would not only allow us to demonstrate our knowledge through our preferred medium, but it would also give us the opportunity to build our skills and creativity within that medium. Perhaps most

importantly, it would help us make meaningful connections between different areas of study.

## **INTERDISCIPLINARY EDUCATION**

Gordon Vars defines interdisciplinary education as “instruction that emphasizes the connections, the interrelations among various areas of knowledge.” He also states that this type of education helps students to “see life whole, to integrate and make sense out of the myriad experiences they have” (1). The National Middle School Association lists among the criteria of developmentally responsible middle level schools a “curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory” (Lounsbury 3-4). Burnaford placed the roots of interdisciplinary education (and arts integration) in the early 1900’s, when certain educators suggested reforms such as reorganizing the curricula by themes or embedding interdisciplinary topics into content-specific areas (Snyder, Klos and Grey-Hawkins 3). American philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey remarked in 1931 that one of the problems with American education was that “we do, and do over again, an immense amount of specialized work in the region of ‘facts’. We forget such facts are only data...uncompleted meanings, and unless they are rounded out into complete ideas...they are as helpless as all maimed things” (qtd. in Donovan and Pascale 15). Yet it took forty more years for elements of the interdisciplinary philosophy to truly start to spread through the American educational landscape.

Perhaps the most significant single publication that influenced this movement was the 1972 book *Establishing Interdisciplinary Programs in the Middle School* by Philip Pumerantz and Ralph W. Galano. Countless articles and books published in the last 43 years reference the basic ideas put forth by these two authors. One of their

primary complaints about more traditional “lecture-regurgitation” methods is that studying subjects in isolation deprives students of the meaningful learning that can occur when they are encouraged to appreciate how the subjects connect (Pumerantz and Galano 8). The book lists the following advantages of the interdisciplinary approach for students:

1. To develop better understandings of themselves and to work out areas of weakness without harm to their self-images;
2. To proceed at a pace commensurate with their interests, skills, and experiences;
3. To have more opportunity to reinforce and improve skills, pursue special interests or details, or to experience inquiry processes;
4. To see present interrelationships and focus upon past and present cultures; and
5. To have experience in developing their individual responsibilities. (9)

One only needs to read the four-page introduction of this important text to discern the authors’ appreciation for the significant role that music can play in this type of educational program. The very first scenario presented in the book is one of a music teacher leading a discussion about poetry to help students not only understand something musical, but make connections between the two art forms (Pumerantz and Galano 7). Then, on the very next page, they present still another musical scenario. This time they suggest that a social studies teacher teaching Westward Expansion might choose a musical student from the class to learn some folk songs relevant to the topic, allowing him to access the information through a medium with which he is comfortable. The student might even be considered the “authority” in his class on this

particular topic (8). This scenario is one in which the student would benefit from all five of the advantages listed in the previous paragraph. Later in the book, there is a suggested unit tying together music and art with the discussion of composing paragraphs in English class. The authors suggest that musical concepts such as form, thematic material, rhythmic structure, repetition, harmonic structure and style could be helpful in understanding what makes a good paragraph (20). While creating connections between subjects is an important tenet of interdisciplinary education, it is an even more fundamental aspect of the contemporary educational trend known as arts integration.

### **ARTS INTEGRATION**

Arts integration is “the investigation of curricular content through artistic explorations,” allowing the arts to “provide an avenue for rigorous investigation, representation, expression and reflection of both curricular content and the art form itself” (Donovan and Pascale 14-15). The proponents of arts integration clearly want to demonstrate that this concept involves much more than students learning a song to help them memorize the fifty US states in alphabetical order. They believe that arts integration does not just deepen learning, but makes learning more meaningful. One example of an organization promoting arts integration is Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE), an organization that works with teachers in low-income neighborhoods across Chicago. In 2014-15, CAPE partnered with 90 teachers in 200 schools, pairing teaching artists with classroom teachers to develop creative lesson plans enhancing education with the arts (“The CAPE Basics”). CAPE defines arts integration as “teaching and learning in which arts learning and other academic learning are connected in ways in which the arts learning AND the other academic learning are both deepened” (Aprill 7).

One thing made very clear by arts integration advocates is that by no means does integrating the arts into other subjects eliminate the need for music and art specialists teaching music and art classes to all students. When arts integration is implemented properly, art and music teachers work on the specific skills needed by students within each art form. Then teachers of subjects such as math, science and history can create activities using the arts to deepen and assess understanding (Donovan and Pascale 15). As one art teacher puts it, "I explore Arts Integration as a dynamic process of merging art with other disciplines in an attempt to open up a space of inclusiveness in teaching, learning and experiencing...it concentrates on the ability of the arts to teach across/through the curriculum and transcend the school subject boundaries" (LaJevic 2).

There are three different levels of arts integration. In its most simple form, students of all subjects are learning through and with the arts - perhaps a teacher might have students demonstrate their understanding of a concept by acting it out or drawing a picture. A more sophisticated implementation might be one where an effort is made to use the arts to create deep connections within different areas of the curriculum. Students studying the Civil War might learn songs that represent the popular musical styles and political perspectives of the time. In its most sophisticated iteration, arts integration involves collaborative engagement - teachers of various subjects working together to create dynamic units that maximize the connections that students make (Robinson 191).

In recent years, arts integration has been implemented in many different places in the United States. Some prominent examples include Arts for Academic Achievement (Minneapolis), Chicago Arts Partnership in Education, North Carolina A+ Schools

Program, Arts in the Basic Curriculum (South Carolina) and Project Zero (Pittsburgh). Research and statistics from these programs show a diverse array of positive results including improved relationships and behavior, community building, better parental involvement, better staff morale and improved attendance. Most importantly, perhaps, many of these programs have resulted in increased student achievement and student test scores (LaJevic 20-21).

### **THE BENEFITS OF ARTS INTEGRATION**

In examining why arts integration has been championed by so many and has produced such positive results in so many places, there are four key concepts that tie things together. First of all, arts integration leads to deeper learning, long-term retention and mastery of material by students. Second, integrating the arts into all subjects encourages development of the all-important 21st century skills that are such a priority in the current educational landscape. Third is the fact that arts integration promotes opportunities for student growth in both self-awareness and cultural awareness in students. Finally, arts integration concepts can greatly assist teachers with differentiation, not only by creating an overall experience of diverse activities to reach all learners, but by offering multiple modes of assessment for individual assignments to allow learners to demonstrate their learning in various ways.

### **DEEPER LEARNING**

As teachers, we all strive to make learning meaningful for students, to see them go beyond memorization of facts and the ability to choose the right multiple-choice answer on a standardized test question. In studies of arts integration programs, teachers report that students become more engaged with content and are more invested in learning, taking ownership of the material. This increased investment results

in mastery of material and a sense that what they are learning is relevant to their own lives (Bellisario, Donovan and Prendergast 3). One of the reasons why arts integration activities lead to deeper learning is that in creating and performing, students demonstrate representational fluency. Representational fluency is a math and science concept referring to a student's ability to "use different symbolic systems to represent meaning" (Donovan and Pascale 18). When students create arts-based work, it forces them to translate their understanding - take what they have learned and represent that knowledge in a new form, using higher order skills like analysis and evaluation. It also allows students to blend what they have learned with their own perspectives, voice and personal experience (Donovan and Pascale 18).

Research has shown that there are several different methods through which mastery is attained and knowledge is moved from the short-term to the long-term memory. Four of those methods are rehearsal, elaboration, oral production and effort after meaning; all of which occur in very meaningful ways through arts-based activities.

- Rehearsal: Teachers of all levels of students use repetition to increase retention. Artistic activity offers a very effective way to make meaningful repetition happen. Rehearsal is a natural aspect of arts activities - it is a much more authentic and meaningful experience to practice a skit or memorize a song than to write something ten times or echo an important definition or quote back to a teacher in call and response style (Rinne 90).
- Elaboration: Processing and expounding upon an idea are great ways to demonstrate mastery. According to Rinne, "considerable research has (also) shown that *semantic* elaboration--elaboration that adds meaning--can improve retention of information" (90-91). Doing an artistic project or performance is an

excellent type of semantic elaboration, especially if students relate the subject matter to their own life in some way.

- Oral Production: Producing words orally leads to a better future recall than reading the word silently. Also - speaking words aloud or mouthing the words is better than answering yes or no to a question (Rinne 92). Arts integration promotes retention by oral production through all types of different possible activities related to music and theater.
- Effort After Meaning: Effort after meaning is a term coined by British psychologist Frederic Bartlett referring to the “effort exerted to understand novel information” (Rinne 92-93). Recall is improved when students take time to process something with which they are presented, to puzzle over it and discern its meaning or significance. The viewing, performance or creation of an artistic work certainly promotes this idea.

In general, activities involving the arts involve the type of rehearsal, elaboration, oral production and effort after meaning that leads to mastery and long-term retention. Students whose teachers employ arts integration techniques have the potential to more easily master the material by doing things that are an inherent part of the artistic process.

## **21st CENTURY SKILLS**

Business and policy leaders have identified critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and the ability to see multiple perspectives as crucial for success in a globally diverse world with ever-expanding technology (Bellisario, Donovan and Prendergast 3). These concepts are part of the list educators call “21st Century Skills.” In a world where factual information is available at the click of a phone, educational



priorities have shifted to emphasize the things that will be most valuable to students in our evolving world.

There are slight variations in what different organizations and individuals identify as 21st century skills. Here is one list that seems fairly comprehensive:

- Students must think critically and creatively
- Students must have organizational skills
- Students must be able to work well with others
- Students need to be self-confident, self-motivated, and self-disciplined
- Students need to understand and use math, science and technology
- Students need to be highly effective communicators
- Students need to understand and appreciate cultural diversity (Donovan and Pascale 20)

Data from a Lesley University study, funded by the Ford Foundation, determined that arts integrated teaching “engages students in creativity, innovation and imagination” (Bellisario, Donovan and Prendergast 2). By its very nature, arts integration leads to creative opportunities that are specifically connected to the sequential learning going on in the content areas. Musical activities certainly address 21st century skills through listening, language development, problem solving and abstract reasoning (Donovan and Pascale 61). CAPE believes that student achievement increases in its schools because an atmosphere of intellectual challenge, creativity, critical thinking and community building are generated by arts integration (Aprill 10).

A 2002 CAPE study reflected that arts integration benefits students in an additional important area related to 21st century skills - the idea of a growth mindset (or what some call “grit”). The study found strong evidence that “arts-integrated instruction

increased student willingness to tackle ‘difficult’ academic content, turning difficulty from an obstacle into a positive challenge” (Aprill 10).

As James Bau Graves states, “The new imperative is creativity. We don’t need our schools to inculcate the habits of menial labor; the new economy needs a workforce that is trained in creativity. And that fundamentally implies a new and unprecedented attention to the arts” (129)

### **SELF-AWARENESS AND CULTURAL AWARENESS**

Injecting the arts into the content areas has many effects. Another that was identified by the Lesley University study is that arts integrated teaching “creates learning that is culturally responsive and relevant in students’ lives”. The data from the study suggests that arts integration promotes cultural identity and consideration of social prejudice. The study found that since the arts draw upon the background knowledge of students, through arts-integrated teaching, individual student perspectives and perspectives gleaned from the students’ cultural backgrounds engage with the curriculum in a meaningful way. Since the creation of artistic work draws from prior experiences, frames of reference and preferences of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds, it makes learning more meaningful and effective. “It teaches to and through the strengths of the students” (Bellisario, Donovan and Prendergast 3).

Arts integration might provide an opportunity for students of different backgrounds to work in groups together to create some type of performance that somehow reflects their collective backgrounds. Conversely, perhaps there might be an assignment where students create individual works and present them to the class, not only allowing them to express themselves in a unique way, but giving their classmates the opportunity to appreciate and understand each student’s backgrounds and interests.

Finally, there are countless ways that the arts can be used to help students understand and appreciate cultures from every time and place in the history of the world through engaging with authentic examples of music, visual art, theater and dance. The arts are powerful tools in helping students understand themselves and others.

## **DIFFERENTIATION**

In 2010, Silverstein and Layne stated that “arts integration provides multiple ways for students to make sense of what they learn (construct understanding) and make their learning visible (demonstrate understanding)” (qtd. in Donovan and Pascale 16). The principles of arts integration align with Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences. If teachers use a variety of art forms and media for instruction and assessment, they will certainly have a diverse array of activities that play to a variety of student strengths. In some cases, like Mr. Longo did, teachers might be able to assign choice-based assessments, allowing students to select from different final products to demonstrate their learning.

The Lesley University/Ford Foundation study reported the following statistics on how arts integration benefits groups of students who are often targeted by differentiated instruction:

- Gifted & Talented Students - 93.8% of teachers surveyed report students reflect more deeply and 87% develop creativity
- Special Needs - 88% report students are more engaged and 88% note students access content in new ways
- Economically Disadvantaged - 85% note students are more engaged and 84% note that students are more collaborative with their peers

- Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse - 81% note increased self-expression and 81% report break-through moments in students' learning have occurred (Bellisario, Donovan and Prendergast 3)

Clearly, there is a universal positive effect on all of these subgroups due to the diverse ways through which students learn and are assessed with the help of the arts. Donovan and Pascale put it best, saying, "The arts embody many paths to learning and inherently encompass multiple modalities through which students can show what they know" (22). Integrating the arts is a fantastic way to achieve the goals of differentiated instruction, giving different students different ways to learn and demonstrate what they have learned.

### **SUMMARY**

For over 100 years, educational leaders have thought and wrote about the idea of creating connections between different subject areas to help make learning more meaningful. Many have implemented these ideas resulting in great success. The empirical and anecdotal evidence suggest that interdisciplinary education and arts integration are effective means of maximizing student learning. As we move deeper into the 21st century, these two concepts continue to be helpful in meeting the ever-changing needs of our students, focusing on the development of essential skills.

## CHAPTER 3: STUDENT RESPONSE TO AN EXPERIENCE INVOLVING INTEGRATING MUSIC WITH SOCIAL STUDIES

Five years ago, the Central Bucks social studies curriculum was shifted, moving the study of the Great Depression to early in the school year. Rather than move the traditional Public Works Day event to a different time of year, a colleague suggested that we keep our most involved integrative assembly in April but change the content to involve 60's and 70's protest music about Civil Rights, the Vietnam War and other issues. So, for five of the last six years, we have held the Protest Day assembly in March or April. In 9th grade chorus classes, for six to eight weeks prior to the concert, we spend part of the 56-minute period on most days working on Protest Day material. Students learn about important musicians and political figures through short biographical videos, old news footage and videos of famous speeches. Then we learn portions of various songs reflecting different viewpoints on the social and political issues of the time. In addition to what we work on in class, I also assign solos, duets and small group songs to some staff members and to my most enthusiastic and outstanding choir members, adding to the overall content of the program. The concert normally takes place on a special school day such as a half-day or the day after the 9th grade trip to Washington, D.C.

This year's Protest Day concert featured parts of 24 songs, eight performed by the 9th grade choir, and the rest performed by individuals or small groups. In between each segment of songs, staff members read narrations, helping to provide an understanding of the social and political issues that inspired the composition of each

group of songs. We display pictures on the screen above the stage to help the students in the audience appreciate what life was truly like in those turbulent times. Before the singing of “We Shall Overcome,” we listened to a short portion of a speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in which he refers to the lyrics of the song over and over. A student read excerpts from John F. Kennedy’s famous speech to the city of Berlin. Something else that added to the assembly is that many of the choir members got in the spirit of the day by dressing up in garb appropriate for the time period. In most years, we schedule Protest Day so that it occurs as the social studies classes are about to engage with the related material on a daily basis, serving as an introduction for students into this important era in American history.

While not part of a specifically designed arts integration program, this event embodies the spirit of arts integration and interdisciplinary education in many ways:

- It fits all three of the previously discussed definitions of arts integration:
  1. Learning through and with the arts
  2. A curricular connection process
  3. Collaborative engagement
- Choir members are introduced to content they will encounter in Social Studies class through learning songs from the time period, reflecting on and discussing those songs.
- The choir members are essentially getting into character as 60’s/70’s protesters, hopefully giving them a unique appreciation for the social, racial and cultural groups of the time.
- In viewing the assembly, the rest of the 9th grade students are exposed to this content through music and multimedia before it is delivered in class.

- The student performers are taking ownership of the content - helping to teach their classmates about the topic.
- It reaches and connects with students using no less than 4 of the multiple intelligences: verbal-linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic, musical and interpersonal.

In an effort to gauge the benefits of this endeavor, after this year's Protest Day concert, I conducted a short survey of both the participating students and student audience members. I reflected on all of my research and created five multiple-choice questions, targeting the impact that this activity was having on the students. I consulted three of my colleagues who teach 9th grade to be sure that the questions were worded clearly for the average 9th grade student. Here are the multiple-choice questions that each group was asked:

#### MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPATING CHOIR STUDENTS

1. Do you feel that learning and performing the songs for Protest Day has increased your interest in learning about 60's and 70's issues in Social Studies class?
2. Do you believe that learning and performing the songs for Protest Day will help your level of understanding of the related information in Social Studies class?
3. Do you believe that the experience of learning and performing the songs for Protest Day will make you more willing to participate in class discussions as you study 60's and 70's social and political issues in Social Studies class?
4. Do you believe that learning and performing the songs for Protest Day helps you understand and appreciate the views of groups in the 60's and 70's such as African-Americans fighting for civil rights, anti-Vietnam War protesters and young people rebelling against the older generation?

5. As a performer in the Protest Day concert, you were actually teaching your peers about these 60's and 70's social issues through your performance. As you sat and listened to the other soloists and speakers in the concert, do you feel you were more enthusiastic to listen and learn because the "teaching" was being done mostly by your peers?

#### MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS WHO VIEWED THE ASSEMBLY

1. Do you feel that being in the audience for the Protest Day assembly has increased your interest in learning about 60's and 70's issues in Social Studies class?
2. Do you believe that being in the audience for the Protest Day assembly will help your level of understanding of the related information in Social Studies class?
3. Do you believe that seeing the Protest Day assembly will make you more willing to participate in class discussions as you study 60's and 70's social and political issues in Social Studies class?
4. Do you believe that being in the audience for the Protest Day assembly helps you understand and appreciate the views of groups in the 60's and 70's such as African-Americans fighting for civil rights, anti-Vietnam War protesters and young people rebelling against the older generation?
5. As an audience member at the Protest Day concert, you were learning from your peers about 60's and 70's social and political issues through music. As you sat and listened to the songs in the concert, do you feel that you were more enthusiastic to listen and learn because your fellow students were the ones performing?



84 choir members took the survey during class within a week of the protest day assembly. One of my collaborators (9th grade social studies teacher Pat Kelly) graciously took the time to have 46 of his students who are not in the choir take the survey. The responses to these questions produced quantitative data allowing me to evaluate the ways in which this endeavor most benefits all students. It also gave me the chance to compare the responses of the concert participants and those students who simply viewed the concert.

I developed my survey questions by reflecting on my research about arts integration and interdisciplinary education and focusing on aspects of each about which I might be able to get some meaningful data through this survey. For example, question two (on both surveys) asks about the students' "level of understanding" and if it might be helped by the assembly. This question was written to get information about the idea that arts integration activities can lead to deeper learning and mastery. I used the phrase "level of understanding" because a colleague advised me that *mastery* is really a "teacher word" and that I should change the question to something that would be more easily understood by all students. Question three (about the students' willingness to participate in social studies class) was written to get data about the assembly's impact on the students in the area of 21st century skills such as self-confidence and self-motivation. Question four examines the topics of cultural awareness and empathy, and question five reflects Pumerantz and Galano's idea of a student or group of students helping their peers by acting as "authority figures" on a certain subject.

In addition to the multiple-choice questions, I asked free response questions in each survey. The qualitative data obtained from the students' responses to these questions is very beneficial in understanding exactly the impact an interdisciplinary

collaboration like this can have. The non-choir students were asked “How do you think being in the audience at the Protest Day assembly will benefit you as a student?” The choir classes were asked two questions in the hopes that slightly different responses might come from each question. First, they were asked “As you reflect on both our preparation for Protest Day and the final concert, how do you think those experiences will most help you as a student studying the social and political issues of the 1960's and 70's?” The second question was “What other reflections do you have about the Protest Day experience and its benefits to you and your peers as students?” Asking the performers the second more wide-ranging question definitely helped me glean some different information from the students. Overall, many of the short answer responses are helpful in interpreting the qualitative data.

### **ASSESSING THE OVERALL IMPACT OF THE PROTEST DAY ASSEMBLY**

For each of the survey questions, there were three different responses representing the impact that the assembly had on the students. For example, in question 1 (about how much the protest day assembly had increased their interest in learning about the 60's and 70's in social studies class) the answer choices were as follows:

1. Definitely has increased my interest
2. Somewhat increased my interest
3. No different than normal

Each of the other questions had three answer choices with very similar wording, always using the words “definitely” and “somewhat” to help delineate between the varying degrees of impact the respondents felt. When sifting through the survey data, the first

thing that is immediately becomes clear is that the students categorically appreciate and identify the benefits of the protest day assembly.

For all five questions on both surveys, an overwhelming majority of the respondents indicated that this activity would either somewhat or definitely benefit them. The average percentage of responses for each item where the respondent indicated that there would be no difference or no benefit in that given area was 10.49%. That means, on average, 90% of the respondents indicated that they could recognize and appreciate each of the ways in which this endeavor was going to have a positive impact on their learning in social studies class.

In responding to the short answer questions, the performers and audience gave specific reasons why they felt the Protest Day experience would help them as students. One choir member noted, "These songs that we performed were written by people who lived during this time. I loved that they were like the primary documents we read in history (because it's a first hand account of a situation) but it is portrayed in a much more interesting way than just reading out of a textbook. Seeing other soloists perform, listening to the choir perform, being in the choir, and performing in a small group forced me to put myself in the shoes of the people who lived through the 60s and 70s and relate to the experiences they had." Another performer spoke to the meaningfulness of the connections between music and history, stating, "I think that overall it gave us something extra that we can connect to what we are learning, allowing us to comprehend what we are learning much easier." In addition, the responses from the students in the audience helped develop an appreciation for how the assembly benefitted them, with one student simply stating, "since it was in music form, it kept me interested."

In addition to the overall positive response to the assembly from both groups of students, the survey data yielded several more-specific results of interest. Comparing the data from the performers to that from the non-participants showed some contrast in certain areas. Also, since each question was written to reflect a different aspect of this type of interdisciplinary experience, comparing the results of the different questions can help us understand the ways in which this activity was most beneficial to all the students. In reviewing all the qualitative data, I noticed four specific trends that are worth noting:

1. Almost unanimously, the students recognized how this endeavor helps them understand perspectives of different social and cultural groups.
2. The members of the audience did very much value the fact that they were learning via a presentation by their peers.
3. More choir members than audience members felt that the Protest Day experience would definitely make them more likely to participate in Social Studies class discussions.
4. Over 90% of all the students surveyed felt that the Protest Day activities would lead to better understanding of the material.

### **CULTURAL AWARENESS AND EMPATHY**

Unilaterally, the most indisputable impact on the students came in the area of cultural awareness - the ability to understand the perspectives of the various social and cultural groups represented by the content of the Protest Day songs. 78.05% of the choir members said that learning and performing the songs for the assembly “definitely helps [them] appreciate the views of those groups”. 73.91% of the audience members surveyed also chose the “definite” response for this as well. In contrast, only one

respondent of the 130 total surveyed stated that what they learned from the experience did not help them appreciate the views of the groups involved.

It was a powerful role-playing experience for the students who sang songs like “We Shall Overcome” and “Give Peace a Chance” to think about what they were singing. Standing up on stage, dressed in costume, many of the students noted that the experience truly connected them to the people who sang these songs when they were first popular. One singer said, “I think it will help us because it can put us in the shoes of the people who were going through this. Also it's a lot different learning the facts and not really being able to totally understand versus learning the lyrics to these powerful songs.” Another commented, “I loved being able to learn and perform songs to help my peers see the anger and sadness the people in our country were feeling during this time.” The power of music can certainly be transporative: one singer went so far as to say, “It helps because a few times it felt like I was in the moment.” The students in the audience could feel the emotion as well. One stated, “As a student, I have a better grasp on the feelings and emotions that people felt during that time, thus allowing me to understand how and why such actions were taken.” Another mentioned, “I believe that I now understand how passionate people were during this time period.”

An important aspect of being self-aware and culturally aware is the ability to identify and understand multiple viewpoints on the same issue. In the concert, we tried to touch on all the various aspects of complex issues like the Vietnam War. Many students recognized and commented on this. One performer mentioned, “The experience of protest day will help me understand that there were many different viewpoints on many different issues, and I need to be considerate.” Another said, “The songs will also increase my ability to see the conflict from both perspective, since in

Social Studies we focus more on the government and in chorus we focused on the people viewpoint.” One young lady connected this idea to the educational value of the concert, commenting, “I think that by performing songs that articulate such strong beliefs and ideas, we are automatically learning and understanding the views that many people had during this time.”

Specifically, many of the students mentioned their increased appreciation for the views of African-Americans fighting for their civil rights. As one student put it, “I feel that the experiences will allow me to be able to view the Civil Rights movement in a more human way, instead of just (as) a historical concept.” Another remarked, “well I think it helps us understand the emotion going into the civil rights and not just learning facts to spit out on the tests. I know now that African Americans persevered through so much to get equality in our society.” The students in the audience noticed this, too. One said, “I think being in the audience at protest day concert helped me understand more of about why people were protesting and how there was great changes in the era with African Americans.” Another spoke similarly, saying, “As a student I think that Protest Day will benefit me, because it will help me understand the 60's and the 70's better and understand the black community.”

One student took things a step further, adding a touch of self-awareness to the equation by explaining, “Protest day showed me what people living during the 60's and seventies cared about and I was able to put that in perspective to what we care about today. Modern day protesting is very different from what it was back then, and we protest different things, but when we protest, we protest with just as much heart and care.” Overall, through the quantitative data and their comments, the students clearly

demonstrated that the Protest Day assembly positively impacted their ability to empathize with various social and cultural groups.

### **PEERS TEACHING PEERS**

One thing that stands out specifically from the audience survey is that the non-performers were energized by the fact that they were being introduced to new information through a performance by their peers. On question five on the audience survey, referring to student ownership of delivering the content, 47.83% of the audience members said that they were definitely more enthusiastic learners because their peers were performing. 43.48% said that they were somewhat more enthusiastic, bringing the total who had a positive response to this question to over 91%. One respondent stated that hearing her peers sing “made [her] curious about the issues that [they] were singing about”. Another stated that the students “showed how much emotion [the issues] brought out in people and how it affected them personally.” One young lady mentioned that through her peers’ performance, she could “see the emotional connections” between the issues and the music.

The positive of being an engaged learner when one’s peers are doing the teaching was not lost on the choir students either. Since they only sang eight of the songs in the program, they also got to sit back, watch and listen as students performed various solo and small group selections. One choir member stated, “The fact that a lot of people had solos and seeing all my friends and peers have so much emotion when singing was really special.” The word emotion continually came up in the free response questions from both the choir and the audience. Watching students from their bus, lunch table, or math class perform these historically significant songs somehow makes them more relatable and meaningful. If the student performers do a good job of expressing

the emotion behind the songs (which is not an easy task) then that comes through to their peers as well. It is clear that giving students ownership in the process of delivering content has positive effects.

### **PRACTICE BUILDS CONFIDENCE**

One of the biggest disparities between the choir survey and the audience survey was on question three regarding the student's willingness to participate in discussion in social studies class. There are all kinds of variables to consider here - for example, if a student is already quite willing to participate in class, perhaps there is nothing that could have happened during the Protest Day process to help increase that. However, I believe that there is a significant difference in the responses to this question that should be noted. In the audience survey, 23.91% of the students said that viewing the assembly would "definitely make me more willing to participate in class discussions". In the choir survey, that number increases to 39.76%.

Some choir members' thoughts illuminate this disparity, especially when you consider the fact that they rehearsed these songs over the course of six to eight weeks of preparation, while the audience members only encountered them for one hour during the actual performance. Several students expressed that the time spent learning the songs generally increased their enthusiasm about the subject, like one student who responded, "I am much more enthusiastic about learning social studies now than I was before the concert." Hopefully that increased enthusiasm will lead to increased contributions to class discussion by those students.

Beyond that, several students came right out and stated that they would feel more self confident and willing to participate in class discussions. One commented, "The songs made me feel like I was a part of the big events happening and I will



definitely be able to bring the messages in the songs back to Social Studies class.” Another admitted, “Now I feel that I can be more active in class and understand the mindset and interests of those in that specific time period. Secondly, I believe that I will be more confident with the information that I learn, that I will remember the material better.” In general many students felt that the time spent learning the songs and considering the views and emotion behind each one would give them added confidence in fully engaging with the material in social studies class.

### **MASTERING THE CONTENT**

As reflected in chapter two, one of the most significant claims by the proponents of integrating the arts into the content is that it leads to deeper learning and mastery. As previously stated, when I created question number two in the surveys (about this topic), I asked about Protest Day helping the students’ understanding, rather than using the words “deeper learning” or “mastery” in case those terms would be unclear to the students.

What stands out about the numbers in regards to question number two is that a very small percentage of students said that they did not feel the Protest Day assembly would help their understanding. In the audience survey, 41.30% said it would “definitely help them understand” the information in social studies class, and 56.52% said it would somewhat help. Only one individual (2.17%) of the audience members responded that it would not help them understand the information. On the choir side, the numbers are similar. 40.48% answered “definitely”, while 52.38% answered maybe. Only 7.14% of the performers felt that the experience of preparing and performing the Protest Day songs would not help them understand the information.

One choir member actually used the word “deeper” even though it was not included in the wording of the question. She stated, “By singing the songs instead of learning the information from a Power Point, it helped me to understand the information in a much deeper way than (I) otherwise would have.” Several students’ comments reflected the multiple-intelligence related benefits of this endeavor and how that aspect of the endeavor contributed to the deeper learning. One commented, “I’m a very musical thinker and learning about these times through music and lyrics instead of lectures helps keep my interest.” Two singers mentioned how the emotional connections that come from singing a song might help them learn in a more meaningful way. The first said, “Since I have such a connection with music, it’s much easier for me to understand something in musical terms versus anything else. I not only am able to remember lyrics to songs way better than notes or flashcards, but I also have a strong emotional connection to music which I feel really helps you understand the era with its music.” The second performer explained, “My interest in the music made me feel more engaged and emotionally interested in the issues being expressed through the music.”

Of course, with the importance placed on testing and grades in these students’ lives, several of them related the meaningful learning associated with the Protest Day experience to how it might specifically help them do well on their report card. One explained, “The songs definitely told me what was going on and that will help when I take a quiz or test or when I participate in class.” Another further explained, “Because when I am studying a certain event I could remember a song and sing it in my head. So when I have the test I can think about the song lyrics and it will remind me of what happened at that certain event.”

## **SUMMARY**

Both the survey data and the students' responses to the open-ended questions certainly illuminate the positive impact that an experience like this can have on learning. The overwhelming majority of the students noted positive effects in all five areas targeted by the survey: increased interest, deeper learning, self-motivation, cultural awareness and student ownership of delivering content. The fact that so many students gave concrete examples in their short answer responses that back up the survey data even further affirms the positive results of the survey.

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Everything I do as a middle school vocal music teacher falls into one of three categories. The first category is the things I have to do because they are required for my job: teaching classes, giving grades, preparing curricular ensembles for concerts, attending meetings, staff development, etc. The second category encompasses the additional things I do because choir and the school musical are co-curricular activities for which I get extra duty pay. Things on this list would be after-school select choir auditions and rehearsals, adjudication trips and festivals, and everything associated with the spring musical. Protest Day falls into the third category - extra things I put time into because I am passionate about them and believe they are valuable for my students and our school community as a whole.

One of the inspirations for researching this topic was to make sure that this endeavor is worthwhile for all, that the time invested in it both in and out of the classroom is time well spent. Enough students and adults over the years have said good things about Protest Day, but examining its true benefits through research and the survey responses of this year's ninth graders has given me a much deeper understanding about what they get out of the experience. It has also helped me develop an appreciation for arts integration to the point that I would consider myself an arts integration advocate.

The research on the positive effects arts integration would be difficult for anyone to refute. Reflecting on my own education, there are dozens of examples of arts based activities that my various teachers through the years used to help make learning more meaningful for us. It's no wonder that an educational philosophy based around that

concept is embraced so enthusiastically by so many. Both the qualitative and quantitative data from the various articles and studies that I read indicate that there are a plethora of positive results that come from integrating the arts into the content areas. I was fortunate to find a few key sources that had compiled information from so many different programs in so many different parts of the United States that showed so many different positive outcomes. It is no wonder that many struggling school districts have embraced arts integration as a way to re-energize their school community.

As far as my school community is concerned, the survey results are clear: Protest Day is absolutely worthwhile. The students acknowledge from both their multiple choice and short answer responses that there are tangible benefits to this endeavor. I was surprised that the percentages of students who responded positively to the questions was so high across the board. I thought that perhaps there might be a higher percentage of the students who were not mature enough to make these kinds of connections.

I was not surprised to find that on both the choir and audience side that the students had the most significant response in the area of cultural awareness. After all, music is inherently emotional, and as a part of Protest Day, students got to sing or hear lyrics about these important issues set to the music created by the people who were on the emotional front lines. Hearing the chords, melodies and accompaniments illuminates the feeling behind the song and makes the meaning easier to appreciate.

One thing I was quite interested in from the outset was the comparison between the choir and audience results. There was not as much disparity between the two as I might have anticipated. I am glad that the students in the audience responded to the assembly in a positive way, and especially that they enjoyed the fact that they were

learning from their peers. As for the choir, it makes sense that they indicated a little bit more of a willingness to participate in social studies class based on the experience than their peers who were not involved in the concert. I actually was surprised that the difference was not bigger, which may be more of a credit to the audience members than a detriment to the choir students.

Perhaps the most significant result of the survey is in the area of deeper learning. I want nothing more for my students than for them to understand, to comprehend, to appreciate how everything they are learning fits together. On question 2, about the concert helping them understand the content better, only 7 out of 130 students felt that the Protest Day experience would not help them better understand. What teacher wouldn't want to do something or try something if they knew that it was going to help 123 out of 130 students understand the content better?

Dissecting, poking and prodding at an event about which I am so passionate in the hopes of revealing its true educational value has been a fascinating and affirming experience. The positive results revealed here will inspire me to continue to seek out new collaborations where music and the arts can help our students learn in all subject areas.

## **APPENDIX A: HOLICONG MIDDLE SCHOOL PROTEST ASSEMBLY 2015**

Here is an outline of what was presented and performed at the 2015 Protest Day assembly. It was the introduction of these topics and the performance of these songs that led to the survey responses and quotes used in the paper. The capitalized items are spoken introductions that were delivered by teachers to give context to the songs that would follow.

### **WELCOME/POP MUSIC OF THE 50's (GLASER)**

- "Johnny Be Goode" by Chuck Berry (student solo performance)

### **OVERALL PROTEST MUSIC INTRO**

#### **CIVIL RIGHTS INTRO**

- "People Get Ready" by The Impressions (student solo performance)
- "A Change Is Gonna Come" by Sam Cooke (student solo performance)
- MLK "We Shall Overcome" Speech (video presentation)
- "We Shall Overcome" by Pete Seeger (choir performance)

#### **FOLK MUSIC INTRO**

- "Little Boxes" by Malvina Reynolds (student solo performance)
- "What Did You Learn in School Today?" by Chad Mitchell Trio (staff performance)
- "Universal Soldier" by Buffy Sainte-Marie (student solo performance)
- "I Ain't Marching Anymore" by Phil Ochs (student solo performance)
- "The Times They Are a-Changin'" by Bob Dylan (choir performance)

#### **VIETNAM PROTEST INTRO**

- "Eve of Destruction" by Barry McGuire (student solo performance)
- "Billy Don't Be a Hero" by Bo Donaldson and the Heywoods (student solo performance)
- "Fortunate Son" by Creedence Clearwater Revival (student solo performance)

#### **KENT STATE INTRO**

- "Ohio" by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young (student small group)

#### **KENNEDY SPEECH INTRO**

- Kennedy's "Ich Bin Ein Berliner" speech (read by a student)

#### **MOTOWN INTRO**

- "Ball of Confusion" by The Temptations (student small group)
- "You Haven't Done Nothin'" by Stevie Wonder (student solo performance)
- "What's Goin' On" by Marvin Gaye (student soloists with choir)

- “War” by Edwin Starr (student soloists with choir)

#### WOODSTOCK MEDLEY

- “Star Spangled Banner” by Jimi Hendrix (guest artist performance)
- “Volunteers” by Jefferson Airplane (student solo performance)
- “With a Little Help from My Friends” by Joe Cocker (choir performance)
- “Blowin in the Wind” by Joan Baez/Bob Dylan (staff solo performance)

#### WRAP-UP/BRITISH ARTISTS INTRO

- “Give Peace a Chance” by John Lennon (choir performance)
- “Gimme Shelter” by The Rolling Stones (student duet)
- “War Pigs” by Black Sabbath (choir performance)



**APPENDIX B: COMPLETE RESULTS OF MULTIPLE CHOICE PORTION OF  
SURVEYS**

**AUDIENCE MEMBERS SURVEY**

- 1 Do you feel that being in the audience for the Protest Day assembly has increased your interest in learning about 60's and 70's issues in Social Studies class?

	Count	%
Definitely has increased my interest	15	32.61
Somewhat increased my interest	21	45.65
No different than normal	10	21.74

- 2 Do you believe that being in the audience for the Protest Day assembly will help your level of understanding of the related information in social studies class?

	Count	%
Will definitely help me understand the information	19	41.30
Will somewhat help me understand the information	26	56.52
Will not help me understand the information	1	2.17

- 3 Do you believe that seeing the Protest Day assembly will make you more willing to participate in class discussions as you study 60's and 70's social and political issues in Social Studies class?

	Count	%
Will definitely make me more willing to participate in class discussions	11	23.91
Will make me somewhat more willing to participate in class discussions	26	56.52
Will not change my willingness to participate in class discussions	9	19.57

- 4 Do you believe that being in the audience for the Protest Day assembly helps you understand and appreciate the views of groups in the 60's and 70's such as African-Americans fighting for civil rights, anti-Vietnam War protesters and young people rebelling against the older generation?

	Count	%
Definitely helps me appreciate the views of these groups	34	73.91
Helps me somewhat understand the views of these groups	12	26.09
Does not help me understand the views of these groups	0	0.00

- 5 As an audience member at the Protest Day concert, you were learning from your peers about 60's and 70's social and political issues through music. As you sat and listened to the songs in the concert, do you feel that you were more enthusiastic to listen and learn because your fellow students were the ones performing?

	Count	%
I was definitely a more enthusiastic learner because my peers were performing	22	47.83
I was somewhat more of and enthusiastic learner because my peers were performing	20	43.48
I don't think my enthusiasm for learning increased because my peers were performing	4	8.70

### CHOIR STUDENTS SURVEY

- 1 Do you feel that learning and performing the songs for Protest Day has increased your interest in learning about 60's and 70's issues in Social Studies class?

	Count	%
Definitely has increased my interest	31	36.90
Somewhat increased my interest	44	52.38
No different than normal	9	10.71

- 2 Do you believe that learning and performing the songs for Protest Day will help your level of understanding of the related information in social studies class?

	Count	%
Will definitely help me understand the information	34	40.48
Will somewhat help me understand the information	44	52.38
Will not help me understand the information	6	7.14

- 3 Do you believe that the experience of learning and performing the songs for Protest Day will make you more willing to participate in class discussions as you study 60's and 70's social and political issues in Social Studies class?

	Count	%
Will definitely make me more willing to participate in class discussions	33	39.76
Will make me somewhat more willing to participate in class discussions	33	39.76
Will not change my willingness to participate in class discussions	17	20.48

- 4 Do you believe that learning and performing the songs for Protest Day helps you understand and appreciate the views of groups in the 60's and 70's such as African-Americans fighting for civil rights, anti-Vietnam War protesters and young people rebelling against the older generation?

	Count	%
Definitely helps me appreciate the views of these groups	64	78.05
Helps me somewhat understand the views of these groups	17	20.73
Does not help me understand the views of these groups	1	1.22

- 5 As a performer in the Protest Day concert, you were actually TEACHING your peers about these 60's and 70's social issues through your performance. As you sat and listened to the other soloists and speakers in the concert, do you feel you were more enthusiastic to listen and learn because the 'teaching' was being done mostly by your peers?

	Count	%
I was definitely a more enthusiastic learner because the 'teaching' was being done by my peers	26	31.33
I was somewhat more of an enthusiastic learner because the 'teaching' was being done by my peers	46	55.42
I don't think my enthusiasm for learning increased because the 'teaching' was being done by my peers	11	13.25

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