

The Power of the Orchestra

“The truth is, I have never felt so moved. Not only because of the emotion of the moment... but I must say because of the quality of the El Sistema musicians”

-Placido Domingo

Show a positive correlation between music education and...

Academic Literacy

Social Literacy

Musical Literacy



Music has the power to transform lives, yet quality music education is often regarded as a luxury. This is no longer true in North Minneapolis.

Advocates for Community through Musical Excellence (A.C.M.E.), an El Sistema-inspired organization, is bringing free classical music education to Nellie Stone Johnson Elementary School. Starting with 15 first-graders, A.C.M.E. aims to spread the amazing effects of music throughout the school and community.

This is Breck School's Community-Based Research in Mathematics' second year partnering with A.C.M.E. to establish benchmarks and create assessments for this program.

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The Power of Research

Brief Overview of the Research

Daniel Bergerson and Eden Motto began assessing the Power of Music in 2012 with a focus on improving social literacy. Christopher Walker will be continuing their research while also testing the students' academic and musical literacies through the 2013-2014 school year.



An after-school music program should help children become better musicians, but do they do better academically? A monthly assessment on academic progress compares students in the orchestra to those not involved with A.C.M.E. A class with a mix of A.C.M.E. and non-A.C.M.E. students will be observed. Students will be assessed on their reading ability as well as unspoken habits of success (e.g. choice of free reading materials, types of questions asked in class).

A.C.M.E. has musical assessments for the student-musicians based on song performance. Student technique and focus will be observed. The goal less about seeing if the children are becoming better musicians, but rather the number of songs they learn and how they perform.

Empathy and creativity assessments created by Daniel Bergerson and Eden Motto will continue to be used to assess social literacy with a particular focus on looking at participation in an orchestra as a means of reducing racial tensions between students.



Playing in an orchestra instills discipline, fosters cooperation, and requires respect for all members. This research project assesses student development as part of an ensemble and raises awareness for the A.C.M.E. program.

A.C.M.E.'s mission is to build stronger, healthier communities through classical music education in an environment that is founded on the principles of social justice.

In parallel with the internationally acclaimed philosophy of El Sistema, Advocates for Community through Musical Excellence strives to instill lifelong skills such as discipline, ownership and community in its students. By doing so, A.C.M.E. aims to nurture not only dedicated musicians, but responsible, civic leaders who may in turn transform and strengthen families and communities.



Christopher Walker has been singing in the Breck choir program and acting in school plays for six years and has studied mathematics for even longer. He is excited to combine his passions for mathematics, helping others, and music, and put them to a good use, helping the community.



Community-Based Research in Mathematics

Mission: To incorporate mathematics into a broader community by partnering with organizations to explore real-life problems with an emphasis on service-learning and social justice.

