
EPIC ARTS

Spring 2019, Denver Metro area



Executive Summary

Mission

RedLine's Educational Partnership Initiative for the Creative (EPIC) Arts Program challenges the current pedagogy in order to create room for students' voices. The goal for EPIC Arts is to construct a student experience that engages art as a vehicle for skill-building, self-expression, and social change. The program is designed to engage children in grades K-12 living in stressed communities who may have limited access to arts education. EPIC acts as a platform for RedLine resident and community artists to collaborate with K-12 educators to implement an experiential curriculum designed by RedLine that creates a body of artwork through the lens of contemporary art and social engagement. Artist and teacher converge to create a new way of delivering instruction that combines artistic practice with the instructional needs of the teacher and the learning needs of his or her students.

Goals

Teacher Objectives:

1. After participating in EPIC, teachers will feel comfortable using experiential, concept-driven art making as their main mode for teaching art.
2. After participating in EPIC, teachers will continue to incorporate social justice issues and socially engaged art in their art lessons.
3. After participating in EPIC, teachers will have a broadened knowledge of contemporary artists and processes; and feel more confident using contemporary art in their classroom.

Artist Objectives:

1. Artists will acquire teaching skills and classroom experience.
2. Artists will develop a broadened sense of connection and responsibility to their community. Artists will develop a deepened understanding of the creative process and their personal artistic practice through helping lead students through the creative process.

Student Objectives:

1. As a result of participating in EPIC, students will experience increase engagement in
 2. other academic classes or excitement about being in school
 3. Students will experience increased social engagement and increase student agency.
 4. Students will gain an increased understanding of art as a mode of communication and meaning making.
 5. Students will develop 21st Century Learning and Innovation Skills (specifically, Creativity and Innovation, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, and Communication and
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Collaboration).

<http://www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework/60-learning-and-innovation-skills>

Opportunity Addressed

Education at RedLine offers opportunities that allow students of all ages to explore and consider social justice issues through the lens of contemporary art. One of RedLine's core educational programs is Educational Partnership Initiative for the Creative (EPIC) Arts Program, started in 2010 that aims to decrease the achievement gap and cultivate engaged youth citizens. The EPIC Arts Program is a semester-long collaboration that pairs a RedLine resident artist with a K-12 art teacher to develop a student-led art project that expresses a social issue chosen by the students. Founded on Socially- Engaged Art Pedagogy, EPIC goes beyond the traditional pedagogy of discipline-based art education to concept-driven art-making that offers participants a way to construct knowledge, critically analyze an idea, and take action in the world. This program, which culminates in an EPIC Youth Exhibition at RedLine at the end of each semester, amplifies students' voices by allowing our youth to express their important perspectives and ideas about today's world.

Project Milestones

During the 2018-2019 school year, EPIC Arts engaged 223 students in 10 classrooms across the Denver metro area at Compassion Road Academy, Rise Up Academy, DCIS Montbello, Academy of Urban Learning, Bruce Randolph, McMeen Elementary, Denver Green School, and Kunsmiller Creative Arts Academy. The two opening receptions (December and May) had over 371 attendees, including students, community members, teachers and artists. Themes conveyed in the artwork ranged from, police brutality and racism, non-binary gender identity, immigration, climate change, homelessness and celebrating cultural identity. In addition to the exhibition of powerful pieces of Socially Engaged Art, Bruce Randolph students sold ceramic bowls and mugs raising over \$200 to support the Denver Rescue Mission.

Epic Arts Curriculum

The EPIC Curriculum has been broken into 4 units of study that are meant to be flexible and adaptable to the needs of each classroom. Within each unit, there are a number of activities that are integral to the project, as well as additional activities that can be used as extensions or supports for students at various grade levels. Teachers should view the curriculum as a flexible structure into which they can insert or adjust lessons or activities to match their school curriculum and meet the needs of their individual students.

Unit 1: Concept Building and Social Engagement Exploration

In this unit, students explore modes of social engagement through art and build a framework for understanding art as a means of communication, meaning making, and a way to activate change. In Unit 1, students begin to generate the big ideas/social issues that they want to explore through their artwork and begin to brainstorm ways in which they might engage with a community beyond their classroom.

Unit 2: Translating of Idea into Form

In this unit, students brainstorm and collaboratively make decisions about how to best translate their big ideas/social issues into an aesthetic form and how to engage with a community beyond their classroom. Teachers might use contemporary artwork examples, lessons on symbolism and color, or discussions of meanings that are carried through medium and process to help students form a better understanding of how aesthetic choices create meaning in art.

Unit 3: Art Making

In this unit, students go through the process of creating a socially engaged artwork. This unit of study is the longest unit in the curriculum and accounts for the majority of class meetings. This step in the EPIC project will look different for each collaboration. In addition to traditional ideas of art making, it might include student research, material explorations, and community engagement activities.

Unit 4: Communicating, Engaging, and Displaying

In this final unit of the EPIC curriculum, students plan the installation and display of their EPIC project in RedLine's exhibition space. Students can be involved in the actual installation and should plan to attend the EPIC Arts exhibition opening.

Epic Arts Program Evaluation and Impact

Road Academy, Rise Up Academy, DCIS Montbello, Academy of Urban Learning, Bruce Randolph, McMeen Elementary, Denver Green School, and Kunsmiller Creative Arts Academy, and Redline Denver.

Survey Data

Post-survey data from students demonstrate that participation in the program supports students' sense of belonging, responsibility, leadership, and connection to community:

Prompt: Because I participated in EPIC...	Yes	Kind of	Not really
I feel a stronger connection to my community	61%	33%	6%
I am better at standing up for what I believe in	68%	30%	2%
I am more interested in community and world problems	73%	23%	4%
I am more interested in speaking up for people who have been treated unfairly	81%	17%	2%
I am better at telling others about my ideas and feelings	54%	39%	7%
I care about my school	70%	27%	3%

SUCSESSES AND CHALLENGES

Following the completion of EPIC Arts Program's eighth year, the artists, teachers, and staff at RedLine are reminded of the impact of the program and have a renewed sense of its importance. By encouraging students to speak out about their cares, concerns, and challenges, they can instigate change in their lives and in their communities. One success story from the many participating classrooms is at Kunsmiller Creative Arts Academy with the 2nd and 8th Graders who worked with RedLine Resident Artist Juntae TeeJay Hwang. In their EPIC arts project, the students addressed school bullying by rewriting the lyrics to the popular song "Happier" by Marshmello. The class then performed the song while marching through the halls of their school, spreading their message for respect, hope, and change with their peers. The event was filmed and screened as well as re-performed during the opening reception for the exhibit.

As RedLine works toward a long-term objective of becoming the premier resource for local artists and a national model for the intersection of art and social justice, we focus on how the progress to this goal relates and is responsive to our immediate surrounding communities and their diverse needs. RedLine's commitment to community-responsiveness is both a core value and an organizational challenge to fulfill. In particular, RedLine implements core programs (e.g., the Artist Residency, Reach Studio, EPIC Arts, ArtCorps Mentoring, 48 Hours Summit, Play Space) that have proven their success over the years and continue to fulfill an important gap. However, our focus on such programming limits our ability to experiment and innovate in relation to evolving community needs due to capacity. Thus, the challenge is maintaining our core programs that continue to be responsive to current needs, while simultaneously maintaining the flexibility to respond to new needs as they emerge.

To solve this challenge, RedLine's current objective is to develop a plan for programs like EPIC Arts to exist outside of RedLine's core programs. RedLine is seeking to partner with Denver Public Schools to implement EPIC and adopt the social justice art education pedagogy as a district-wide curriculum. RedLine would continue to support EPIC through pairing artists, professional development for teachers, and showcasing the exhibition. The goal would be to reduce the burden on RedLine's budget and staff by strengthening the program's capacity through the identification of additional financial resources and collaborations that could support the scaling, modeling, and implementation of EPIC Arts in more schools. This way the program could continue while RedLine's staff capacity could pivot to support emerging needs. RedLine has already reached out to arts organizations in our community where there is an active interest to offer EPIC Arts on a larger scale. The strategic planning of the EPIC expansion will unfold over the next school year as RedLine continues to implement the program in schools.

LESSONS LEARNED.

As we continue to grow EPIC Arts we take the feedback from our artists and teachers and implement it into the following projects. Issues raised this session included increased time with the students to brainstorm, reduced class size and access to more instructional materials. Resident Artist Eileen Richardson reflected, "I thought it would be nice if we could all share some initial exercises to conduct with the students, it would be great to have some kind of database with ideas on warm up lessons, activities with students to generate ideas, build trust, etc." Responding to this wish, we developed a shared drive with prompts, articles and other resources regarding Socially Engaged Art that both artists and teachers in participating schools can access. This database of resources builds upon the curriculum, supplemental readings, and the growing number of resources available for teachers and artists to support the program.

Another reflection we received came from our Community Artist at Bruce Randolph, who suggested longer 1 to 2 hour work periods, which would be useful during the art-making phase when the class shifts from ideation/conceptualization to making/creating. Typically, EPIC fits inside the classroom's assigned period, which ranges from 35 minutes to 50 minutes. Often the artmaking period is cut short by check-ins and clean up, leaving limited time for going deep into new artistic practices. In the future, we aim to carve out larger work periods with classrooms when possible, even hosting field trips onsite at RedLine for students to work in our Community Studio and become familiar with the gallery, which always increases attendance at the exhibition opening.

YOUTH ARTIST STATEMENTS

Bruce Randolph EPIC Artist, 11th Grade

"An artist can convince an audience to change their way of thinking and make them open their eyes to a problem they didn't see before"

Bruce Randolph EPIC Artist, 10th Grade

"I can express my voice through art, art is a big voice in our community and it's something that can make the community better."



Bruce Randolph, 7th Grade:

"Let's Whack Out Racism."

Our project represents racism and how people who have been victims of racism feel about it. The puzzle pieces on the face represent different races and how they are all connected no matter their skin color. The head has no actual face features because we are trying to show how people feel dehumanized when they are judged. The bat hanging right by the head represents the fact that we are knocking out racism.

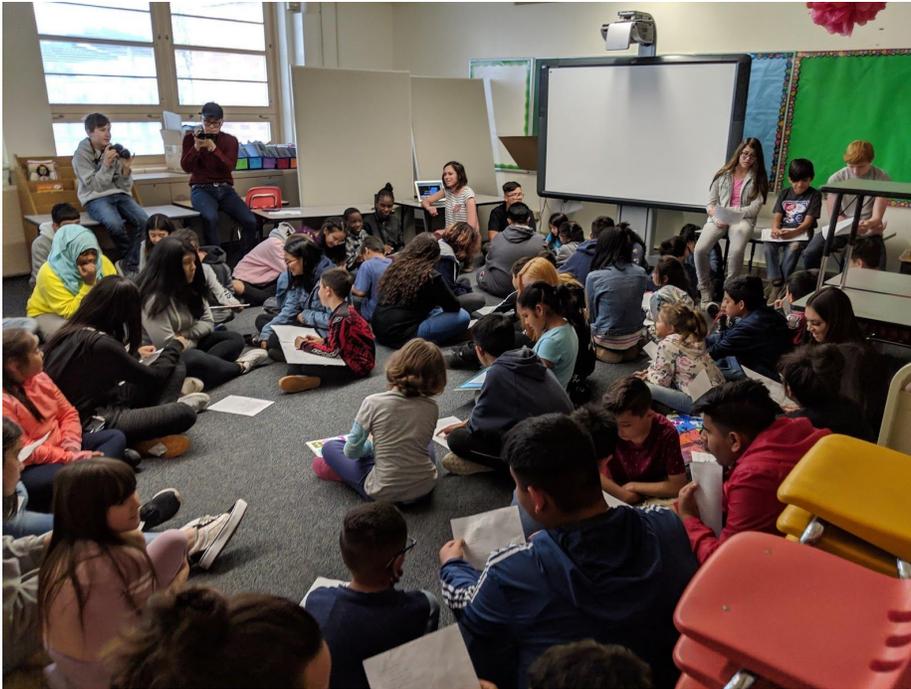
Denver Green School EPIC Artist 7th Grade

"[EPIC] It changed my ideas because it showed that if a whole community works together, they can accomplish a lot."

Teacher statements

"Participating in the EPIC program helped me introduce bigger questions surrounding social justice issues into my classroom. It also helped me let go of more skill based projects and opt for idea driven projects. The skills following the ideas, not the other way around." - Academy of Urban Learning

"I've been doing EPIC from the very beginning and this was my most successful semester yet!" - Bruce Randolph



Resident Artist Juntae TeeJay Hwang working with 2nd and 8th Graders at Kunsmiller Creative Arts Academy to memorize lyrics to their social justice song.



Opening reception at RedLine on Saturday, May 18th, 2019: Back Row from left to right Academy of Urban Learning, Bruce Randolph, McMeen Elementary, Denver Green School. Front Row: Kunsmiller Creative Arts Academy.



Academy of Urban Learning, Instructor: Kristen Emerling, Resident Artist: Anthony Garcia Sr. Grade level: 9-12th Grade. Mural by students that will be placed outside their building that focuses on the cathartic act of creativity with the goal of taking up space and showing the city we are here.

Artists statements

"Important to the success of this endeavor, was the upfront time in class to build trust among this small group and to open up with each other and with me. It took additional time to communicate deeper feelings – peeling the layers back each time we met about real concerns that nobody often sees nor hears. I validated these concerns as they also did for each other. This was the heart of the work that I encouraged them to express in the gallery. This work became a revelation of a united soul, it was the pulse about what really mattered most that drove the work." - Bruce Randolph participating Community EPIC Artist

"I think it's [EPIC] a wonderful 'in between' teaching situation, where the artist can really focus on the creativity and less on classroom management. I always learn something new doing this program." - Denver Green School Participating Resident Artist

Why is Epic learning effective?

LEARNING AND INNOVATION SKILLS

Learning and innovation skills increasingly are being recognized as those that separate students who are prepared for a more and more complex life and work environments in the 21st century, and those who are not. A focus on creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration is essential to prepare students for the future.

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Think Creatively

- Use a wide range of idea creation techniques (such as brainstorming)
- Create new and worthwhile ideas (both incremental and radical concepts)
- Elaborate, refine, analyze and evaluate their own ideas in order to improve and maximize creative efforts

Work Creatively with Others

- Develop, implement and communicate new ideas to others effectively
- Be open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives; incorporate group input and feedback into the work
- Demonstrate originality and inventiveness in work and understand the real world limits to adopting new ideas
- View failure as an opportunity to learn; understand that creativity and innovation is a long-term, cyclical process of small successes and frequent mistakes
- Act on creative ideas to make a tangible and useful contribution to the field in which the innovation will occur

CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Reason Effectively

- Use various types of reasoning (inductive, deductive, etc.) as appropriate to the situation

Use Systems Thinking

- Analyze how parts of a whole interact with each other to produce overall outcomes in complex systems

Make Judgments and Decisions

Effectively analyze and evaluate evidence, arguments, claims and beliefs • Analyze and evaluate major alternative points of view

- Synthesize and make connections between information and arguments
- Interpret information and draw conclusions based on the best analysis
- Reflect critically on learning experiences and processes

Solve Problems

- Solve different kinds of non-familiar problems in both conventional and innovative ways
- Identify and ask significant questions that clarify various points of view and lead to better solutions

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

Communicate Clearly

- Articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written and nonverbal communication skills in a variety of forms and contexts
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- Listen effectively to decipher meaning, including knowledge, values, attitudes and intentions
 - Use communication for a range of purposes (e.g. to inform, instruct, motivate and persuade)
 - Utilize multiple media and technologies, and know how to judge their effectiveness a priori as well as assess their impact
 - Communicate effectively in diverse environments (including multi-lingual)

Collaborate with Others

- Demonstrate ability to work effectively and respectfully with diverse teams
 - Exercise flexibility and willingness to be helpful in making necessary compromises to accomplish a common goal
 - Assume shared responsibility for collaborative work, and value the individual contributions made by each team member
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