Soothing Our Savage Inequalities: Nonprofit Arts Education in Buffalo

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Key Sources

- Arts Education Partnership. The Arts and Education: New Opportunities for Research. 2004
- Catterall, James S. et al. Involvement in the Arts and Human Development: General Involvement and Intensive Involvement in Music and Theater Arts. UCLA Graduate School of Education. 1999

Key Findings

- All three organizations began after witnessing the profound impact of the arts on students, and wanting to nurture it.
- Issues of accessibility to art: transportation and money
- Working within limitations: from not having a stage to practice on before the week of the show, to not having enough instruments to fill demand.
- A shared focus on the personal development of the students rather than on the art itself.
- There is a need for greater representation within the community and support/recognition of young and minority artists.

Abstract

Even as cutbacks in arts programming disproportionately impact low-income and minority students, research is just scratching the surface of the cognitive and social benefits of participating in the arts. Rather than focusing on the failings of the education system, however, this project tells the stories of three successful Buffalo arts nonprofits with whom I have worked. Just Buffalo Writing Center provides free writing workshops taught by local artists, Buffalo String Works teaches violin and cello to West Side refugees, and Shakespeare Comes to 716 trains underprivileged teenagers to perform theater. My project examines how creative writing, music and theater uniquely affect the brain and learning, as well as the benefits arts education has had on underserved populations in Buffalo: from LGBTQ to refugee to African-American students. Finally, based on interviews with program organizers, the project suggests how to fill in gaps of accessibility and representation in the Buffalo arts community.