



Theatre-in-Diversion: an Evaluation of an Arts-Based Program for Juvenile Offenders

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Overview

- Theatre in Diversion Program at Western Kentucky University is a partnership between
 - Administrative Office of the Courts
 - WKU Theatre and Dance Department
 - WKU Sociology Department



Program Objectives

- Provide WKU Theatre and Sociology students with the opportunity to mentor at-risk youth from the community who have committed a status offense
 - Develop and teach classes on acting, improv, staging, and play writing
 - Direct youth in the development of a showcase performance
- Provide at risk youth with the opportunity to
 - 1) Increase positive peer interaction
 - 2) Enhance critical thinking abilities and communication skills
 - 3) Bond youth to community leaders
 - 4) Develop an appreciation of the arts
 - 5) Increase understanding of the legal system through dramatic interpretation of concepts such as authority, justice, and responsibility
 - 6) Reduce delinquent behavior



Structure of Program

- Program has been offered in spring semester since 2012
 - 5-7 WKU Student mentors/teachers
 - 8-14 youth from the community who have a diversion agreement with Court Designated Workers (CDWs)
 - Case workers within juvenile justice system



Structure of Program

- WKU Students
 - teach the youth the basics of improv, staging, script writing, scene work, and acting
 - Enroll in a 3 credit hour Theatre in Diversion Course or a Research Methods course
 - Service Learning Model (an AAC&U High Impact Practice)
 - WKU Students develop lessons; mentor and teach youth; write reflection papers; assist with data collection



Structure of Program

- Meet 2-3 times per week
 - Program pays for youth's transportation costs and daily snacks
- Culminates in a showcase performance written and performed by the youth participants under the direction and mentorship of the WKU students
 - Typically last Saturday in April; family and friends in attendance











Program Evaluation

- Since the inception of the program, we have interviewed youth participants and some of the parents / legal guardians
 - What is the general perception of the program?
 - Has participation in the program changed the youths' relationships with parents, teachers, siblings, and peers?
 - How has the program changed the youth more broadly – for example in building inter-personal, teaming, and communication skills?



Methods

- WKU students conduct 20-25 minute interviews with youth participants at the conclusion of the program
 - Structured interview containing 10 questions
 - General perceptions of the program
 - Engagement in structured activities prior to participation in TID
 - Changes in relationships with parents, teachers, siblings, and peers
 - Advice for future participants



Sample

- Total Number of Youth Participants: 52
 - Prior to IRB Approval 57% (30)
 - IRB Approved: 43% (22)
 - 19 of these 22 participants, or 87% participation rate



Sample

	Total in TID N = 52	Interviewed N = 19
Participants	% (N)	% (N)
- Male	50 (26)	26 (5)
- Female	50 (26)	74 (14)
	100 (52)	100 (19)
Level of Schooling		
- Middle School	17 (9)	32 (6)
- High School	83 (43)	68 (13)
	100 (52)	100 (19)



Results

- 70% of youth participants did not engage in structured activities prior to committing status offense
- Many youth in our sample reported positive changes in relationships with parents (57%), teachers (47%), and peers (36%)



Changes w/ Parents

- Kriss: “After the whole situation with me getting in trouble, I was cocky with my mom and had an attitude and my mom didn’t know what to do with me. Being here helps me get my anger and frustration out in theatre and not out on her. Not being stuck at home with her all the time helps.”



Changes w/ Parents

- Lena: "Well, she had to change her work schedule so gettin' off, coming made her, have a day with me I guess. Afterwards we still... hang out after this class I guess."
- Sue: "For the better after the play. I live with my grandmother and after the play she came up to me with tears and told me how wonderful the play was and that she was proud of me. "



Changes w/ Teachers

- Ashley: “Yeah. Our relationships have actually grown stronger and I’ve actually made better grades.”
- Elliot: “Only one in particular. I’m very close with my English teacher because she’s all into this theatre and arts stuff”
- Angela: “I talk to them more. I got used to asking questions here in theatre in diversion. Now I’m asking questions and raising my hand at school. I’m normally really quiet in school. But, in here, I learned that it is okay to ask questions. Now I’m comfortable doing it.”



Changes w/ Peers

- Melanie: "Some of the girls I used to hang out with I still hang out with but the not the main one I used to hang out with who got me in trouble. I'm not fixin to get in trouble with them and I'm telling her to stop getting in trouble too."
- Elliot: "Yes, because the friends I used to hang out with are the ones I got in trouble with so I don't hang out with them anymore."



Lessons learned in TID?

- Among the 19 youth, commonalities include:
 - Builds confidence / overcome stage fright (6)
 - Teamwork (4)
 - Being more open-minded (3)
 - Need to become more active (2)
 - Opportunity for self-reflection (2)
- Nothing / Useless (3)



Conclusions

- By documenting the effectiveness of diversion programs like TID, encourage the development of more arts-based programming for the benefit of youth participants (especially at-risk youth)
- Encouraging other academic departments/units and universities to develop their own diversion programs
- Educating members of the larger community about the effectiveness of programs like these and their benefits relative to more costly alternatives that may not generate the same positive outcomes
 - Development of self-esteem, communication skills, pro-social relationships, team building, etc