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Artist navigates from STEM to STEAM



Joseph Vincelli is the founder and executive director of The Artist Outreach, a marriage of basic classroom learning and creative self expression.

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“Readin’ and ’ritin’ and ’rithmetic; taught to the tune of a hick’ry stick,” wrote American composer and lyricist Will Cobb in the silly 1907 song “School Days.” Education has come a long way since the turn of two centuries and has seen dramatic evolutions by the 21st century. All of the basics are still basic, but savvy educators, creative thinkers and talented artists continue to bring innovative, higher levels of teaching and learning into the classroom. Hick’ry sticks have given way to the conductor’s baton.

Today’s “basics” are science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), the country’s core academic disciplines. They are designed to improve competitiveness in science and technology development while gaining the highest levels of math and engineering education. Curriculum choices are integral to preparing students for current and future workforce development.

One of those forward-thinking artists, musician Joseph Vincelli put his creative vision into action when he established

The Artist Outreach (TAO) in 2012. “TAO is an art-based educational nonprofit organization, designed to teach students to cultivate self-expression and creative thinking through the power of music and art,” Vincelli said. Vincelli’s unique initiative incorporates the arts into the learning process of the basic skills taught by schools.

The Rhode Island School of Design introduced the expansion of “STEM” to “STEAM,” to include the arts in the initiative. Dallas ISD is one of many Texas school districts starting to implement the arts into its basic curriculum. TAO has gotten ahead of the parade in demonstrating how it’s done.

In harmony, the National Education Association’s (NEA) 21st century initiative is to make integral in curricula “the four Cs:” Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking and Creativity.

TAO accomplishes its goals through three programs. STREAMliners provides services to schools as a supplemental education through cross-curricular integration, reinforcing the teachers’ lessons with an emphasis on imaginative and playful techniques. Teaching artists, who are professional artists or teachers themselves, develop a regular schedule with classroom teachers, study their curricula and lesson plans, and then lead the class up to an hour each visit, usually twice a week. TAO currently has a STREAMliners’ partnership with East Dallas’ Stonewall Jackson Elementary School, which began in September for fourth and fifth graders and will end in mid-December.

A STREAMliners lesson might look like this: for “Musical Geometry Dudes,” TAO artists use music and dance to create an adventurous and fun way to understand geometric shapes and their place in learning. The artists explain the correlation between musical, geometric and mathematical proportions using original songs about geometry that build the student’s understanding of the concepts.

In a math class, an artist may work on the “Song Creation” module through which TAO artists create songs including students’ birthdays by turning the dates into musical notation, associating music and math. Addition, subtraction, multiplication, complex multiplication, ratios and decimals — all operations are used to create original music that is based entirely on the students’ birth dates.

Another TAO program is Inspired Living, which is designed for advocacy centers and other nonprofit organizations. TAO provides after-school, after-work and out-of-school activities that build the individual’s creative thought process through art therapy. It is used as a way to manufacture creativity while building self-esteem. Some examples of the organizations which TAO partners with are Big Brothers, Children’s Advocacy Center, Rainbow Days and Big Thought.

The third TAO program is Healing in Motion, which is geared to adults, many of them high-risk, who reside in or are a part of advocacy centers and other organizations. Through the program, artists show them how creativity can be a part of their everyday tasks, such as culinary and nutrition, grooming, yoga and other forms of regular body movement.

Vincelli is a saxophonist, flutist, author and clinician, who is a graduate of the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston. The artist has toured and recorded with musicians including Buddy Miles, Ice Cube, Bobby Goldsboro and Jerry Vale, to name a few. He has written for several film scores and movies, commercials and jingles. The musician has recorded 14 CDs and a DVD. He authored a 15th year book project, resulting with *The Art of Tone, Understanding our Love for Music*.

He is a public speaker, who also gives master classes to students interested in the music industry. The artist has toured internationally to countries including Brazil, Italy, Australia and South Africa among many others. He was the 1998 recipient of the Scott Joplin Award for achievement and the 2000 Hall of Fame winner at the Clearwater Jazz Holiday festival.

Vincelli has crossed the country performing the National Anthem for the Dallas Stars, Washington Bullets, Texas

Rangers, Toledo MudHens and for the NBA Champion Dallas Mavericks for 12 years. He has been featured in dozens of periodicals and on talk shows, including PBS and KERA locally.

According to Vincelli, “TAO incorporates music, dance, design and other art forms, or ‘creative’ exercise into core subjects, believing that it is equally important as ‘physical’ exercise.” He continues, “Our vision is to encourage self-expression, which leads to self-discovery; self-discovery then leads to new approaches and opportunity for innovation; innovation gives students the ability to compete in the global workforce.”

He adds, “TAO demonstrates to students the power of creative thinking, and how they can apply it to their lives now and in their future careers.”

For additional information, visit theartistoutreach.org, call 214-906-1059 or write executive director Joseph Vincelli at director@theartistoutreach.org.