

What is the Promise in the Promise Neighborhoods?

Promise Neighborhoods



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Introduction: What is the Promise in the Promise Neighborhood?

This question is one, which everyone from President Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to politicians and economists, to students at universities like Washington and Lee and at programs like the Harlem Children's Zone, has a connection to and would like a definitive answer for. A desire for data, evidence and action, but detailed questions ensue as well, wondering: why the Promise Neighborhoods are special? If they are worth the investment? How they will institute more effective initiatives and make longer-lasting changes than preexisting federally funded education programs like Head Start? Do they pass a cost-benefit analysis?

This paper addresses two issues. One concerns the holistic program of the Promise Neighborhood with its comprehensive "cradle-to-college"¹ strategy that seeks to help break the cycle of generational and neighborhood poverty. The second considers the inclusion of arts and its benefits in the all-encompassing strategy of the program.

Through analyzing the Promise Neighborhood initiative and the potential promise that exists within, I seek to show the role of art within the program and how it helps foster a higher quality education for children while creating community and civic leadership. Teaching art and expression improves mental health, teaches kids to be citizens and leaders, and bridges the gaps between different races, communities, and backgrounds. The Promise Neighborhood's integral inclusion of arts distinguishes it from other more narrowly defined programs.

I conclude that the Promise Neighborhoods and their supplementary art programs both have promise; however, the level of promise in the Promise Neighborhoods is only

¹ Kirp, David L. "Cradle to College: Community Schools Alter the Arc of Children's Lives by Addressing Academic And Social Needs," *The Nation*, 14 June 2010. <http://www.thenation.com/article/cradle-college>. 27 March 2011.

based off the short-term data that currently exists on the model of the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), which the Promise Neighborhoods developed from. The jury is still out on if this replication might be too problematic and risky to universalize for the long-term, general city.

What are the Promise Neighborhoods?

The Promise Neighborhoods developed as a facet of Obama's White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative and can be defined with the goal of "creat[ing] a comprehensive continuum of education programs and family and community supports, with great schools at the center, that will significantly improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children and youth, from birth through college and career, in the nation's most distressed communities."² They seek to provide a high-quality education for students through charter schools and other academic programs, which include an emphasis on art education. The strategy takes bold, new steps in the direction of ending poverty through joint educational and communal efforts to "improv[e] the educational outcomes and overall life prospects of low-income children and their families."³

To the education programs, they add community investments: "place-based strateg[ies] to support local communities in developing and obtaining the tools they need to revitalize neighborhoods of concentrated poverty into neighborhoods of opportunity."⁴

² "The White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative." http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/nri_description.pdf 10 March 2011.

³ "What is a Promise Neighborhood?" The Promise Neighborhoods Institute, PolicyLink. 2011. <http://www.promiseneighborhoodsinstitute.org/what-is-a-pn/> 21 March 2011

⁴ "The White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative."

The White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative highlights reasons why the Promise Neighborhoods took the additional communal approach: “In high-poverty neighborhoods, high unemployment rates, rampant crime, health disparities, inadequate early care and education, and struggling schools contribute to intensify the negative outcomes associated with living poverty.”⁵ Neighborhood poverty identifies as a critical factor in explaining why some children are more likely to have reduced opportunities.

The bold structure and organization of Promise Neighborhoods are based off a list of multi-dimensional strategies to achieve effective outcomes and desired goals:

- Seek to integrate support efforts to the community via feedback from leaders and members of the community
- Focus on increasing the capacity of students by helping them from cradle to college and beyond
- Develop a continuum of community, academic, and family supports that stands with education at the center
- Bridge programs and agencies
- Work with local governments
- Manage information on the overall impact of Promise Neighborhoods, its relationship with certain programs and student outcomes
- Gather other worthwhile data to help improve the Promise Neighborhoods as they expand and develop.⁶

⁵ “The White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative.”

⁶ “What is a Promise Neighborhood?”

The Promise Neighborhood description states that particular sites, services and programs will be restructured and tailored to the needs of that particular city, the suggestions from members within the community will be considered, and a results-based accountability measurement will assess what works and what does not.⁷ This will help effectively replicate the model. With the Promise Neighborhoods, the combining of education initiatives and neighborhood community programs could stand as the curing solution to childhood and educational poverty.

Why are the Promise Neighborhoods special?

Every word used to explain the Promise Neighborhoods in the first sentence under the ***What are the Promise Neighborhoods?*** section defines a distinctiveness of the program that shows why they are special. They identify education at its core; however, the all-encompassing nature, the continuing and long-lasting efforts and initiatives and the family and community involvement, all further support key concepts that distinguish the Promise Neighborhoods as a special program. The pairing of this neighborhood approach with educationally focused services creates a program of magnified power, potential and promise. The Harlem Children’s Zone has produced considerable and significant gains in student achievement and well-being, and as Obama states, “if we know it works, there’s no reason this program should stop at the end of those blocks in Harlem.”⁸

⁷ Jean-Louis, Betina and Frank Farrow, Lisbeth Schorr, Judith Bell “Focusing on Results in *Promise Neighborhoods*; Recommendations for the Federal Initiative.” Harlem Children’s Zone, The Center for the Study of Social Policy, and PolicyLink. Page 3.

⁸ Aarons, Dakarai I. “President Envisions Anti-Poverty Efforts like Harlem’s ‘Zone;’ Budget Outline Calls for ‘Promise Neighborhoods.’” *Education Week*. 11 March 2009. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/03/11/24harlem.h28.html> 27 March 2011.

Obama sees the Promise Neighborhoods as a way to “reaffirm the promise”⁹ and reality of the given values of the United States such as equality, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness. This concept relates to political philosopher John Rawls’ “Theory of Justice” principle, which asserts the need to adjust for the social situations children face at birth, prior to their ability to make a decision, and to provide a fair equality of opportunity.¹⁰ Rawls would find fault in the unprotected and unfair access to opportunity with the current state of poverty. Education programs, like the Promise Neighborhoods and the Harlem Children’s Zone, should mitigate social disadvantages and effectively do away with differences in childhood and circumstantial advantages. A high-quality and effective education supplemented by family strengthening and community goals that the Promise Neighborhoods laid out would diminish the at-birth disadvantages and the inequality Rawls discusses. The potential promise from a Promise Neighborhood provides a chance for this Rawlsian belief to be satisfied, for ensuring that a young person born in Harlem or other impoverished city has the equal opportunity to prosper as a child born into a family in the top income percentile. Though Rawls does not mention art in his theory of justice as fairness, he would most likely agree that the Promise Neighborhood’s inclusion of art in its strides to educate children and deliver opportunity would be reasonable and necessary. The First Lady, Michelle Obama, explicates reasons behind art as opportunity and its importance in helping a child build a fair and equal capacity. She explains that “learning through the arts reinforces critical academic skills in reading, language arts, and math, and provides students with the skills to creatively solve

⁹ “The White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative.”

¹⁰ Daniels, Norman. *Just Health: Meeting Health Needs Family*. Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 2008. 4-5.

problems.”¹¹ When considered as a unit, President and Mrs. Obama see promise in the existence of Promise Neighborhoods to break the cycle of poverty and in the use of art education to foster a deeper, more profound educational experience.

The Harlem Children’s Zone Model

Making the Harlem Children’s Zone into a national model that extends into twenty-one neighborhoods suggests it has special and noteworthy characteristics. It began in recently in 2004, but this 97-block education and community initiative in Harlem, NY, has proven “enormously effective”¹² and offers the potential for making substantial strides in the well-being and capacities of low-income individuals and families. The New York Times Magazine explicates the goal of HCZ, which states “the objective is to create a safety net woven so tightly that children just can’t slip through.”¹³ It envisions a complete and comprehensive starting point strategy to help all children in the target neighborhood “have accesses to effective schools and strong systems of family and community support that will prepare them to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to college and career.”¹⁴ The Harlem Children Zone model has been mentioned as a “cradle-to-college,”¹⁵ all-encompassing, long-term approach to give disadvantaged children the best possible start in life, keep children healthy, assure success through their school years, graduate from college, and build an environment of

¹¹ Resnick, Lynda. “Why Art Education Matters,” The Huffington Post. 1 February 2010. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lynda-resnick/why-art-education-matters_b_445314.html 13 March 2011

¹² Dobbie, Will and Roland G. Fryer, Jr. “Are High-Quality Schools Enough to Close the Achievement Gap? Evidence from a Bold Social Experiment in Harlem.” Harvard University, 2009. <http://www.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/fryer/files/hcz%204.15.2009.pdf> 27 March 2011. 3.

¹³ “The Harlem Children’s Zone: History,” The Harlem Children’s Zone, 2009. <http://www.hcz.org/about-us/history> 9 April 2011.

¹⁴ “What is a Promise Neighborhood?”

¹⁵ Kirp, David L.

family and community support.¹⁶ Today, HCZ offers over twenty different service programs and sites and serves more than 10,000 children and 7,400 adults.¹⁷

Under the evidential successes of the Harlem Children's Zone and Obama's plan to expand this model nationally, this type of program has garnered much publicity and support. From best-selling books such as Paul Tough's *Whatever It Takes* or the movies "The Lottery" and "Waiting for Superman," a decent amount of publicity and hype surrounds the Harlem Children's Zone. In turn, it has won attention from funders, bipartisan politicians, education reformers, and the general public. Though HCZ is still new and developing, the negative data that appeared thus far proves inconclusive to find it ineffective or less effective than another program.¹⁸ In contrast, the successful results continue to reel in support and attention as politicians and reformers seek for cures to the education system, which when broken can be one of the most debilitating and detrimental defects in our society.

Literature on the Harlem Children's Zone

In 2009, Harvard researchers Dobbie and Roland conducted an econometric study to estimate the causal impact of the Harlem Children's Zone on children who enrolled in the first two years (2004 and 2005) of HCZ's charter school, the Promise Academy. They ran two regressions, one that compared the winners and losers of the lottery application system, and another that studied the differences in a student's home address to the other students' in their school entrance year. In both cases, the results

¹⁶ "Achieving Results of All Children." The Promise Neighborhoods Institute, PolicyLink. 2011. <http://www.promiseneighborhoodsinstitute.org/results/> 21 March 2011.

¹⁷ Dobbie, Will and Roland G. Fryer, Jr. 5. "The Harlem Children's Zone: History,"

¹⁸ This will be discussed in detail later.

prove that HCZ affects students enough to reverse the black-white achievement gap in mathematics and reduce it in English Language Arts.¹⁹ Their evidence on the impact of community investment in regards to the short-term outcome of student achievement produced inconclusive results. The question that remains is if the high quality school alone produced these results or if school and the complementary neighborhood investments mattered in what the students were able to academically achieve.²⁰

Other sources of literature remark that HCZ's communal efforts have been successful thus far. Authors Austin, Lemon and Leer find that HCZ neighborhood investments promote earnings and asset development, strengthen families, organize and build the community and develop innovative approaches to serve; that they are producing outcomes that benefit individuals and communities.²¹ When Austin et al. asked the HCZ staff what investments they believed worked best, the majority answered the HCZ family and child services and their programs to increase community involvement.²² Austin et al. observe a range of programs like the Baby College, the Gems Program, the Shaping Minds Around Reading and Technology Program, the TRUCE program and the Community Pride Program while Dobbie and Fryer only study the Baby College and the Gems Program.²³ HCZ's community approach seeks to increase resident involvement with a "hands-on, grassroots approach," and dual-focused method defined by "a more holistic approach that brings together services at the micro-level of the family and the

¹⁹ Dobbie, Will and Roland G. Fryer, Jr. 3.

²⁰ Ibid, 24.

²¹ Austin, Michael and Kathy Lemon and Ericka Leer. "Promising Practices for Meeting the Multiple Needs of Low-Income Families in Poverty Neighborhoods." *Journal of Health and Social Policy*, Vol 21, Issue 1, Hawthorne Press, 2005, 99.

²² Ibid,100.

²³ Ibid.

macro-level of the neighborhood.”²⁴ Sociologist David Brooks finds that the presence of the “Zone” and the HCZ schools create “an orderly and demanding counterculture to inculcate middle-class values,”²⁵ thus, overriding the neighborhood of underperforming, discouraged, and impoverished mindsets and situations, and reinstating ideals of promise, safety, and faith.

Though HCZ data depicts positive and promising results for children, Obama’s nationwide reproduction of the HCZ model remains debated. Austin et al. see the Harlem Children’s Zone as a “promising program,” and though this affirmatively answers that promise exists in the structural model for Promise Neighborhoods, the authors’ specification of what promising means makes a worthwhile point.²⁶ They explain that they chose the word promising because at the moment, not enough data exists to rest assured that this is the *best*.²⁷ As HCZ only admitted its first class in 2004, relatively little has been written on the Harlem Children’s Zone and no long-term data exists; therefore, taking the bold initiative to make this social experiment a national entity was and still remains risky.

Personal Experience

In the summer of 2010, I worked for TRUCE, an arts and media program within the Harlem Children’s Zone. An acronym for The Renaissance University for Community Education, TRUCE seeks to use art to help educate and challenge children to think and grow. TRUCE qualifies as one of HCZ’s neighborhood investment sites;

²⁴ Ibid, 115-6.

²⁵ Brooks, David. “The Harlem Miracle.” *The New York Times*. 8 May 2009.

²⁶ Austin, Michael and Kathy Lemon and Ericka Leer, 97.

²⁷ Ibid.

however, in this experience I saw first-hand the internal nature, organization, and opinions of the way the entire HCZ program runs. I experienced just how “promising” HCZ’s strategy and performance methods are, and ultimately saw the real world implications of its results. I worked with a range of children from ages 13-19 and we focused on art projects. I watched each student discover her own form of self-expression and release through these artistic activities over the summer. When I asked a 16-year-old male student why he attended TRUCE, his answer illuminated the value and effectual power of the program: “I attend TRUCE to better myself through the arts. If I weren’t at TRUCE I’d be outside getting into trouble. [Instead] I’m here learning [and] at the same time, I’m having fun while I’m learning.”²⁸ TRUCE and its access to art gives students experiences that they might never have otherwise, as their childhood or family situation deprives them of an opportunity to learn and grow from this type of extracurricular outlet.

Prior to working for HCZ’s TRUCE, I fell into the category of people swayed by the hype surrounding HCZ and the highly publicized “miraculous”²⁹ short-term results. I anticipated a fairy-tale of a nonprofit, the same way CEO/Director Geoffrey Canada explained HCZ to the public. Even with some positive experiences, the majority of my time at TRUCE I spent watching the promoted “Harlem Miracle”³⁰ image disprove itself day by day. The disorganized, displeased and disagreeing administration often offered poor examples and allowed students to get away with skipping hours of attendance or unjustified stipends. The staff lacked due to a high attrition rate and day-to-day, some staff members became so distracted by their own lives they forgot to prepare for class or even come. I was shocked to see these teachers categorized as “high quality” or even,

²⁸ Interview Conducted by Christina Lawrence with TRUCE student. July, 2010.

²⁹ Brooks, David.

³⁰ Ibid.

considered role models, a description Canada asserted all HCZ teachers and employees must be/are.

Despite my initial dismay at the way I thought this “model” program ran, I have come to terms with the fact that these caring Neighborhoods provide more for children, families, other adults and communities than anything prior. While TRUCE makes mistakes, they also make more significant strides in being a social and educational safe haven for students. Missing class for personal issues, family issues, etc., is something that happens to everyone, something that cannot be avoided no matter how high quality of a teacher, role model or student one might be. In accordance with the aforementioned Austin et al. point, the presence of HCZ is better and more promising than what was there before. No prior program has ever been as comprehensive, all encompassing, and “hoped for” as these Promise Neighborhoods. Furthermore, the negative arguments against HCZ lack fair platforms. For example, the aforementioned results from Dobbie and Fryer saying HCZ’s community investments do not produce effective results do not consider the fact that it might take an entire neighborhood longer to react to investments than it takes a student to react to individual educational investments. Changing the success of one individual and measuring these effects proves significantly easier than the trying to do so for a complex, highly populated neighborhood of 97 blocks. With this understanding, the belief purporting Obama’s institution of the HCZ model into Promise Neighborhoods seems promising.

Other noteworthy firsthand examples on the value in TRUCE and in providing arts education surfaced during my internship. One 16-year-old girl attending TRUCE answered that she attends because she “like[s] how [they] get a chance to explore other

cultures and learn about different medias of art and how important art is for other countries.”³¹ Because of TRUCE’s focus on the arts, I followed up my interview session by asking the students how they feel the arts help them. One student explained that “arts help me express how I feel because sometimes I don’t like to explain myself.”³² While another responded, “It helps me explore different things and be exposed to new things. It’s not every day that I get to work with a camera or make collages.”³³ A particularly verbal student explained that art “helps me with self-expression...The arts help me alleviate some of the problems I deal with at home or in the neighborhood. I see a lot of negative energy going around. The arts, for me, are writing and singing. By doing that, I help myself and maybe give back to the community.”³⁴ This response brings HCZ’s educational and community investments full circle and the student proves that TRUCE succeeds in its central focus of helping students as well as its peripheral intention of bettering a community and building a neighborhood. At the core, this quality of including arts in its holistic realm of services makes the Promise Neighborhoods special; however, the positive results and benefits that HCZ students come away with signal even more additional value to this service.

Comparison to Preexisting Education Programs

The approach of the Harlem Children’s Zone and Promise Neighborhoods to have holistic continuum of support through schools, families, and neighborhoods marks a new strategy to helping disadvantaged people. A comparison of the HCZ and Promise Neighborhoods model to preexisting education programs highlights the differences

³¹ Interview Conducted by Christina Lawrence with TRUCE student. July, 2010.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

between the short-term and long-term expectations and implications. Prior to HCZ, most programs to foster education or communities were taken on as a “schools-only”³⁵ approach or a focused community effort.³⁶

Head Start exemplifies an early childhood education program that has been studied extensively both short-term and long-term since its inception in 1964. While Head Start’s attributed achievements consist of its ability to make up for a poor child’s disadvantaged school readiness, improve test scores for a period of time and provide them with a form of preparation, negative long-term results of Head Start’s impact have surfaced. Head Start has been most readily criticized for its “fade out”³⁷ effect, which argues that Head Start children lose its impact once they graduate from the program.

With HCZ and the Promise Neighborhood’s “cradle-to-college”³⁸ strategy, the possibility of the “fade out”³⁹ effect gets eliminated before it even becomes an issue. While Head Start does not neglect important and influential factors in a student’s life such as family and parenting advice or art education, its approach to both proves less comprehensive and substantive than the Harlem Children’s Zone. Additionally noteworthy, Head Start does not even include community initiatives.

Art at Head Start consists of a daily or weekly lesson for a minor fraction of the class day. Student-made paintings, drawings or collages hang on the walls of classrooms. Head Start makes efforts to include families and strengthen the roles of parents by having

³⁵ Whitehurst, Grover J. “The Harlem Children’s Zone, Promise Neighborhoods, and the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education,” The Brookings Institution, 20 July 2010. http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0720_hcz_whitehurst.aspx 27 March 2011.

³⁶ This multi-stemmed approach was not unheard of or entirely new; however, it was the first one to comprehensively include programs for communities in addition to services for parents and education for children.

³⁷ Garces, Eliana and Duncan Thomas and Janet Currie. “Longer-Term Effects of Head Start,” *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 92, No. 4, Sept 2002. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3083291> 5 April 2011. 999.

³⁸ Kirp, David L.

³⁹ Garces, Eliana and Duncan Thomas and Janet Currie, 999.

annual home visits and parent-teacher conferences. However, community involvement at Head Start occurs if the community makes the effort to involve itself; programs made to better the community do not exist like they do at the Harlem Children's Zone. The Promise Neighborhood's holistic approach includes a greater number of citizens for a longer period of time than the two-year Head Start program, which only offers limited dental care, health care, and parental/familial support. Because of its holistic, substantial nature, supporting the Promise Neighborhood program would deliver a far greater societal return per each dollar and effort invested.

The comparison between the Harlem Children's Zone and the KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) Schools highlights other valuable aspects of HCZ. This discerns the difference between a "schools-only"⁴⁰ charter school strategy, as the KIPP charter schools only teach from 5th-8th grade, and the "cradle-to-college"⁴¹ approach of HCZ.⁴² KIPP schools have created meaningful results in diminishing the black-white achievement gap and consequently, they have already expanded nationally.⁴³ When comparing the three KIPP charter schools in the New York City area to the HCZ Promise Academy charter school, all three KIPP schools produced better academic scores, most particularly in math.⁴⁴ This led Dr. Grover J. Whitehurst asks if the "schools-only" approach produces better scores, then why invest in the schools and neighborhood strategy like HCZ's.⁴⁵ As mentioned earlier, perhaps it is too soon to tell how the neighborhoods will react to the initiatives. Despite positive impacts, results from KIPP do

⁴⁰ Whitehurst, Grover J.

⁴¹ Kirp, David.

⁴² Only 85% of KIPP Schools are 5th-8th grade.

"KIPP FAQ," <http://www.kipp.org/faq> 3 April 2011.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Whitehurst, Grover J.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

not “suggest that KIPP schools have necessarily found ‘the answer’ to the educational woes of urban schools, but the results do suggest that KIPP is ‘doing something right.’”⁴⁶

Mike Feinberg, a co-founder of the KIPP network, asserts that “the work HCZ does to support students is ‘incredibly important. I’d replicate it in a heartbeat versus do it in the way we do, which is [responding to] one crisis at a time.’”⁴⁷ Feinberg’s suggestion points out how the “cradle-to-college” approach might be better at achieving a greater spectrum of goals beyond test scores like psychological and behavioral results. Measuring and comparing test scores does not satisfactorily assess outcomes of the program as the inputs of each differ.

The Perry Preschool provides another experimental example of an education program that has received positive and meaningful achievements for students. This experiment studied the effectiveness of preschool during the years 1962-1967 by offering a high quality and intensive preschool for children, ages 3, 4, or 5, who yield from disadvantaged neighborhoods with failing schools. The Perry Preschool intervention focused solely on early childhood education and development by offering small intensive classes for preschoolers, parental meetings, weekly home visits and a concern for socio-emotional development.⁴⁸ The short-term and long-term data that has since then been conducted highlight that it generates results that last into adulthood. The structure of the Perry Preschool project relates similarly to the intended ultimate organization of the Harlem Children’s Zone and the Promise Neighborhood schools such as small classes,

⁴⁶ Macey, Erin and Janet Decker and Suzanne Eckes. “The Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP): An Analysis of One Model’s Efforts to Promote Achievement in Underserved Communities,” *Journal of School Choice*, Vol. 3, Issue 3, Indiana, 2009. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=b00e9268-01d9-455f-9664-363e9d275956%40sessionmgr12&vid=10&hid=15> 3 April 2011. 220.

⁴⁷ Toch, Thomas. “The Plight of a Good Idea,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, Phi Delta Kappan International. November 2010. 71.

⁴⁸ Currie, Janet. “Early Childhood Education Programs,” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2001. 220.

high-quality teachers, parental involvement, and fostering preschool students. While Perry Preschools produced significant results, it stands as yet another example of an education strategy that intervenes to help the child for a concentrated, specific amount of years and then stops. Though the Perry Preschool Project includes aspects like intensive parental involvement, it neglects to account for community investments and comprehensive services. Neither the Perry School or Head Start provides the same scope of free medical, dental and mental-health services, student incentives for achievement, high-quality nutritious cafeteria meals three times a day, parental lessons and support in the form of food baskets, meals, bus fares, and more. Additionally, specific communally targeted sites and services like the Community Pride initiative or other ones mentioned in the second paragraph of the *Harlem Children's Zone Model* section do not exist in the structure of these programs.⁴⁹ In my summer at TRUCE, I helped plan times for the teenage TRUCE students to meet with the elderly people who attended the senior home across the street and find ways to overcome or understand generational differences and disagreements that existed in the neighborhood. The administration planned and emphasized events and initiatives to build the community. No work at Head Start, KIPP, or the Perry Preschool has tried for this goal to change.

Art as an Educational Tool and Expansion of Fair Opportunity

The Promise Neighborhoods incorporation of art education signifies a desire for a more well-rounded intervention as art education permits an increased ability to develop socially, academically, and introspectively. Art produces returns to the children and the community because of the lessons it teaches, the ways in which it can be used to build

⁴⁹ Robelen, Erik W. "Study of Harlem Children's Zone Finds Achievement Gaps Closing." *Education Week*. 18 November 2009. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/11/18/12harlem-2.h29.html> 27 March 2011.

communities, bridge gaps, its historical importance and its obvious aesthetic nature. Arts classes yield broader consequences than what it seems on the surface. Not only are “the arts... particular enhancements of life...[but]...it is claimed that the more arts classes students take, the higher their SAT scores.”⁵⁰ Arts create a visual culture and an education on socially relevant happenings that gives students the opportunity to study images, popular culture, history, sociology and politics.⁵¹ As one TRUCE student said, access to arts courses give children the process of “bringing an imagination into being that is appraised by a sense of purpose held by a young creator.”⁵² These special and unique parts of the brain that art stimulates require new ways of thinking, exploring and making judgments about situations and relationships. They lead the student artist to consider alternative solutions to a problem as they build imagination and self-worth. For less academic students, the arts reach them in other ways, ways beyond the mathematical and historic textbook methods. Elliot Eisner elucidates that the arts “help us learn to see and to feel what we see. The arts are eye openers.”⁵³ The range of art programs and services that the Harlem Children’s Zone provides proves that the minds behind the organizational structure understand the positive impact art can have on disadvantaged children, many of who may learn differently or have more trouble being academically stimulated by traditional methods. TRUCE teaches visual and performing arts, from crafts, murals, photography and collage, to singing, dancing, acting and writing poetry. Each type of art purports beneficial educational and emotional impacts.

⁵⁰ Eisner, Elliot W. “Should We Create New Aims for Art Education?” National Art Education Association, Vol. 54, No. 5, September 2001. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3193929> 10 March 2011. 7-10.

⁵¹ Eisner, 8

⁵² Ibid, 9.

⁵³ Ibid.

Beyond TRUCE, many other art programs focused on boosting the lives of low-income, disadvantaged youth exist and have proven effective. Artists Striving to End Poverty, ASTEP, uses the arts to help teach children in impoverished communities to cope.⁵⁴ They define their core mission with the goal of “creat[ing] safe spaces where the kids don’t feel judged about what they are doing.”⁵⁵ In essence, this vision seeks to foster self-esteem and confidence for the youth who participate in the program. Life Pieces to Masterpieces, a Washington, DC based program for at-risk boys and young men, offers another example of an arts program designed for fostering disadvantaged individuals. It maintains a strong focus on building self-regard and confidence as it “encourages young men to focus on finding their purpose in life.”⁵⁶ These arts programs illuminate that art education can provide a type of quality education that is fair, equal and deserved, but can also be more influential and impactful for certain students and communities. It gives children a chance to explore their own self, their community and their history on their own accord rather than always listening to others and perpetually following the textbook.

Arts teach the soft skills that can oftentimes be overlooked. Art education provides a mental alternative to mathematics and dense English literature. Studies show that art education teaches self-discipline, intuition, reasoning, imagination, and dexterity.⁵⁷ The education and presence of art builds bridges of understanding and provides a resource for disjointed communities to appreciate different cultures and come

⁵⁴ Macel, Emily. “Can Art End Poverty? A New York Based Helps Disadvantaged Children Take the First Step.” *Dance Magazine*, May 2009. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1083/is_5_83/ai_n31849381/ 27 March 2011.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Milk, Leslie. “2010 Washingtonian of the year: Mary Brown; Turning Young Lives Around Through Art.” *Washingtonian.com*. 6 January 2011 <http://www.washingtonian.com/blogarticles/people/capitalcomment/17855.html> 23 March 2011.

⁵⁷ Resnick, Lynda. “Why Art Education Matters.”

together.⁵⁸ The nonprofit 501c3, Creative Arts Workshops 4 Kids, combines helping kids and communities through art. They seek to utilize “the visual and performing arts to teach life skills to children and teens while enriching communities.”⁵⁹ While art brings communities together, additional research on its affect on individual youths has become increasingly more significant. If arts build self-esteem and confidence, it then widens and enhances the functional capability and opportunity of a student. This causal result, which lessens inequality and poverty reiterates the value in art education. Expanding art opportunity in turn, expands self-esteem, degrees of knowledge, and community capacities. From youth school art programs to community granted mural programs, art across the nation fosters individuals and builds communities.

Art as Expanding the Community

Community art extends beyond Rawls' concern about individual opportunity as it expands from helping one person to empowering an entire group of people. Art made for the community encourages an impoverished children's self-esteem as the causal effects of seeing one's own work bettering his community also builds his own confidence. At the same time, this community art helps the entire community as a form of racial and social uplift, a way to bridge social strife, to teach the society, and to install aesthetic appeal in a location that might have been run down before. Though I never participated in a community art project while at the Harlem Children's Zone, its inclusion, emphasis, and subsequent impact was clear. Projects for children ranged from temporary chalk sidewalk

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ “Creative Arts Workshops For Kids; Our Vision.” New York, New York, 2007. <http://www.caw4kids.org/vision.html> 28 March 2011.

designs to more permanent mosaics for the sides of other buildings.⁶⁰ Substantial art projects and paintings embellished the interior and exterior of the TRUCE building with images complemented with inspirational quotes such as “If you don’t stand for something, you will fall for anything,” to educational images like books with TRUCE designed on the pages.⁶¹ These images inspire and remind anyone in the TRUCE community of respected values and goals. On the walls inside of the TRUCE playground, student art and designs decorate and enhance the playful environment.⁶² Within a city, the protective playground wall is necessary; thus, the mural addition proves better and more aesthetically appealing than the otherwise blank, concrete wall. Art programs contribute to the beauty of the community and as a result, the residents appreciate the neighborhood more and treat it with an increased amount of respect.

In The Community Economic Development Movement, William H. Simon illustrates the power of art in shaping a community. He uses a mural example to show how it created a more vibrant community in the Roxbury areas of Boston. On Dudley Street in Roxbury, graffiti covered the dilapidated and unattractive walls of buildings. Today, the walls of an old building on Dudley Street have been painted with a mural of the leading figures involved in the community development program.⁶³ Since the inception of this mural, not one mark of graffiti has been made. Simon provides this as a tangible effect of a community investment, which improves the value of an “economic investment, social capital, and collective discipline that enhances bargaining power with

⁶⁰ See photo 1 for an HCZ mosaic.

⁶¹ See Photo 2 and 3 for an interior of TRUCE.

⁶² See Photo 3 for the TRUCE playground.

⁶³ Simon, 67-8.

outsiders”⁶⁴ and also yields intangible results that boost community spirit and respect. Like the Dudley Street example, the HCZ art projects can make an important contribution to the effort of community development and to initiate community respect from local citizens.

More distant history also illustrates the effective impact of art on building disadvantaged communities into thriving and growing neighborhoods, on the mental health of individuals, and on bringing people together and bridging social and racial strife. During the Great Depression in the 1930s, the American government turned to art in attempt to rebuild optimism and encouragement within the country. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt instated the Works Project Administration with the Federal Art Project (FAP) as a core feature. With this project, the U.S. government employed artists to create public works of art across the country. The FAP helped unemployed citizens gain work, but it also provided aesthetic, expressionistic outlets for the public at large and a way to bring them together.

The 1960s offer another telling example of public art that changed communities. The muralist walls that African American artists and racial groups created across the nation delivered bold and clear societal messages. These racially charged murals, like the “Wall of Respect” in Chicago from 1967 and the “Wall of Dignity” in Detroit from 1968 turned abandoned and rundown buildings into visual icons promoting black power and pride.⁶⁵ Exemplifying the type of art that brings the community together and speaks to it at the same time, these public murals expressed the sentiments of the African American

⁶⁴ Ibid, 68.

⁶⁵ See photo 5 and 6.

race, which at the time was faced with severe internal strife and external demons. Judging from the way community art has historically helped foster a sense of pride and aesthetic appreciation among residents, the inclusion of art programs in the Promise Neighborhoods would continue to better the lives of underprivileged citizens and communities.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Another important question to ask is if the “hope” invested in these models will translate into realistic expectations. This requires looking at the financial facts and results. For the 2010 fiscal year, Congress granted the Promise Neighborhood Initiative \$10 million to implement twenty-one planning grants into the chosen neighborhoods.

This means that each neighborhood received awards somewhere between \$400,000-\$500,000. In the 2011 fiscal year, the Promise Neighborhoods received \$210 million to continue the project.⁶⁶ Though this is no small amount, when compared to other government programs, the Promise Neighborhoods are a cheap investment. Take the Earned Income Tax Credit program, which costs approximately \$50 billion per year. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program costs \$20 billion per year. Head Start’s 2010 budget consisted of about \$7.2 billion and each year they receive a close to \$1 billion boost in funds.⁶⁷ This far exceeds the current or asking budget of the Promise Neighborhoods.

The Harlem Children’s Zone Promise Academy spends approximately \$15,925 on each student per year, but this summed price does not include other sites and services

⁶⁶ “The White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative.”

⁶⁷ Guernsey, Lisa. “A Closer Look at Obama’s FY11 Budget: Head Start,” New America Foundation. 12 February 2010. http://earlyed.newamerica.net/blogposts/2010/a_closer_look_at_obama_s_fy11_budget_head_start-27490 9 April 2011.

such as after-school program costs, performance rewards, meal costs, health and dental care costs, and central administration and building costs.⁶⁸ In 2004, the price per student at Head Start was \$7,222.⁶⁹ While the Head Start number is drastically cheaper, the Head Start program works with 3 and 4 year olds for only two years, keeps its focus on education and its long-term effects still remain unresolved. However, in a per city comparison to Head Start, the Promise Neighborhoods prove to be more expensive.⁷⁰ Another per student cost comparison for the Harlem Children's Zone is the price per student of an average NYC public school per year, which is \$14,452.⁷¹ With a \$1,473 price difference, the benefits of attending the Harlem Children's Zone prove significantly larger as students show improved average test scores, healthier habits, better physical and mental health, increased likelihood of attending and graduating from college, increased adult income, and many other beneficial variables. These two cost-benefit analyses do not compare the community investments, as they are left out of HCZ's per student price; however, in both cases when comparing academic scores per student relative to school prices, HCZ costs more but students do better and it lasts longer. Charter schools like the Promise Academy are expensive investments, but if they work, their cost is not prohibitive.

⁶⁸ Otterman, Sharon. "Despite Money and Attention, It's Not All A's at 2 Harlem Schools." *The New York Times*. 13 October 2010. http://www.lexisnexis.com/lncui2api/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T11567094546&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T11567094552&cisb=22_T11567094551&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=6742&docNo=11 24 March 2011.

⁶⁹ Sacks, Lynne and Betsy Brown Ruzzi. "Early Childhood Education: Lessons from the States and Abroad: 2005," *National Center on Education and the Economy*, <http://www.ncee.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Early-Childhood-Education.pdf> 9 April 2011. 3. This number does not account for inflation. Also, in 2004, Head Start's budget was smaller, thus the probability that it costs more per student in 2010/2011 is likely. Furthermore, because Head Start programs exist in different states, the prices per student could vary between states. Thus, this numerical comparison of Head Start per pupil to the Harlem Children's Zone per pupil is not perfectly accurate.

⁷⁰ Keep in mind that the HCZ model and Promise Neighborhoods are also more comprehensive and holistic than Head Start.

⁷¹ Otterman, Sharon.

The potential within the Promise Neighborhoods to make significant and valuable impacts on the state of poverty would make their \$210 million budget a small fee in comparison to preexisting programs. Imagine if 2,000 poor neighborhoods across the country were granted the initial funding of the Promise Neighborhoods (\$10 million). Totaled, this would be a \$20 billion investment, an amount currently equivalent to TANF's yearly budget. With the recent data proving that the academic success of the Harlem Children's Zone has effectively eliminated the black-white achievement gap in mathematics, would investing in the potential behind this be more socially, individually and communally efficient and worthwhile? Would increasing this bold social experiment maximize the "promise" Geoffrey Canada says exists within the structure and nature of the program? In terms of the arts program within the Harlem Children's Zone and the Promise Neighborhoods, Larry Etkin states that "every penny we invest in arts education is paid back over the long haul."⁷² U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan explained that when implementing the Promise Neighborhoods, "The cost is going to vary community to community, but we think this is an absolute investment."⁷³

One dissenting opinion argues that HCZ's method to approach all of a neighborhood's social needs would make the financial costs per person too high to be copied successfully nationwide.⁷⁴ Objections are bound to exist regarding the impact and outcomes of Promise Neighborhoods and the model program in Harlem. They are both so

⁷² Etkin, Larry "Investing in the Arts is Investing in Our Future" Star Tribune, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota. 4 January 2008. <http://www.startribune.com/opinion/commentary/13064636.html> 13 March 2011.

⁷³ Otterman, Sharon.

⁷⁴ Harris, Paul. "Obama Hopes this Man Can Rescue Ailing US Schools. Others Have Doubts: Geoffrey Canada's Promise Academies, which Inspire Pupils with Daily Chants and Posters Reading 'Failure is not an Option,' Have Had Success At Sending Harlem's Poor Black Children to College. Now He is Advising Britain's Education Secretary." *The Observer*, England. 10 October 2010. http://www.lexisnexis.com/lncui2api/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T11567094546&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T11567094552&cisb=22_T11567094551&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=143296&docNo=5 24 March 2011.

young. Still, investments in the program have been shown to deliver short-term outcomes and benefits such as increased involvement, social adjustments, community building, eliminating/reducing the achievement gap, that are worth the financing. The long-term benefits are harder to measure, although researchers and reformers anticipate that the institution of the Promise Neighborhoods will result in health and cognitive benefits, improved psychological well-being, social advancements, and hopefully an overall diminishing to the cycle and scope of poverty. Judging from the short-term results, these long term expectations are reasonable. The main goal is to ensure that the investment expands opportunity. and thus far, it seems to be doing so. This goes beyond the economic cost-benefit analysis, but extends to opportunity as a matter of justice.

Limitations and Risks of the Promise Neighborhoods

Despite the fact that Promise Neighborhoods embody all encompassing ideals regarding building communities through education, limitations in the structure exist. For example, geographical constraints occur as the nature of the program and the community initiatives suggest that Promise Neighborhoods would best fit in a densely populated urban area. The spread out rural environment would not translate as effectively. Additionally, because Promise Neighborhoods are educationally based and focused, many of the problems that already exist in the education system today will influence the Promise Neighborhoods and its educational outcomes. Factors such as teacher quality, administrative structure and organization, student attrition, class size, etc., matter for the results of its schooling services. One researcher, Gerald W. Bracey, also finds issues with the potential out-of-school factors that could deter from positive school performance results. He lists everything from poor natal care, compromised fetal environments and

under or overweight children to student transience and summer losses as “anti-miracle factors.”⁷⁵ Bracey’s concern is a valid one; however, many of the services initiated by the holistic strategy cover for problems like summer loss with summer programs or under/overweight children with nutritional meals three times a day.⁷⁶ The many factors that influence a child’s life makes truly tying the “safety net” together an enormously difficult - and for disbelievers, an impossible – task.

The newness of the Harlem Children’s Zone and its approach exemplifies another important factor that cannot be overlooked when analyzing its limitations. The amount of literature and analyses offering data on the effectiveness of their services is minimal. Even Geoffrey Canada admits it is too early to “gauge community impact.”⁷⁷ The true effect cannot be tested until the first grade of children to enter the Harlem Children’s Zone in 2004 graduates from college in 2014-15, or even until the first early childcare cohort year reaches adulthood, which would be twenty or so years from now. One other strong concern is the replication of the Harlem Children’s Zone into a generalized, national project. Though the Harlem Children’s Zone has achieved substantial results, the copying of this model might not translate as well in other locations as each neighborhood has its own diverse structure, concerns and population. Edmund W. Gordon, the Chairman of the Harlem Children’s Zone Research Advisory Committee, explains this

⁷⁵ Bracey, Gerald W. “A Miracle on 125th Street?” Phi Delta Kappan, Phi Delta Kappan International. September 2009. 91-92.

⁷⁶ Refer to page 17 for a greater coverage of comprehensive initiatives HCZ has taken to help out-of-school factors.

⁷⁷ Shulman, Robin. “Harlem Program Singled Out as Model; Obama Administration to Replicate Plan in Other Cities to Boost Poor Children” *The Washington Post*, 2 August 2009. <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopic/academic/> 24 March 2011.

concern: “what I’m hesitant to endorse is the idea that the whole package is ready for generalized replication.”⁷⁸

Conclusion

Although my time spent working with the Harlem Children’s Zone and the arts at TRUCE was far from perfect, in retrospect I have realized that the existence of the Harlem Children’s Zone and the building of Neighborhoods alike creates communities and neighborhoods that are better than what was there before. The difference between the best, the better and the better than before highlights this point. Better does not mean best, and better can always get better. Even more importantly, better is most definitely better than nothing. Could this strategy at “better” be the most “promising?” The possibility exists. Currently, flaws exist in the model; however, it is still new. A few years of being tested and tried will improve it exponentially. This reasoning suggests that implementing Promise Neighborhoods makes strides to break the cycle of poverty that have the promise to be bigger and more effective than other programs that currently try. The Harlem Children’s Zone model has effectively expanded opportunities thus far; therefore, the model itself should be given the opportunity to continue widening the opportunity of individuals and society through the implementation and expansion of Promise Neighborhoods.

⁷⁸ Robelen, Erik W.

Photo 1: HCZ Street Mosaic



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Photo 2: Interior of TRUCE:



Photo 3: Interior of TRUCE:



Photo 4: TRUCE Playground:



Photo 5: Wall of Respect, Chicago, 1967, AFRI-Cobra



Photo 6: Wall of Dignity, Detroit, 1986, AFRI-Cobra



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