Creating Curricular Strategies for 21st Century Life Skills & Success at the ICOB Academy

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The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to practice leadership through action.

To find out more please visit the Institute for Women’s Leadership’s website at http://iwl.rutgers.edu.
The Why

- Post 9/11 United States context
  - Rise in negative media attention around Islam/ Muslims
  - Actions targeting Muslim Americans
    - NYPD Surveillance
  - Mutual feelings of distrust
  - Difficulties adjusting to schools/ communities

- Immigrants – acculturation difficulties
The Site

- Islamic Center of Old Bridge (ICOB) Academy
  - Small private Islamic elementary school
  - Grades: Pre-K to 6
  - Average Class Size: 15-18
  - Student Demographics: Arab-American, South Asian-American, African-American
  - Teacher Demographics: All female; Arab-American, South Asian-American
The Needs

- Interpersonal problems among students
- Very rigid religious ideas internalized from families
- Intolerance/ mistrust toward outsiders
- Lack of independence (fed by excessive parental control)
- Lack of exposure to non-Muslim peers
- Students facing abuse/ Immigrant parents’ misunderstandings of discipline vs. abuse
- Difficulty adjusting to public school environment after graduation
The Bigger Picture

- None of these needs are unique to this school

- Every religious school... school... community faces similar problems

- The specifics of each situation are, however, unique, and no one solution is adequate for every situation
The Programs
Feelings-Based Problem Solving

- Drawn from a number of social-emotional learning frameworks

- Key components:
  - Explicit teaching of emotion words through integration with weekly vocabulary lists
  - Use of emotion words with problem solving worksheets
  - Assignment of student “mediator” each week as the first level of conflict resolution
Needs Addressed

- Recognizing and Expressing Emotions
- Resolving Interpersonal Problems
- Developing Independence
Religious Diversity Education

- Lessons on other religions in grades 4-6
  - Builds up from earlier education on individual diversity
  - Instruction on major world religions
  - Emphasis on both similarities and differences with Islam

- Addressing Dual Identity
  - “I am a Muslim, I am an American” project
Needs Addressed

- Building tolerance/ understanding
- Creating foundations for interfaith thought and action
ICOB Grads Club

- Proposed monthly “club” for recent graduates of the school
  - Provides support structure for students after leaving the school
  - Provides space to discuss experiences, problems, etc. with familiar teachers and classmates

- Needs Addressed
  - Difficulty adjusting to public school
Possibilities for Future

- Teacher/ Parent workshops on abuse
  - Teacher education: supporting students reporting abuse
  - Parent reeducation: challenging cultural assumptions

- Social-Emotional Education
  - Morning Meetings
  - Responsive school discipline
  - Speaking/ Listening Skills
Outcomes
The Response

- “A reminder of why we teach”

Diagram:
- Teachers
  - Communication
  - Emotional/Social Empowerment
  - Classroom Practices
- Families
- Students
Leadership Lessons

- Small actions have large impacts
- Listening is a tool more powerful than expertise
- A challenge is better seen as an avenue to new lessons
- There is no such thing as the end
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