Arapahoe School students get creative in a new spin on learning culture

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Transforming one's spiritual identity onto a shield believing that it will provide physical and psychological/spiritual protection is a traditional Indian concept.

That same concept was applied to Dr. Stephen Sroka's presentation at the Fremont County School District 38 schools in Arapahoe recently as part of his “The Power of One-Teaching to a T-Native Style.”

Sroka, from Ohio, added his own twist to the belief using T-shirts to emulate a shield.

“It is a brain-based teaching strategy developed to reach and teach at-risk native youth,” Sroka said. “It deals with sex, drugs and violence, all within a personal native historical, philosophical and realistic perspective.”

Students designed the center of their own T-shirts with a four-piece wheel. Each quarter of the wheel then was designated for what the students interpreted for their specific dreams, hero, what they are proud of and pet peeves.

District 38's Arnella Oldman, who assisted with getting Sroka to visit Arapahoe, said each T-shirt design is unique to the student.

“It comes from themselves and expresses who they really are,” Oldman said.

Sroka said the concept of the project was for students to address the issues they are confronted with today and develop their own life skills on how to deal with them.

“It teaches that students have choices and have consequences,” Sroka said.

The bottom of the T-shirt was reserved for a safe-sex message and the back was for a drug-free message that each student created.

“The sleeves were where the students illustrated how they were going to protect themselves,” Oldman said.

Sroka said the program attempts to allow students to gain a deeper understanding of their culture.

“The students were encouraged to draw on their native culture to reflect colorful, powerful and culturally sensitive messages,” Sroka said. “The resulting T-shirts were spectacular, insightful, colorful, humorous and thought-provoking.”

This was the first time Sroka applied the new teaching technique.

“Sensing the passion, concern and urgency in Arnella’s request and knowing that native youth are some of the most at-risk youth in America, I created The Power of One-Teaching to a T-Native Style to help educate, inspire, and motivate each Native youth to make a difference in his or her school, community and life,” Sroka said. “My goals were to involve all the students in an activity that would be interesting, fun, insightful, useful, and let them explore their creativity, their native spiritual heritage, reflect on their life, and develop relevant life skills to deal with the adolescent risk factors of sex, drugs, and violence.”

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