



NEA ARTS

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Engaged and Empowered

The Importance of Arts Education

NEA ARTS

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About this Issue

Whether it was making a pinch pot, performing in a play or dance recital, or singing in the choir, most of us can remember participating in the arts during our school years. Recent research by James Catterall found that we were not just learning dance, music, theater, and visual arts—he discovered that students with access to in-school arts instruction performed better academically, participated more actively in extracurricular activities, and were more likely to pursue higher education.

In other words, arts education doesn't just teach skills to future practitioners of the arts. It teaches children the creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking skills needed to succeed in the 21st century. (You can read the full report here: www.arts.gov/research/Arts-At-Risk-Youth.pdf.)

In this issue of *NEA Arts*, we'll visit communities that are ensuring students have opportunities to learn in the arts—communities that are putting the Catterall research into action. From turning around failing schools thanks to the Turnaround Arts initiative to promoting musical composition among Hopi and Navajo youth to rigorous dance education in St. Louis, and to school districts from Austin, Texas, to rural Gates County, North Carolina, including the arts as part of core curriculum in communities across the country is empowering students.

In the coming months, the NEA will be unrolling a new plan for arts education. By leveraging our investments, driving data collection and research, collaborating with public and private partners for collective impact, and developing strategic leadership, we hope to ensure that every child, in every state, is engaged and empowered through an excellent arts education. Stay tuned as we announce this exciting new strategy!

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The Art of Turning Things Around

PCAH's New Arts Education Program for Low-Performing Schools *By Rebecca Gross*

AMID THE LEGENDARY SPECTACLE AND FANFARE OF MARDI GRAS, THE KREWE OF BACCHUS PARADE IS KNOWN AS ONE OF THE MORE EXTRAVAGANT PROCESSIONS. There are 25 floats, three dozen escorts on horseback, and a celebrity king, whose royal duties have been performed by everyone from Will Ferrell to Hulk Hogan. This year, the marching band from Batiste Cultural Arts Academy had the honor of performing along the parade route. While it is by no means unusual for school bands to participate in Bacchus, it's something close to a miracle that this particular school found itself front and center, showing off its musical talent and fresh uniforms to the entire city of New Orleans.

A few years ago, Batiste Cultural Arts Academy—then known as Live Oak Elementary—was ranked as the lowest-performing school in Louisiana, which itself was ranked 49th out of all 50 states in terms of academic performance. Today, it is one of eight schools nationwide participating in Turnaround Arts, an initiative launched by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH) in 2012. The public-private partnership, which counts the NEA as one of its partners, is designed to help close the academic achievement gap with high quality and integrated arts education programs. In addition to professional training, leadership summits, and funding for arts specialists and supplies, each

ABOVE | The Batiste Cultural Arts Academy Marching Band participating in its first Bacchus parade during Mardi Gras 2013.
PHOTO BY JAMES WANAMAKER

school is paired with a well-known artist such as Yo-Yo Ma, Kerry Washington, and Alfre Woodard, whose work with students have helped Turnaround Arts garner national attention.

The two-year program was developed in response to findings from *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America's Future through Creative Schools*, a research report published by PCAH in 2011. The study drew on research that showed a strong correlation between in-school arts exposure and positive behaviors, including improved academic performance, increased attendance, and a higher probability that students will participate in extracurricular activities, attend college, and later gain employment. These positive effects were particularly pronounced in students from low-income, high-minority communities, who demonstrated the most relative academic improvement when given greater arts instruction. However, the report also found that these same populations were receiving the least amount of in-school arts instruction. In other words, “the kids in America who need the arts the most are getting it the least,” said Kathy Fletcher, director of Turnaround Arts.

In the case of Batiste, which serves grades K-8, rampant turmoil destroyed any notion that school could be a safe haven or might offer a

path out of poverty. There had been three principals in three years, less than 15 percent of students were reading at grade level, and according to teacher Glenda Poole, chaos reigned in the hallways. “[There were] children all over the place, teachers coming in at 8:30 and saying ‘I can’t do this,’ and at 8:45 they were out,” she remembered. “It was just that bad.”

In 2010, with the situation reaching crisis level, the school was taken over by Louisiana’s Recovery School District. Batiste was awarded a School Improvement Grant from the U.S. Department of Education—a required component of the Turnaround Arts application—and the ReNEW Charter Management Organization was brought in. Working with the legendary Batiste jazz family, ReNEW changed the school’s name, replaced most of its staff, and began to initiate a culture of accountability among both students and teachers. Although optional after-school arts programming was in place from the start, Ron Gubitiz, principal for



ABOVE | An art class at Savoy Elementary School. PHOTO BY JOHN PINDERHUGHES, COURTESY OF CRAYOLA LLC AND USED WITH PERMISSION
OPPOSITE | Principal Ron Gubitiz and actress Alfre Woodard observe a class at Batiste Cultural Arts Academy. Woodard is the school’s designated Turnaround artist. PHOTO COURTESY OF PCAH

“Our mission is to build a compassionate community of creative thinkers, leaders, and lifelong learners who are prepared for success in all future pursuits.”



grades three to five, said that it wasn't enough to accomplish all that he envisioned.

“Our mission is to build a compassionate community of creative thinkers, leaders, and lifelong learners who are prepared for success in all future pursuits,” he said. “If we're going to train our kids to just be somebody else's employee, that's fine. We can teach them the basics. But to teach them to be those creative thinkers and leaders, we have to teach them the arts.”

Now, with funding and guidance from Turn-around Arts, Batiste is well on its way to becoming a true cultural arts academy. Art and music are “essentials,” not electives, and are taught toward the end of every afternoon to encourage kids to stick around through the school day. Artists are brought in to teach theater or visual arts techniques to math, language arts, and science teachers, and a major donation of art supplies by Crayola “was the difference between being able to buy 100 on-level reading books for our lowest-level kids versus needing to buy art supplies,” said Gubitz. Another \$10,000 program grant from the National Association of Music Merchants has stocked Batiste with ukuleles, recorders, and drums.

“Maybe it's in my head, but I can see their brains changing as they try to figure out the chord

fingerings,” Gubitz said of the children learning to play ukulele. “It's actually teaching them multiple languages that they can bring back to the languages of reading, math, science, and social studies.”

Poole, who teaches eighth-grade reading and provides coaching for other teachers, describes the recent change in culture as “huge.” Since 2010, Batiste has achieved a 29-point increase in its state-issued school performance score, and 43 percent of students were reading at grade level by the end of the 2011 school year, with similar gains in math. Even more promising, 55 percent of students are currently on track to attend college, up from 21 percent. “Kids are doing much more, we're seeing more progress academically for them, and they're staying in school longer,” said Poole. “We see the impact.”

A thousand miles away in Southeast Washington, DC, a similar story is unfolding at Savoy Elementary School. In the year since Turn-around Arts has been in place at Savoy, “the whole world has changed,” said Principal Patrick Pope. Pope is a veteran DC Public School (DCPS) principal who had previously developed an intensive arts curriculum at Washington's Hardy Middle School. When he arrived at Savoy in 2011, he began a similar plan at the consistently failing school, where only 20 percent of students tested as proficient in reading and 15 percent tested as proficient in math.



ABOVE | The NAMM Foundation spent a day at the Batiste Cultural Arts Academy providing music lessons and introducing students to different instruments. PHOTO BY DAVID ALEMAN, F-STOP PHOTOGRAPHY

RIGHT | The Bastite Cultural Arts Academy Marching Band practicing for its performance during Mardi Gras. PHOTO COURTESY OF PCAH



With the Turnaround Arts designation, Pope’s plan has kicked into high gear. On a Thursday morning last April, one of three dedicated arts instructors guided children through the musical alphabet in the keyboard lab; students acted out a picture book in a classroom-turned-“Reader’s Theater”; and another group performed their daily song and movement warm-up via Skype for Kerry Washington, the school’s designated Turn-around artist. Nearly every inch of candy-colored wall space is plastered with student artwork, from collages inspired by Romare Bearden to re-interpretations of Jacob Lawrence.

But Pope is quick to point out that Savoy’s art program “is not just a feel-good moment... We

want the children to understand that we’re using the arts as a vehicle for motivation.” Throughout the school, there is an emphasis on order, purpose, and respect, a philosophy that affects everything from the way students walk down the hallway (single-file, hands behind their backs), to the way they interact with teachers (they’re



Savoy students rehearse a choreographed dance to Michael Jackson's "Thriller," which they performed as a flash mob outside the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC. PHOTO COURTESY OF PCAH

expected to listen, and they do).

“[We’re committed] to making sure that [students] understand that the discipline and focus that they’re going to learn is not just to carry a song or dance the Lindy Hop or create a beautiful masterpiece of visual art, but that those internal motivations and those internal self-regulatory aspects will play out in the rest of their lives,” Pope said. “They’ll play out in the math room, in their science lesson, and in their reading lesson.”

So far, Pope’s confidence seems well-founded. In the past two years, test scores have stopped falling, and teacher retention rate has remained steady. At a time when DCPS is shuttering 15 schools for low enrollment, Savoy’s own enrollment is up by 18 percent. The school’s suspension rate has fallen by 95 percent, and Pope said office

referrals have also decreased dramatically.

While these are the type of evidentiary statistics that will likely prove critical to future arts education funding, there are other, unmeasurable effects that are just as important, if not more so. “There’s a feeling of excitement and joy in these hallways,” said Fletcher, of the eight Turnaround Arts schools. “A lot of our kids are facing post-traumatic stress because they live in high, high poverty. So to be able to go into school and have something that gives them a sense of happiness and confidence—that’s what childhood should be about.”

Even at Batiste, so recently a poster child of all that was wrong with the American education system, this sense of happiness has begun to spread. As Glenda Poole thought back to Mardi Gras, it was clear that participating in Bacchus was a major point of pride not just for students but for their teachers. “To see them come down the street...that was really huge for us,” she said, smiling at the memory. “[All the teachers] got together waiting for them, and the kids were really excited to see us there. It was a wonderful thing, that’s for sure.” ▲



ALL PHOTOS BY MICHELLE MAZAN BURROWS

IT TAKES A COMMUNITY

Integrating the Arts into the Learning Process in Rural North Carolina *By J. Rachel Gustafson*

THE MORNING BELL RINGS AT GATESVILLE ELEMENTARY IN RURAL GATES COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, WHICH APPROXIMATELY 12,200 RESIDENTS CALL HOME AND WHERE NEARLY A QUARTER OF THE POPULATION LIVES BELOW THE POVERTY LINE. Students gather in their classrooms, attendance is taken, homework is collected, and everyone settles in for a day of learning. But rather than return to their desks for a day of academic lecture, students will spend the school hours exploring geometry through dance, the water cycle through a painting, and a new book through sculpture. These students and their teachers are part of a

growing network of schools across the nation participating in the A+ Schools Program, which integrates the arts into the learning process.

The nationally recognized pioneer arts education program has been incorporated into two of Gates County's five public schools, Gatesville Elementary and T.S. Cooper Elementary. Building on the success of those two schools in providing a broad, integrated, arts-based curriculum that engages and motivates the students, Gates County, with the help of a recent NEA grant, will begin the A+ Schools training process for the district's three remaining schools.

The University of North Carolina's Thomas

S. Kenan Institute for the Arts launched the A+ Schools Program in 1995. The concept was ambitious: develop a program for comprehensive school reform that uses the arts as an interactive vehicle for teaching and learning across all subjects. Under the leadership of the North Carolina Arts Council, the A+ Program has grown to a network of more than 40 schools across the state and has provided more than 10,000 teachers with training. The program has also recently launched into other states. Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Arkansas have their own A+ School Programs in place, for a grand total of 120 A+ schools across the nation.

The A+ Schools Program was one aspect of North Carolina Arts Council's accomplishments during their participation in the NEA's first class of the Education Leaders Institute (ELI) in 2008. For four years, ELI has brought together artists, educators, policymakers, and community and school leaders for a three-day institute to challenge assumptions and strategize on how to advance the arts as part of a comprehensive education (a report on lessons learned from the

initiative will be published by the NEA in summer 2013.) The arts council determined during that session that continuing to grow A+ schools in the state would benefit students and the community—and bringing in all the schools in Gates County is part of that strategy.

Michelle Burrows, director of the A+ Schools Program at the North Carolina Arts Council, has seen first-hand the powerful impacts of the arts in the classroom. “We are looking at the arts in three ways: arts education, arts integration, and arts exposure,” said Burrows. “We often hear people say there’s a hum, or a buzz, when you walk into an A+ school because the kids are so active in their learning.”

In Gates County, that buzz has grown into a powerful force. Over the last three years, both Gatesville Elementary School and T.S. Cooper Elementary School have primarily shown increased student achievement in both math and reading. Both schools performed between six to 14 percent higher in reading and approximately seven percent higher in math when compared to



ABOVE | T.S. Cooper Elementary in Gates County, North Carolina, participates in the A+ Schools Program to integrate the arts into core curriculum.
OPPOSITE | T.S. Cooper Elementary kindergartners experience math concepts by creating original artwork in the style of the artist Henri Matisse.



ABOVE | At A+ schools, teachers create an arts-rich learning environment, such as the dance class shown.

OPPOSITE | Gatesville Elementary teachers build their team through arts-enriched, collaborative A+ professional development experiences.

statewide North Carolina school performance levels. Over the next two years, the A+ Schools Program will serve as many as 1,200 Gates County students and 115 faculty members. Once the three remaining schools in the county complete their A+ training, the county’s public school system will be the first district in North Carolina to include all of its schools in the A+ School network.

Teaching North Carolina’s required curriculum in A+ Schools involves a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach that weaves the arts into every aspect of a child’s learning. According to Barry Williams, superintendent of Gates County Schools, the A+ whole-school reform model not only offers unprecedented opportunity for arts access but also allows students to use the arts as an intellectual compass. “Integrating the arts into the curriculum in rural schools allows the teachers to reach more of their students in more ways,” said Williams. “The use of music, art, theater, dance, and media to teach the state-mandated curriculum will allow for a higher level of student engagement. We cannot always take the children to the arts experiences, but we can

bring the arts experiences to them.”

To become an A+ school, each institution’s faculty participates in the Five-Day Institute. Led by A+ Fellows—practicing classroom teachers and specialists, administrators, teaching artists, and writers—the institute provides intensive and inspiring professional development for teachers.

“We tailor our training for the specifications of each individual school and we make sure to have complete buy-in from the entire school community,” said Burrows. “The whole faculty is involved and has agreed to participate before the training ever begins. We’ve even had bus drivers and cafeteria workers participate. What it boils down to is the size of the community. The smaller the community, the more impact those support staff have on the school. Everybody is working for those kids.”

Williams agreed. “There is much truth to the age-old saying: ‘It takes a village to raise a child.’ Similarly, it truly takes a community to help complete a school,” he said. “In a rural community, the importance of the partnership is heavily underscored. By banding together to

support their school, the strength of the community increases. In a rural area—where families live spread out on farms, small neighborhoods, and villages—having a shared stake in their community’s school provides a way for there to be more common ground that crosses socio-economic lines.”

After completing the initial training courses at the program’s Five-Day Institute, teachers from Buckland Elementary School, Central Middle School, and Gates County High School will be provided with ongoing, high-quality professional development over a three-year period. A+ Fellows continue to offer both professional development support and in-classroom instruction for A+ teachers and faculty during each school’s three-year training program.

Joan Certa-Moore is one of North Carolina’s A+ Fellows. A trained dancer and veteran arts educator with 29 years of experience, she believes the A+ Program is one of the healthiest ways to learn, for teachers and students alike. She also stresses the importance of the program’s continued professional development, which has proven to be a major contributor to A+’s success.

“With the A+ professional development, you have practitioners teaching other practitioners in what is a very powerful and affirming experience of collaborating with other like-minded public educators,” said Certa-Moore. “We work with the teachers both in and out of the classroom. They invite us in their teaching space and

observe as I teach their students from the beginning to end as the children create a movement product based on a concept that the teachers would typically be teaching. We debrief as partners and there is a real dialogue.”

In their report, *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America’s Future Through Creative Schools*, the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities recognizes North Carolina’s A+ program as an effective, research-based strategy for sustainable school reform. The report notes that the program has shown consistent gains in “student achievement, the schools’ engagement of parents and community, as well as other measures of learning and success” throughout 12 years of research findings. The school-wide value of the A+ system has also shown to benefit “higher proportions of disadvantaged and minority students” as research indicates an equal performance level of disadvantaged A+ students when compared to more advantaged schools.

But beyond test scores, A+ Schools are teaching one of the most important skills needed to succeed in the 21st century: creativity. As teachers find new avenues to engage and motivate their classrooms, students are learning the out-of-the-box thinking that is so valued in today’s creative economy. With the A+ arts model as their academic companion, the future for A+ Gates County students is whatever their imagination holds. ▲



Achieving success in the arts can be a matter of grit, determination, patience, and talent. Unfortunately, it can also be a matter of money. To become a professional dancer, for instance, requires years of dance lessons, shoes, tights, and leotards, all of which come with a price tag. Students will also need to get themselves to and from dance class, which can be problematic if a family lacks a car or lives beyond the reach of public transportation. For children living in low-income communities, these obstacles often prove to be insurmountable.

DANCING T

The Honors Program



TO SUCCESS

at COCA in St. Louis

 *By Rebecca Gross*

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Antonio Douthit in Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*. PHOTO BY GERT KRAUTBAUER



COCA alumnus Antonio Douthit, now with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, works with COCA student company members. Douthit returns to COCA annually to teach COCA students during a two-week residency. PHOTO COURTESY OF COCA

But in St. Louis, Missouri, the Center of Creative Arts (COCA) aims to level the playing field for children who wish to pursue the arts. Founded in 1986, COCA offers classes and in-school workshops across all artistic disciplines, from visual arts and theater to voice and writing. Although sliding-scale financial aid is available for recreational art classes, the center's dance programs in particular are designed to ensure that all students have access to professional pathways, regardless of their background.

"Many students that we're working with don't have the opportunity to go beyond a ten-block radius within their neighborhoods," said Kelly Pollock, executive director of COCA. "To bring them into a community of intentional learners who are passionate and have respect and a sense of discipline opens their eyes that they can be successful, that there are more possibilities than they thought imaginable, and that if they work hard and commit themselves, they really can achieve whatever it is they want in life."

When it comes to dance, this commitment begins at an early age. The Talent Identified Program (TIP) offers a rigorous trajectory for 9-11 year olds who have shown promise in dance during COCA's outreach work with underserved

St. Louis public schools. Throughout the three-year program, TIP students receive all classes free-of-charge, and are also provided with dancewear and door-to-door van transportation.

At the age of 12, TIP participants are invited to audition for COCA's Honors Program, which offers training at a pre-professional level to roughly 50 students an academic year. Throughout the years, the Honors Program has received numerous NEA grants, as well as a 2003 Coming Up Taller Award (now called the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Awards) presented by then-First Lady Laura Bush. Although the Honors Program is open to all income levels, COCA provides scholarships, transportation, and dancewear as needed, in addition to academic tutoring, ACT preparation, and assistance with college applications and auditions. As a result, 100 percent of Honors students have gone on to post-secondary study. Working with the organization College Bound, the center has extended its support throughout students' college careers to make sure they stay the course.

The Honors Program is directed by the endlessly enthusiastic Lee Nolting, who has taught dance at COCA for 25 years and leads one of the center's three student dance companies.

Nolting's work with high-risk youth began in the 1980s, when she lived and taught dance in East St. Louis, one of the region's rougher areas. "I got a chance to see what those kids' lives were like: the single parents, the parents who didn't come to pick up their kids because they were in the crack house, the kids who didn't have lunch," she remembered. She also saw how transformational dance could be, which inspired her to help launch the Honors Program a few years after she arrived at COCA. As she said, "This is a program that is run by passion: [students'] passion to want opportunity, and our passion to try and make sure that they have accessibility and the opportunities that every child should have."

For Honors students like Antonio Douthit, these opportunities can prove life-changing. Douthit grew up in what he described as "not the best neighborhoods," and as a young boy spent time living in transitional housing and a church. But when he was 16, he serendipitously discovered his talent for dance. One afternoon, when he and a few friends heard music coming from a community center, they went to investigate. There they discovered a dance class in session, and perhaps as is typical for teenage boys, decided to interrupt it.

"[The teacher] asked us to leave several times,"

Douthit remembered. But they didn't, instead convincing the instructor to let them follow along from the back of the room. By the end of class, the teacher had sensed a spark, and invited them to return despite their horseplay. While the others laughed the suggestion off, Douthit did come back, although this time on his own.

Within a month, he was guided to COCA, where it took Nolting a total of one class to realize Douthit's potential. She marched him to the office of Stephanie Riven, then COCA's executive director, and explained that the teen needed a scholarship so he could participate in the Honors Program. Although Riven had never seen him dance, Douthit was offered free tuition on the spot. He went on to graduate from high school—the first in his family to do so—and attended the North Carolina School of the Arts before leaving to join the Dance Theatre of Harlem. In 2004, he became a member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, one of the world's premiere modern dance companies.

"I am what I am today because of that scholarship," said Douthit, who doubts he would have



Lee Nolting teaches a summer workshop at COCA. PHOTO COURTESY OF COCA

achieved his current level of professional success without free tuition. He also credits dance with motivating him to graduate high school, since most dance companies require a high school diploma in order to audition. “Arts give kids a sense of purpose, and for me COCA gave me that sense of purpose,” he said.

Despite his touring schedule, Douthit returns to COCA every January to choreograph and teach, and remains in touch with many staff members and alumni. When COCA students find themselves in New York for auditions or summer workshops, Douthit has also been known to open his home and let them crash.

“I feel like [because COCA] gave me the opportunity without really knowing what was going to happen with me, I should give back to other kids,” said Douthit of his continued involvement with the program. “You never know what that’s going to do for someone.”

Other alumni have become equally accomplished, and have gone on to dance with the the Houston Ballet, on Broadway, and with hip-hop artists such as Usher and Ne-Yo. Like Douthit, many of them also return to COCA. Christopher Page, now a member of the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble, annually choreographs COCA

students in a piece honoring Black History Month, and Rodney Hamilton, the center’s first scholarship student, has used time off from Ballet Hispanico to lead master classes.

But even for students who do not pursue dance professionally, the Honors Program has proven beneficial. “The true purpose of arts education is not necessarily to create more professional dancers or artists,” said Pollock. “[It’s] to create more complete human beings who are critical thinkers, who have curious minds, who can lead productive lives.” She cited the discipline needed to attend daily training, the confidence and poise needed to perform onstage, the motivation to practice until you land the leading role, and the humility and good sportsmanship to accept it when you don’t.

Nolting echoed Pollock’s belief that these secondary skills are as important, if not more so, than proper form and technique. “Even if they don’t become professional dancers, they become so successful as individuals in whatever they’re doing,” she said of her former students, some of whom have gone on to achieve success at Princeton (graduating with a degree in physics), Columbia University Medical School, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. “It’s an incredible feeling to know that you helped someone be the best that they could be.” ▲



Rodney Hamilton leads a master class at COCA. Hamilton was the first scholarship student accepted into COCA’s Honors Program. PHOTO COURTESY OF COCA



Austin Independent School District's "Aha!" Moment

By Paulette Beete

IS THE PRESENCE OF FINE ARTS TEACHERS IN A SCHOOL ENOUGH TO GUARANTEE THAT ALL STUDENTS ARE RECEIVING A QUALITY ARTS EDUCATION?

That was the question facing the Austin Independent School District (AISD), an urban district in Texas with more than 86,000 K-12 students in 2009. Despite Austin's reputation as an arts city, and a commitment to hiring fine arts teachers for all of its schools, it seemed that some students weren't reaping the potential benefits of an arts education: increased participation, fewer absences, and better standardized test scores. AISD Superintendent Meria Castarphen decided the solution was to do more than just deliver a basic arts education. She wanted to create arts-rich schools in which creative learning extended across all classrooms regardless of subject matter, and took place outside as well as inside each school's walls.

Greg Goodman, AISD's fine arts head, char-

acterized arts-rich schools as ones that "promote, teach, and celebrate creativity as the focal point of instruction and learning in all classes." He added that putting creativity at the center of learning resulted in "higher student and faculty attendance, higher promotion rates, fewer discipline problems, and an increase in parental support and community engagement."

Brent Hasty, executive director of the nonprofit MindPOP and a clinical professor in social studies education at the University of Texas, agreed. According to Hasty, "An arts-rich school does not only teach kids in deep ways about an art form, but it also uses some of the arts-based instructional strategies in other places that are not about teaching the art form at all." In other words, traditional arts activities such as role-playing can take place in history class as well as theater class.

To work toward the task of defining and creating arts-rich schools in Austin, local funders and Castarphen asked Hasty to convene com-

ABOVE | MindPOP partner Drama for Schools/UT Austin uses shadow puppetry to teach drama-based strategies to Austin public school teachers. PHOTO COURTESY OF DRAMA FOR SCHOOLS

munity stakeholders. He assembled a community-wide working group to uncover the reasons the district's current arts education plan wasn't working as well as it should. Partners included the school district, city offices such as Parks and Recreation and the Cultural Arts Division, local philanthropies, and arts organizations such as VSA Texas and Ballet Austin.

The group eventually outlined four categories of barriers to success, the first of which was equity and access. They discovered that whether a student was in a so-called poor school, or a rich one, there were actually other factors that played a role in restricting the student's arts education experience. For example, Hasty explained, kids who were struggling academically often were pulled out of arts classes. A second set of barriers fell under the heading of impact and measurement, which, according to Hasty, meant that even if arts organizations were deliv-

ering high-quality programs, "they didn't have the evaluation background to know if they were making a difference." Hasty cited professional development as the third barrier: "Our general classroom teachers didn't always have access to how to use arts integration or arts-based strategies." Finally, the district lacked a single channel for directing teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to the community's available resources.

After the working group teased out the challenges they needed to address, they recognized MindPOP as a nonprofit hub for stakeholder collaboration and to oversee the strategic planning process. Goodman described MindPOP—named for the moment in learning when everything "clicks"—as an "avenue for the district, city, community artists, philanthropists, and higher education to join resources and knowledge to create a powerful team of stakeholders in order to move student achievement in Austin ISD."



ABOVE | Creative Action, another MindPOP partner, works with Austin students. PHOTO COURTESY OF CREATIVE ACTION
OPPOSITE | VSA Texas leads students in a drum circle. PHOTO COURTESY OF VSA TEXAS



In 2011, Austin was chosen to participate in the Kennedy Center’s Any Given Child initiative, which through intensive consultation services works with school districts in selected locations across the country to develop tailor-made, long-term arts education strategies. Austin is the seventh city to participate in the initiative, with MindPOP acting as the main contact.

After an extensive literature review, MindPOP undertook a comprehensive research effort to mine data specific to the community. That data revealed that individual students who were highly engaged in the arts showed higher attendance rates and did significantly better on statewide standardized tests. Even students in high-poverty schools performed better academically if they were engaged in the arts. While these types of statistics from other communities were familiar to many in the arts education field, it made a major impact on local leaders to see similar results from Austin’s own kids. “Now we have people who might not have the same confidence [as the arts community] that the arts could solve these other issues for them and [now want] to use this strategy in closing the achievement gap or keeping kids in school or getting kids ready for college and career,” said Hasty.

MindPOP also surveyed 108 K-8 principals, 1,553 classroom teachers, 330 fine arts specialists, and 53 Austin arts organizations, asking about everything from arts funding to profes-

sional development. They also took an inventory of the city’s arts resources: How many minutes per week did the students receive instruction in specific arts disciplines? How much arts integration was exhibited in academic subject classrooms? How were community partners involved at each grade level? Hasty noted that local educators were highly invested in the process. “We had about two-thirds of the general classroom teachers respond to the survey, which is pretty

amazing. We had 100 percent compliance with the principals; they highly valued the arts.”

After the nine-month process, MindPOP leveraged the data into an ambitious plan to transform the learning environments of Austin’s schools. Hasty explained, “Our plan is really looking at the three legs of the school, making sure that there’s access to fine arts learning in and out of school, that teachers have access to arts-based instructional strategies to use in their classrooms, and that there are connections to the community for kids in their families to arts organizations, to all of the places in the community where we know arts learning is happening.”

The new strategy, as outlined in an October 2012 Any Given Child Summary Report, comprises five goals: to increase creative learning moments for students in and out of school; create arts-rich schools for each and every student; create a community network that supports and sustains the arts-rich life of every child; develop leaders and systems that support and sustain quality creative learning for the development of the whole child; and demonstrate measurable impacts on students, families, schools, and the Austin community.

Ultimately, the focus of the new strategic plan is engagement—students who are more engaged with learning, educators who are more engaged with teaching, and a community that is engaged



Paramount Theatre, another MindPOP partner, also uses drama-based arts strategies to teach Austin students. PHOTO COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT THEATRE

with supporting the success of the next generation.

A significant element of the revamp is intensive professional development for classroom teachers. “All of our campuses commit to two half-day, full faculty trainings where we teach them how, when, and why to use arts-based strategies.” Not only are the teachers given a “toolbox” of strategies to use, but they’re taught how each strategy changes given the goal of an assignment. For example, is it a hook to get the students interested in a topic, or is it being used as an assessment to find out what the students have learned? Hasty added, “We decided to do an instructional approach, rather than a curricular approach.” In other words, teachers don’t receive prescribed lesson plans. Instead, they can take the approaches they’ve learned and apply them to any lesson plan.

One example Hasty gave was using theater to help a social studies class look at the complexity of the colonization of the Americas. Traditionally, students would get the point-of-view of both sides but not necessarily gain an understanding that encompassed the dynamic between both sides. Using role-playing, however, students literally embody that dynamic, gaining a deeper understanding of both sides of the conflict.

Hasty noted that by supplying teachers with tools rather than lesson plans, there’s no resistance of the “I don’t have time for this” variety. Teachers also receive support at the district level. “The question is, ‘How well are you doing it, and do you need any help?’ And if you need help, we can

provide you some professional development.”

Various types of empowering activities support the other goals of the arts education strategic plan. For one thing, it’s become more fully embedded in the city’s own strategic plan for the cultural community, Create Austin, which charts a course for cultural development over the next ten years in the city. This opened up further opportunities for collaboration among city offices in support of arts education. “We’re trying to build the kind of advocacy that we need and really building the leadership to support it across all of the sectors,” said Hasty. “We’re doing innovative things—like MindPOP has funded part of a development position in the school district to help them build their capacity to raise money for the arts.”

Given all the moving parts, so to speak, it may be a full decade before the plan is fully operational. Hasty, however, remains optimistic about its success, especially in light of the high degree of collaboration and cooperation that has characterized the project so far. “One of the most exciting things is thinking about the work we have to do to achieve our plan, and each of those different entities saying, ‘I can do this part.’ ‘It makes sense for me to do this part.’ ‘It makes sense for you to do that part.’ And it’s really collective impact at a functional level.” ▲



The media arts, through Austin Film Society, are another arts-based strategy used in Austin. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUSTIN FILM SOCIETY



Composing

Enlightenment

Bringing Musical Education to Native-American Communities

By Michael Gallant

“WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER, I FELT STUCK ON THE RESERVATION,” SAYS MICHAEL BEGAY, A 28-YEAR-OLD COMPOSER OF NAVAJO HERITAGE WHO GREW UP IN ARIZONA. “It felt like I was ten years behind the whole world. I had no idea what to do with my life and I wanted to quit school. I could feel this whole void opening on top of me.”

Begay’s bleak perspective changed dramatically, though, when the librarian at his high school, Greyhills Academy in Tuba City, turned him on to a new opportunity—the Native American Composer Apprentice Project (NACAP).

Started in 2000 as an outreach initiative from the Grand Canyon Music Festival, NACAP seeks to bring musical inspiration and education to rural Native communities, many of which don’t have the resources to

offer strong arts programs for their students.

As part of NACAP, world-class string quartets like ETHEL and the Catalyst Quartet perform for schools on Navajo and Hopi reservations and serve as resident artists. Students from those same schools collaborate with resident NACAP composers, embarking on a rigorous three-week program that gives them the theoretical and practical tools with which to compose their own music. Selected students’ works are then performed for the public as part of the annual Grand Canyon Music Festival season.

Begay participated in NACAP for multiple years, and has become the first alumnus to return as a composer-in-residence. However, his transformative experience with the program is far from unique. Native-American students across Arizona and Utah have benefitted immensely from the pro-

ABOVE | Michael Begay (second from left) working with the ETHEL String Quartet as part of the NACAP activities to bring musical education to Native-American communities. PHOTO COURTESY OF NACAP



Students (including Russell Goodluck, second from left) from Chinle High School, the largest high school within the Navajo Nation in Arizona, participating in the NACAP program. PHOTO BY CLARE HOFFMAN

gram’s musical apprenticeships, not only gaining musical knowledge and creative confidence, but also giving new voice to their cultural heritage.

Russell Goodluck, 20, first discovered NACAP in 2006 as a freshman at Chinle High School in Arizona. ETHEL performed at a school assembly and the young man was, in his own words, “hooked. I had never composed music before seeing ETHEL. I didn’t know anything about bass clef, viola clef, or how a string quartet worked. I was totally clueless. But after seeing ETHEL perform, I knew that I wanted to dedicate myself to being a musician.”

Kevin Mitchell, also a former student at Chinle, recalls a similar experience. “When I saw them playing at the school, I wondered, ‘Who are these guys? What are they doing here?’ When I saw other students introduce themselves and tell us that they had *written music for the quartet*, it blew my mind. How did I not know about this?”

Clare Hoffman, artistic director for the Grand Canyon Music Festival, has been thrilled to see the enthusiasm and growth of NACAP students like Mitchell and Goodluck. “Reservation communities can be incredibly isolated, and the students that we work with have no frame of reference when it comes to writing music for a format like string quartet,” she said. “What we’ve tried to do is solve this tremendous problem of access, to make music composition not this thing in an ivory tower that you can’t do, but something

that’s accessible, achievable, and *real*.”

Teaching high school students to compose music in a mere three weeks may sound like a daunting task, but in NACAP’s 13 years of existence, both students and resident composers have continuously risen to the occasion. As the program’s teachers guide their young apprentices through the basics of music, students’ own creativity is allowed to flourish. “[The teachers] helped us edit our music and make sure that everything would be playable by world-class musicians, down to the last pitch and rhythm, but the ideas were ours,” said Mitchell. “In one week we learned everything from treble clef and time signatures down to sharps and flats, dynamics, and articulations. That was a big lesson,” he added laughing.

Although NACAP focuses on teaching the fundamentals of Western classical music, Native roots are never far from the program’s work. Many students benefit by learning from fellow Native Americans, such as composers-in-residence like Begay, head composer Raven Chacon, and Brent Michael Davids, a co-founder of the program. The students’ own heritage also plays a key role in the creative process. “The integration happens automatically and subconsciously,” described Begay. “The students may not even realize it, but the rhythmic structures that they use can sound like a Round Dance. One student who came from a ranch had his horses’ hoof-beats in his

piece. Some students use tones or melodies from corn-grinding songs in their pieces.

“Some of these pieces come across like ancestral voices speaking, but without any conscious thought on the part of the composer. It’s not like they’re trying to make their music sound ‘Native,’” he continued. “It just seems to come naturally.”

Native-American instruments have also become part of NACAP’s creative alchemy, at times melding with the traditional string quartet to create a different flavor of cross-cultural work. “Last year, I played as a guest artist with ETHEL on Native-American flute,” said Goodluck. “We performed an improvised song here in Tempe, Arizona. That’s also what I’m working on right now,” he continued. “I’m trying to write music for my flute and possibly a string orchestra or symphony orchestra.”

NACAP’s success has earned the program national attention, including an Arizona Governor’s Arts Award for Arts in Education, support from the National Endowment for the Arts, and a 2011 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, presented by First Lady Michelle Obama. But on a local level, the program continues to give back to its participants, benefitting them long after their official apprenticeships draw to a close.

Begay, for example, credits his NACAP experience not just with teaching him about music, but also instilling him with a sense of discipline, both in his creative work and in his everyday

life. In addition to his work with NACAP, he studies at Diné College and is vice president of his campus student body. Once he earns his degree, he plans to attend another Arizona university to further study music composition.

Similarly, Goodluck plans to pursue a master’s degree or PhD in music education while concurrently learning about music composition and music therapy. He was also recently invited to participate in the Moab Music Festival in Utah as a guest artist and attributes his aspirations and successes to his experience with NACAP. “It’s a really, really good program and I’m honored to be part of it,” he said. “It brings such enlightenment to many Navajos and other reservation kids. I could see myself coming back as a composer-in-residence someday.”

For Mitchell, one of the greatest benefits of his experience was a fundamental shift in self-perception. “It was amazing to know that I wrote a music piece for a world-class string quartet, and to see my music played by them was so inspirational, encouraging, and profound,” said Mitchell. “It was mostly just profound to know that a random kid like me from a small reservation town could get an opportunity to experience something like that. It was the greatest opportunity I’ve ever had in my life.”▲

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A member of ETHEL, the string quartet-in-residence, works with a student at the Navajo Nation city of Tuba City, Arizona.
PHOTO BY CLARE HOFFMAN



The artist Inocente at work. PHOTO BY ROB TOBIN



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The cover painting is by Inocente, the subject of the Academy Award-winning short documentary *Inocente* by Sean Fine and Andrea Nix Fine. The film follows her life as a 15-year-old undocumented immigrant with a troubled family life through San Diego's overcrowded homeless shelters, and how art helps her overcome her bleak surroundings. As part of our online content for this issue, which you can find by scanning the QR code or visiting arts.gov, we talk with Inocente, now 19, about the importance of art and how it changed her life. Other online features include a look at how different art-based schools approach the concept of arts integration; an interview with high school teacher Jack Scott about his use of rap music to connect his students with math; the Cultural Crossroads program at Holter Museum of Art in Helena, Montana, which brings visual artists to local schools; and more.

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