Hood River Middle School students turned to pop music history – the Beatles’ Abbey Road – as the inspiration for the cover of their own guide to Hood River downtown history and public art. The project engaged 36 students in an exploration and identification of public art and cultural landmarks, and is the first step toward the development of a public art plan for the City of Hood River. From left, students Robert Nunez, Eliot Woodrich, Katherine Rouse and Carson Wright play the roles of George, Paul, Ringo and John.
Rethinking the Fundamentals of Education

The subject of this Connections is arts learning – education through the arts, a complex subject and one that reflects winds of change blowing through arts, education, political and business communities across the country.

It anticipates nothing less than a sea-change in the way we teach our children, a day when the arts are “not extracurricular, extraneous, or expendable, but instead an essential part of a well-rounded education for all of our students.”

Those words were written by Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee who chairs the Education Commission of the States. In mid-September, the commission issued The Governor’s Commission on the Arts in Education Findings and Recommendations (2006), the result of a two-year study focusing on what state policy makers can do to support quality arts education.

The report summarizes state arts education policies, examines policy-makers' perspectives on the issue and the tools they need to promote arts education, and reviews research on the benefits of learning in and through the arts. The overall conclusion, in Governor Huckabee’s words:

“Arts education must be a vital part of every child’s education. From improving academic and student achievement to enhancing our nation’s overall economic competitiveness, the arts offer many practical benefits. In fact, I would suggest that the future of our economy is based on establishing a creative class and creating a generation of people who can think artistically. That’s why an arts education has value in and of itself.”

This assessment is especially significant because it comes not from the usual suspects in the arts and education communities, but from those charged with making public policies. This is a very positive sign.

The Education Commission of the States report is one of many studies showing the connections between the arts and success in education. One of the most persuasive, Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning, came from the Arts Education Partnership. Its executive summary provides a clear description of why the arts have such power to change the learning experience. Take a look at the digest of those seven points in this publication, and you will see them all reflected in the case studies described on the following pages.

Those examples are a fraction of the exciting arts programs that have been created by Oregon’s classroom teachers, artists, education specialists, business leaders, and parents. What defines them as “best practices” are the collaborations and partnerships that sustain the programming, the professional development opportunities for teachers and teaching artists, and the involvement of parents and communities.

Repositioning the arts as an essential element of a well-rounded education cannot be done in isolation. It will take the active involvement of many segments in a community, working together toward a common goal: an education that opens doors to a fulfilling life for all of our children.

– Christine D’Arcy
Executive Director
Education and the “Fourth R”: Opening Doors through the Arts

“The challenge for educators is to create schools that help students acquire the knowledge, skills, confidence, and motivation to succeed in the increasingly sophisticated workforce and as parents and citizens. Because the arts possess the power to play a role in meeting this challenge, an arts education must be fundamental, not incidental. I consider the arts to be the “fourth R” - a basic tool in the school reform arsenal.”

—Ramon C. Cortines, executive director
Pew Network for Standards-Based Reform at Stanford University

He was the kind of kid you might not notice. Bright enough, but far from genius. Quiet and a bit short for his age. Not fast enough or strong enough to become a sports star; neither popular nor unpopular. A face in the crowd, trying like every other teenager to discover who he really was.

But one teacher did notice him. He was the kid’s English teacher and head of the drama club, and he thought the kid might fit a role in the class play. He was right, and that bit of risky casting did nothing less than change the kid’s life.

It stimulated his brain in new ways and gave him permission to discover his inner genius. It taught him how to work as part of a team and to open his mind to new ideas. His circle of friends widened, crossed boundaries of background, culture and interest. He grew in self-confidence and the ability to express himself.

The kid didn’t go to Broadway or Hollywood. He went to college, where he studied engineering and creative writing. And he used what he learned on that high school stage every day of his life. The biggest lesson he took with him was the power of the arts to stimulate learning and, in the process, to transform lives.

The theatre kid in this story is not a hypothetical or composite character. He’s as authentic as you or I. That high school experience marked the defining “before” and “after” of his life; it snapped on the switch that lit the path to the person he is today.

Millions of young people have found inner strength and hidden talents through painting, dance, music, theatre. Some became professional artists; most did not - did not even aspire to be. That wasn’t the point. The point was to grow as individuals, to gain insight into the human condition and a deeper understanding of their own selves - knowledge that the arts can deliver better than any other teaching tool. Along the way, many of them were exposed to a love of discovery and creative thought that opened doors to other disciplines.

Discovering and Nurturing the Artist Within Each Child

Artistic expression is encoded in our DNA: how else to explain the way it has accompanied us at every stage of development, as a people and as individuals? We knew this instinctively as children, when we were busy learning something new every day. We colored, we drew, we sang, banged piano keys, danced our own choreography. We made up stories and acted them out. We created. We grew.

If we were lucky, those natural inclinations were encouraged. We connected with mentors - teachers, parents, artists, role models - who helped us channel our interests into lessons on the important stuff of life. And we carried those lessons with us.

The operative word here is “lucky.” The theatre kid’s mid-sized high school had a full complement of arts classes and clubs. They were elective or extracurricular; you could choose them or ignore them. There was some recognition of the intrinsic value of the arts, little understanding of their role as a powerful teaching tool. That kid fell within the orbit of a teacher, rare in his time, who understood that power.

After all these years, many of today’s students are no better situated, and some are much worse off. Every student should have access to an arts-rich education.

We can do better. Today, a growing body of research confirms that arts are a fundamental element of the education process - not just for what they teach, but in the way they teach. Our schools have greater access to creative teaching aids and to partnerships with artists and arts organizations whose missions promote education.

In Oregon we have many examples to look to for inspiration, guidance, and validation. This issue of Connections provides a glimpse of some of the best practices in arts education at work in schools and communities.

1. Gaining the Arts Advantage, a report from the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Arts Education Partnership

Public Believes the Arts Belong in Learning

Americans believe that learning in and through the arts is an important part of all students’ educational experiences. Here are findings from a May 2005 Harris Poll commissioned by Americans for the Arts:

93%
agree the arts are vital to providing a well-rounded education for children.

86%
agree an arts education encourages and assists in the improvement of a child’s attitudes toward school.

83%
believe that arts education helps teach children to communicate effectively with adults and peers.

79%
agree incorporating the arts into education is the first step in adding back what’s missing in public education today.

54%
rated the importance of arts education a “ten” on a scale of one to ten.

79%
believe that it’s important enough for them to get personally involved in increasing the amount and quality of arts education.
Plugging the Gaps in Arts Education: Arts Organizations Step into the Breach

As towns and cities across America have taken a chain saw to traditional arts education in their schools, other players have had to step into the gap. Every nonprofit arts organization includes an education program at some level, not simply as payback for their nonprofit status, but because artists are natural and passionate teachers. And because their future depends on a continuing supply of interested, enlightened audiences and practitioners.

These two organizations are among the largest and most experienced in Oregon, a position reflected by the depth and breadth of their education programs. Yet, we don’t need to match their scope, as long as we aspire to a similar level of relevance and creativity.

Community Music Partnership/Oregon Symphony

*Reaching for the Heart and Soul of Every Oregonian*

In 1896, the first orchestra in the American West was founded, not in San Francisco as you might suppose, but in Oregon. It was one of only seven major orchestras in the U.S. before 1900. Six years later, what was then called the Portland Symphony made its first state tour. It’s been touring ever since. But it wasn’t until 1967 that the name was officially changed to reflect the reality that this great asset and resource belongs to all of Oregon. The goal of the Oregon Symphony today, said Music Director Carlos Kalmar, is to “touch the heart and soul of every Oregonian.”

The symphony’s education and community engagement programs work toward that vision by bringing music alive for Oregonians in schools, community centers, and concert halls across the state. More than two-thirds of its events and activities take place outside Portland’s Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, reaching 70,000 children and adults in 16 counties and more than 300 schools through formal performances and musician visits.

But the educational grace note that perhaps soars above all others comes from the innovative Community Music Partnership program.

In 2001, staff, musicians, board, and past community partners began to wrestle out the answer to a profound question: “What does the ‘Oregon’ in the Oregon Symphony mean?” Out of that process came the Community Music Partnership, a program designed to enhance communities’ understanding of how the arts enrich schools and the broader community.

The partnership is a two-year music residency program that focuses symphony resources on one rural or remote Oregon community of 30,000 people or fewer. Partner communities are selected through a competitive application process and, thanks to grant funding, incur no costs for the residency activities. Local ownership is central to ensuring that the partnership’s efforts succeed and endure. A steering committee of key community stakeholders collaborates with the symphony to ensure that all details of the residency are tailored to the unique needs and challenges of the partner community.

The first year of the residency consists of planning, followed by multiple musician residency visits and chamber music concerts, culminating in a free, full-orchestra concert and two full-orchestra youth concerts. Other education programs available include master classes, clinics, and staff development opportunities.

Year two of the residency is committed to evaluation and assessment, and to development of a sustainability plan. The symphony is not interested in a “love ‘em and leave ‘em” relationship: The goal, said Director of Education and Community Engagement Emilia Smith,
“is to have a lasting impact on music education in Oregon’s rural communities,” with the emphasis on “lasting.”

The ability to sustain and grow beyond the two-year residency is central to all partnership activity, beginning with eligibility requirements for the program. The symphony is the force that inspires and enables a deeper understanding of the value and power of music. In the process, the symphony also serves as a catalyst for the local coalition-building necessary to sustain arts education programs and the overall cultural vitality of the community.

But leave the final words to one who has experienced the program first-hand. In 2003-2005, the symphony partnered with Redmond. Here’s what one member of the community observed:

“What has resulted is nothing short of pure magic! Our students are abuzz with excitement. They are e-mailing questions to the visiting musicians; they are bringing in instruments from home for sharing. Local musicians have received a huge increase in calls for music lessons. ... Our teachers have participated in workshops and staff development that will help them integrate music education into their instructional programs.”

“Even in our remote, arid location — and amidst desiccating economic and political challenges — the Oregon Symphony...has delivered enriching and energizing waters of inspiration. As a result, our students, teachers and the broader community of Redmond have already begun to respond to this introduction to new educational, aesthetic, and cultural joys and opportunities afforded by music.”

—Linda Seeburg, Principal, John Tuck Elementary School, Redmond
Energizing the Student in All of Us

It’s part of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival legend: during the first “season” in 1935, city fathers insisted on supplementing the plays a young college teacher wanted to stage with a couple of boxing matches as a kind of “flop insurance.” The plays were a success; it was the boxing that flopped. Having learned from this, the company now offers hundreds of events and activities each season — classes, lectures, tours, retreats, discussions — all of them involving education. Boxing is nowhere to be seen, unless, of course, it figures in the action of a play.

Inspired by each season’s plays, the learning opportunities range from free discussions after performances to week-long retreats; as Shakespeare himself almost said, “there is something here for all markets” — especially students and educators.

If you’re lucky enough to have visited the festival in the spring or fall, you’ve had the experience of finding the theatre buzzing with the energy of hundreds of young theatre-goers from schools across the west. The lights go down, the action starts, and you quickly find yourself caught up in a special theatrical experience — due in no small part to the infectious enthusiasm of those young people. They care about what’s happening on stage, and they understand it.

The festival puts considerable effort into making sure that those students, and their teachers, are well informed. Prologues presented by a company member prepare students for challenging themes and complex language. Post-show discussions with cast and crew take place after special matinees. Company members lead workshops featuring theatre exercises to explore the themes, characters, and language.

There’s a summer seminar for high school juniors who have a special interest in theatre. Participants take classes and workshops in acting, tech, and administrative functions; attend plays; and work with other students on projects addressing the challenges facing school drama programs and the arts in general.

The Play’s the Thing, in Ashland and on the Road

The festival’s School Visit Program, now in its 36th year, is one of the country’s largest theatre outreach efforts. Every fall, teams of actors visit urban and rural schools in many Western states, engaging students in ways that relate to their lives and stir their imaginations. Offerings range from single performances to one-day visits to three-day residencies that culminate in a 90-minute evening show for students, parents, and the community.

A few years ago, OSF launched a program of School Visit Partnerships designed to expose underserved students to professional theatre through performances, workshops, and teacher training. During the 2005-2006 school year, eight rural and low-income schools in...
all corners of Oregon participated in programs that run from one to three years, all at minimal or no cost to the schools.

For educators, the festival provides background materials, teaching suggestions, and classes, such as Inside Shakespeare strategy workshops geared toward specific plays and Shakespeare in the Classroom, which teaches a theatre-based, non-academic approach to making the works of Shakespeare exciting and accessible.

Of course, every audience member is still a student in his or her own way, and the festival has plenty of activities to occupy the brain of those whose school days are behind them. They range from the popular backstage tour; to noon lectures by stage directors, scholars, and guest experts; to in-depth class sessions that can last from a weekend to a week. Theatre fanatics can even Wake Up with Shakespeare by attending a six-day immersion of plays, lectures, and discussions the festival holds each summer.

In its efforts to nurture audiences with “education programs that turn theatre into meaningful, lifelong experiences,” Oregon Shakespeare Festival is fully aware that the cost of tickets can be a stretch for many young and low-income people. In addition to lower ticket prices for students and student groups, the festival subsidizes nearly 50,000 play tickets each year through funds raised by the Bowmer Society, a special group dedicated to funding the festival’s education programs.

“Not a Bad Week’s Work”

In the 2004 inaugural year of the School Visit Partnerships, actors Carolyn Hitt and Aldo Billingslea spent a week at a high school that had done away with assemblies because “the police had to disperse the last one.” Aldo gave a glimpse inside the program in the Oregon Shakespeare Festival member magazine:

“Scenes from August Wilson’s Fences … electrified and polarized our student audience. … The students were totally there in the moment with us on stage. And even better, they were doing the work of relating the theatrical experience to their lives. … Being part of a live theatre audience and interacting with actors who are affected by how the audience reacts was a new and special life event for them. Even though violence is an ordinary part of life for students in their community and in the media, their reaction to combat onstage … was electric. I sensed a thirst for theatrical experience as well as a new respect for something artistic and academic. …

“With huge grins on their faces, students who saw Carolyn and me walking around campus toward the end of the week would yell, ‘Hey, Shakespeare!’ … To me, this simple verbal gesture signaled just how far some of the students had come. They learned to open up to their vulnerability and express who they are on the inside. And they made a big discovery about the power of the dramatic arts. Not a bad week’s work …”
Bringing in Reinforcements: Teacher Development and Collaboration

The art of teaching, it has been said, is the art of assisting discovery. Sometimes it’s the teachers themselves who deserve a little assist, especially when the subject is as broad and layered with complexity as “the arts.”

Oregon Teacher Art Institute/Oregon Alliance for Arts Education

Teaching the Skill of Imagination

“Imagination is more important than knowledge.” — Albert Einstein

It’s all well and good to say – and even better to believe – that the arts enhance learning in all academic disciplines. But, as with nearly everything else in this world, the devil is in the details, especially in a day when budget cuts have cost many schools their arts specialists. How does a regular classroom teacher begin to fill that gap? How does a non-artist go about drawing meaningful connections between the various arts and math, history, science, and other important stuff?

One very good thing a teacher can do come July is attend the Oregon Teachers Arts Institute, a six-day professional development retreat designed to immerse educators in skill building and the theory and practice of teaching in and through the arts. It’s the only week-long residential program devoted to helping classroom teachers become arts-savvy educators.

The curriculum is built around workshop and studio sessions with special emphasis on multicultural learning and arts integration, taught by master teaching artists and arts specialists. The week-long retreat also incorporates performances and opportunities to network with peers and professional arts organizations.

The importance of the Institute’s approach was summed up by Vickie Fleming, Oregon’s Associate Superintendent of Public Education, in her keynote address at the 2004 session:

“It is important that all of our children read and write and do math so they can live lives filled with opportunities. Those abilities will open innumerable doors. But you are here to learn about giving our youngest citizens more than just those skills.... You are here to learn about ways to inspire, create, and encourage another very important skill – that is imagination.”

Now in its seventh year, the Institute is coordinated through a partnership of the Oregon Alliance for Arts Education, the Oregon Department of Education, and the Oregon Arts Commission.
“We Cultivate Education”

“In my plays I want to look at life — at the commonplace of existence — as if we had just turned a corner and run into it for the first time.”

—English Playwright Christopher Fry, 1950

Oregon Children’s Theatre has an impressive history — 16 years and counting — of providing high quality, professional theatre experiences for school groups and families. Those experiences have always contained a strong educational element, but in 2004, the company ratcheted up its efforts by adopting a new vision for the theatre’s role in the community.

That new vision commits OCT to using its artform to teach and engage young people in learning, rather than simply entertaining them. “We produce more than plays,” the company announces on its website, “we cultivate education. These opportunities promote creativity and confidence in students, while also supporting elementary and middle school classroom curricula.”

The support extends to those who teach the curricula. In 2004, the company launched its innovative Master Teacher Program. Now in its third year, the program consists of a number of interlocking elements. Focal point is a corps of teacher liaisons recruited from local schools, who serve as communications conduits between the theatre company and the educators. Their role is to help ensure the schools make best use of the theatre as an educational resource, and to provide useful feedback from the teachers to OCT.

All liaisons and teachers are invited to a dress rehearsal for an advance look at each production and can participate in a menu of workshops and field trips that provide insights into the art and business of theatre. Finally, each school receives a toolkit of curriculum-linked resources that support OCT’s study guide, which was itself developed by teachers who share OCT’s belief in the power of live theatre to educate as well as entertain. The study guides are divided into pre- and post-show activities that link to benchmarks for math, reading, science, social issues, and literature.

“Teachers who are passionate about arts education are the single best advocates we have to bring arts education back into schools in a time of declining resources,” said Marta Mellinger, the company’s executive director. “Anything we can do to support teachers on the front line is important to us.”

Acting student Natasha Natraj gets direction from Artistic Director Stan Foote during Oregon Children’s Theatre’s Young Professionals Program, developing theatre skills and creativity and confidence in students.
**Teaching Through Sound and Image**

"Understanding the media and new technologies is especially important nowadays since much of the information youth receive, and entertainment they enjoy, is through television, film, and the Internet."

Those words, true when they were written six years ago, are yet more pertinent today. They first appeared in the 2000 annual report of the National Endowment for the Arts, referring to the Media Arts Academy, which was launched that year on the tide of a major NEA grant. The Academy, said the report, “helps teachers better educate youth in the media arts, giving them a vocabulary to discuss and evaluate the media and the knowledge and means to create their own works.”

The medium for this important message is a week-long professional development institute for teachers, counselors, and those who work with youth in community programs throughout the Northwest. By combining theory and practice, the Academy helps educators develop a framework for understanding media education today, develop hands-on skills in video technology and artistic processes, and learn how to integrate media literary concepts and activities into other subjects and other settings outside the traditional school environment.

“This involves not only understanding and interpreting images that youth encounter through electronic media, but also engaging them in the process of creating their own media-based products to communicate their ideas.”

—NEA Annual Report, 2000

Teachers who complete the program earn graduate credit from Portland State University. The Academy also offers seminars for teachers in cooperation with the Oregon Teacher Arts Institute, Oregon English Teachers Association, and Oregon Educational Media Association. In 2005, Academy offerings were expanded to include a digital video editing workshop, enabling teachers to return for advanced level training in effective storytelling through sound and image. The following year, a one-day, teaser workshop on introductory video production was added to the statewide in-service day held in October.

**“This was a fantastic class. The lesson plans went right into my classroom that September.”**

- Rachel Thompson

Tualatin High School art teacher and member of the class of 2001, who went on to win a coveted endorsement in Professional Technical Education from the Teachers Standards and Practices Commission.
Professional Development Exchange Workshops/
Young Audiences of Oregon & SW Washington

“Learning Isn’t Just for Kids”

Why do we create? What’s the relationship between critical thinking and creativity? How do we meet challenges posed by the diverse learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and languages of today’s students?

Every year, elementary teachers delve into these and other big issues in a series of intensive workshops sponsored by Young Audiences in partnership with other arts organizations. You may know Young Audiences as the organization that gets young people involved in music, drama, visual arts, dance, and literary arts. It is, after all, the oldest and largest arts and education organization in the Northwest, with a long history of bringing artists and children together as an integral part of students’ educational experience.

But teachers can also “forget to allow themselves the opportunity to explore new ideas,” Young Audiences says on its website. “Learning isn’t just for kids — it’s a life-long endeavor that must be actively pursued.”

Hence, an annual series of workshops to make that pursuit a bit easier, and a lot more enjoyable. “Learning about the arts can be scary stuff to many teachers,” the website continues, “but trying a little at a time can prove to be interesting and even fun.”

In 2006, more than 50 Portland-area teachers and teaching artists learned innovative arts-oriented teaching techniques that meet the different needs of different kinds of learners. Last January, for instance, 24 teachers participated in Look, Create, Reflect! Fostering Critical Thinkers through Art & Literacy. Ann Ott-Cooper, a visual art educator at Jackson Middle School in Portland, led an intimate exploration of critical thought and creativity informed by works from the permanent collection. After the teaching came the practice: the participants applied what they learned by creating their own work of art.

The workshops cover a variety of arts-related issues. In an upcoming session, Investigate, Discover, Interpret! Teaching & Learning through Drama, teachers will work with actor/teaching artists at Artists Repertory Theatre to explore how to use drama as a teaching tool in today’s often challenging classroom environments.

Once they’ve experienced it themselves, educators are better able to open worlds of expression for their students, helping them cultivate the knowledge and skills necessary for success in the 21st century — imagination, creativity, self-direction, motivation to excel, flexibility, appreciation of diversity, and teamwork.
Connecting with the World We Live In: Working Artists Share Their Knowledge

We can prepare young people to succeed in the 21st century workplace by giving them opportunities to work closely with adult mentors. Especially valuable are those programs that expose children to new approaches to understanding the world and to solving real-world problems.

Writers In the Schools/Literary Arts

Thinking and Writing with the Pros

"Writing is thinking on paper."

—William Zinsser, writer-editor-teacher; author of On Writing Well

Who among us doesn’t agree that learning how to communicate through words is central to education? Because why? Because it’s central to success in the world after school, duh. We must all learn how to think, therefore we must all learn how to write. And yet who has not despised of the woeful state of writing among today’s youth (granted, it’s a complaint that seems to come up every generation)? The problem is that nearly every kid in the world hates to write. Tough, most writers hate to write — though, for them, it’s more of a love-hate relationship — but they do it anyway. What they really like to do is talk about writing. So why not get these two groups together and see what develops?

Which is exactly what the Writers in the Schools program does, though it’s far better organized than “seeing what develops.” WITS (very appropriate acronym) promotes literacy by giving students hands-on experience with professional writers and exposing them to contemporary literature, while providing tools for teachers to develop a comprehensive language arts program built around creative writing. It also helps support working writers with paying gigs as mentor-instructors.

Today, WITS serves all Portland public high schools and several alternative programs, reaching more than 3,000 students a year. Centerpiece is a semester-long residency by a professional literary artist, who works in consultation with the teacher to construct and adapt a course outline that addresses the specific needs of the class. Lessons include a literary model, instruction in writing fundamentals, and an in-class writing exercise. Other program elements include one-day visits by local and touring authors, one-on-one writer-student mentorships, faculty writing workshops, books for classrooms and school libraries. The workshops span a variety of disciplines, from language arts to English as a Second Language, to biology to social studies.

WITS takes students through the entire creative writing process, from the germ of the idea to public exposure. Student readings are held at neighborhood bookstores and cafes, and Literary Arts publishes an annual anthology of selected student poems and prose, which has become a showcase of some of the most promising creative writing in Portland.

"Read and enjoy. No doubt you’ll discover a sense, a sound, and an image that will be as sparkling as ‘candy apple red toenails,’ or maybe as oddly comforting as a pair of shoes tied together and strung over a telephone wire. Whatever it is will remind you we all can have Days Like This."

—from the introduction to the 2003-2004 WITS anthology

Writer Emma Oliver works with students from Roosevelt High School in Portland during a Literary Arts’ Writers in the Schools residency in Portland.

PHOTO: ANNIE ROBB

Writers in the Schools: www.literary-arts.org
Jefferson High student John Senah reads to his class during a Literary Arts’ Writers in the Schools residency in Portland.
A Confluence of Art, Business and Environment

“I loved logic, math, computer programming. I loved systems and logic approaches. And so I just figured architecture is this perfect combination.”
—Maya Lin, architect of Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. and the Confluence Project in Oregon and Washington

An architect needs a solid grasp of design, math, physics, engineering, and technology. He or she must understand how our environment both affects and reflects who we are as individuals and as communities. The connections between art, knowledge, business, and life are as clear to an architect as the toughened glass in a waterfront condo.

Each spring for the past quarter century, the Architects in Schools program helps nearly 800 students in grades 3 through 5 make those connections. The program pairs practicing architects with classroom teachers for 6-week residencies in what stands as one of Oregon’s best examples of a partnership between business, school, and cultural nonprofit.

One aspect that makes the program successful is its attention to professional development for both architect-mentors and teachers. The teachers attend a two-day workshop to help them integrate the program with other learning. In the classroom, the architect-teacher teams work from a comprehensive guide, Architecture as a Basic Curriculum Builder, which includes instruction on drawing technique—a missing link in many of today’s elementary schools—and age-appropriate activities that provide connections to Oregon Content and Performance Standards. In the process, students get real-life lessons that are both challenging and—dare we say it?—fun in such subjects as visual arts, math, language arts, social studies, science, and history. Each May, the program ends with an exhibition of the students’ work in the American Institutes of Architects Gallery in downtown Portland—an opportunity for students to show off their accomplishments, and for the public to see the creative energy of a younger generation.

How does learning happen? How do ideas become reality? How are designs developed and built? What is the intersection between creativity and application? How can high school students get their heads around these concepts?

In the 2004-2005 school year, the Architectural Foundation laid the cornerstone of a pilot program to help high school students discover the answers to these questions. THOUGHT>PROCESS gives school teams the opportunity to learn about process and collaboration while working with local architects and staff of Portland’s Bullseye Glass Company to design and fabricate glass and steel projects. The program is designed to link to state CIM and CAM requirements and to inspire young people to think “outside of the box” and learn what it takes to “create their own box.”

“Don’t think that at age 18 you want to just focus in on your own personal world. Open it up for a while.”
—Maya Lin
The Power and Magic of Mentoring

“Caldera changed me, actually it saved me.”
—Wryn, age 17

Here in the shadow of Mount St. Helens, we know that a caldera is the broad crater formed by the explosion of a volcano. It comes from the Spanish word for caldron — in legend, the place where leprechauns store their gold, where Harry Potter stirs his potions, and where the Olympic flame flares every four years. A caldera, we might then say, is a place of transforming power and magic.

Appropriately enough, Caldera is also the name of an Oregon nonprofit organization that offers arts learning experiences for underserved young people from Portland and Central Oregon. By using working artists as classroom mentors, Caldera fosters creativity among low-income youth and gives them a sense of self that can imagine a world beyond narrow choices.

The magic begins in the kids’ schools with Caldera’s Arts Partner School Program, built around a series of interconnected arts education services. Here, professional artists lead week-long, school-wide residencies, performances, exhibitions and arts workshops related to classroom themes. Then, throughout the school year, a Caldera mentor continues to connect with a core group of students every month. The program is available to Arts Partners and youth at no cost.

Caldera’s work with students continues into the summer season. Every year, more than 200 students from diverse ethnic, urban and rural Oregon communities head to the Caldera retreat in the heart of the Oregon Cascades, there to take part in deep learning experiences that build community and personal growth. Each day, students are immersed in the arts — music, art, photography, dance, creative writing — taught by professional artists who are also gifted teachers.

Since its founding in 1996, Caldera has made use of the arts and artists to help transform the lives of more than 5,000 Oregon young people.

“If you’re an artist of any stripe, you can be selfish or keep it for yourself and financial gain — or pass it on, so it doesn’t die.”
—Catón Lyles, dancer and Caldera artist/mentor

A fourth grader at Farmington View Elementary School displays her “mask designed by committee,” developed with the help of fellow classmates and an architect-in-residence through the Architects-in-Schools program. 

PHOTO: JOHN MEDVEK

“The knowledge and skills that learning in the arts imparts uniquely equip young persons for life. What’s more, combining music, art, dance, and drama with subjects such as math, reading, and language can be highly effective, enhancing student engagement and increasing academic achievement.”

—Margaret Spellings, U.S. Secretary of Education
Dispatches from the Front: 
Transforming Classrooms through Art

They exist in different corners of the state, but despite their geographic differences, these schools have much in common. All have a significant proportion of low-income students. They embarked on ambitious efforts in learning and used the arts as an instrument of that transformation. Today, these schools are success stories. Coincidence?

McKinley Elementary School, Salem

“Everything in life is personal – that’s what’s great about the arts.”

So says Christine Hannegan, fifth-grade teacher at McKinley Elementary School in the Salem/Keizer School District. And in her classroom, kids take their work very personally indeed.

Over 40% of the students at McKinley qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch, while others come from very privileged homes. That doesn’t appear to affect Hannegan’s arts-infused teaching style. A practicing visual artist for 15 years prior to entering the classroom, she believes that students need to talk over their feelings about what they’re learning so they’ll remember it.

Each year, all lessons, whether in social studies, math, science, or language arts, are built around a theme. Last year the focus was birds; this year it’s “Neighborhoods From Around the World.” All students maintain a drawing journal where they record their thoughts on the subjects they’re learning. And each day they talk about art: art is life and it’s everywhere.

In Hannegan’s classroom, the learning is wide-rang-
ing and exploratory. A typical arts project will explore the interwoven connections between history, culture, architecture, language, music, and nearly any other subject area. In “Native American Gothic,” for example, each student must choose a Native American tribe, then do research into the clothing styles, environment, dwellings, and other aspects of daily life. The student must then turn what was learned from that research into a picture of a male and female from the selected tribe, in the style of artist Grant Wood’s famous “American Gothic” painting.

Each year, students read books by Dr. Seuss, draw a Seuss character from one of the books, and then draw a character of their own creation in a “Seuss-like tradition.”

Hannegan’s students test well, but that’s not enough. “Everyone can get straight As,” she said, “but not everyone is taught to be creative. That will carry them further in life.”

Sunnyslope Elementary School, Roseburg

Students from Sunnyslope Elementary School in Roseburg meet for choir before school starts two mornings per week as part of their commitment to arts education.

Making Art a Natural Part of the School Experience

Once upon a time, in an actual place called Roseburg, there was a school that had a name — Sunnyslope — but no identity that would separate it from all the other low-achieving, troubled schools across the land. Sixty percent of the students qualified for free or reduced-cost lunch benefits; there were problems with student behavior (400 calls to the office per year) and teacher retention (about half of them left each year).

But Sunnyslope was determined to improve. A new principal named Jim Knapp arrived to set the new course. The first step was to convert the school from grades 4–6 to K–5. Teachers had to be trained to teach to primary grades, so why not use that as an opportunity to improve the school overall? Knapp believed every school must start with a philosophy — that you can’t take the arts out of the school. Every kid should know the value of the arts. The suggestion was made and gained unanimous staff support: convert Sunnyslope to an arts-centered school.

They didn’t follow a set model, but built their own arts-infused curriculum that would be an instrument of academic success. At the same time teachers were being trained to work with younger students, they were being taught by professional artists at the Umpqua Valley Arts Association.

The arts are fully ingrained into the Sunnyslope culture, not as something unusual or special, but a natural part of the school experience. The school has established major partnerships with organizations such as Britt Festivals in Medford, Umpqua Valley Arts
“Our Beliefs”

These statements come from Sunnyslope Elementary’s School Improvement Plan.

1. All students can learn and succeed.
   • Developing the mind and opportunities through involvement in the arts increases academic success.

2. Students will be challenged at their individual level of learning.
   • The arts teach to the multiple intelligences and individual learning styles.

3. Families, schools and the community are partners in every child’s education.
   • A school-wide effort in promoting the arts will foster a sense of belonging among our staff, students, and community.

4. Everyone benefits when individual unique strengths, talents and abilities are valued.
   • The arts help develop unique individual strengths and talents — bringing about a sense of ownership and promoting self-enrichment opportunities.

5. Everyone belongs and is expected to contribute to the learning community.
   • Learning about the arts teaches an appreciation for diversity and promotes communication through creative expression.

6. A safe and respectful environment is everyone’s right and responsibility.

Why the Arts Change the Learning Experience

While learning in other disciplines may often focus on development of a single skill or talent, the arts regularly engage multiple skills and abilities. Engagement in the arts nurtures the development of cognitive, social and personal competencies.

• The arts reach students who are not otherwise being reached. They provide a reason, and sometimes the only reason, for being engaged with school or other organizations.

• The arts reach students in ways that they are not otherwise being reached. Success in the arts becomes a bridge to learning and eventual success in other areas of learning. The arts regularly engage multiple skills and abilities. Engagement in the arts nurtures the development of cognitive, social, and personal competencies.

• The arts connect students to themselves and each other. By engaging his or her whole person, the student feels invested in ways that are deeper than “knowing the answer.”

• The arts transform the environment for learning.

When the arts become central to the learning environment, schools and other settings become places of discovery.

• The arts provide learning opportunities for the adults in the lives of young people. Young people gain an understanding that learning in any field is a never-ending process.

• The arts provide new challenges for those students already considered successful. For those young people who outgrow their established learning environments, the arts can offer a chance for unlimited challenge.

• The arts connect learning experiences to the world of real work. The world of adult work has changed. Ideas are what matter, and the ability to generate ideas, to bring ideas to life and to communicate them is what matters to workplace success.

— Adapted from Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning (1999), a publication of the Arts Education Partnership, and used with permission.
Greenwood Elementary School, La Grande

A Different Way of Knowing

In 2001, Greenwood Elementary received a grade of “Low” on its Oregon School Report Card, one step up from the “Unsatisfactory” bottom. It was Mike Gregory’s first year as principal. Five years later, the school was graded “Exceptional,” the highest rating available. How Greenwood took three giant steps forward in such a short period is the story of a principal, school administration, teachers, and community unafraid to make drastic changes in the way its kids are taught.

With funding from a Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) grant, which the Oregon Department of Education makes available to high-poverty, low-achieving schools, Greenwood began the work of transforming its educational model.

Whatever else, administrators and teachers agreed, the students and their learning had to be the bottom-line concern. “All decisions,” said Gregory, “should be kid-centered.” Students have individual learning styles; when they’re taught in a way that understands those differences, their achievement will increase. The arts, Gregory believed, were an excellent means to involve the full curriculum while accommodating those individual learning styles.

A requirement of the CSR grant was that participating schools select an External Model Provider. Greenwood decided on Different Ways of Knowing (DWoK), the Galef Institute model, because of its social studies and art focus. Annie Painter and Mary Crouse, trained DWoK teacher-coaches, were hired to work with the staff. Both are former elementary school principals in Oregon, and they have complementary specialties in literacy (Mary) and the arts (Annie).

The new model required a whole-school changeover. Areas of need were identified and addressed in a way that was flexible, yet goal-oriented. All teachers participated in the teacher training and implementation of the curriculum. Already a strong staff, the process brought them even closer together around a common language. Greenwood has always been family-oriented; parents became excited and supportive of the new direction.

Gregory acknowledges that this was not the typical school improvement approach. It took far more work than adopting a drop-in curriculum, but it supported the school philosophy of teaching to all students. The results, Gregory is convinced, speak for themselves.

Top of the list, of course, is that “Exemplary” grade. There are others. In 2005-06, Greenwood Elementary received an Exemplary Reading Program Award from the Oregon Reading Association. Members of the staff have presented at education conferences in Oregon and in Los Angeles. Their curriculum map has been requested and distributed to school districts in Michigan, New York, and Indiana. In 2006, Gregory was named Educator of the Year for Union County.

But for the principal himself, the best result of all is seeing the joy and satisfaction of accomplishment on the faces of the students, many of whose prospects, like their school, are no longer ranked “Low.”

Greenwood Elementary School: www.lagrande.k12.or.us/ge/genewweb/index.lasso

Resources

Oregon Arts Commission
www.oregonartscommission.org
Online source of state arts grants for arts learning and community development. Links to regional arts education partners and providers.

Oregon Department of Education
http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/real/standards
Online source for Oregon Content and Performance Standards.

Oregon Alliance for Arts Education
www.oregonarts.org
Links to information on arts learning, advocacy and teacher professional development opportunities.

U. S. Department of Education
http://www.nochildleftbehind.gov
Comprehensive source of information on The No Child Left Behind Act.

Americans for the Arts
http://www.artsusa.org/services/arts_education/
Online resources for advocacy, research, partnerships, and professional development in support of arts education.
Hood River: Heart and Soul and Public Art

May Street in Hood River will never show up on the cover of a Beatles album, like Abbey Road, but never mind. It did make the cover of a fine new walking map to the city’s collection of public art. Last fall, a team of Hood River Middle School students started working on the guide, under the coordination of teacher Ann McDonald. But this was no simple “walking-around” art project. “I want your heart and soul involved,” McDonald warned the students. The work was to involve a healthy dose of learning, followed by creative application under the eye of artist-in-residence Shelley Toon-Hight.

Phase one involved extensive research. Artists, architects, and historians helped the students get to the root of the issue: what is public art, anyway? Then followed a methodical sorting-out process, as students dispersed into the community, surveying, photographing, and mapping out public art candidates, assessing each one: Is it art? Does it belong in the guide? Their documents were exhibited at the Hood River library.

In phase two, the students worked with a local graphic artist on the final product, a handsome guide to Hood River’s cultural landmarks. And on the cover, that sassy take-off on “Abbey Road,” with students standing in for George, Paul, Ringo, and John. Abbey Road is widely considered to have marked the beginning of the end for the Beatles. The walking map, on the other hand, marks the beginning of several things. Among them: greater public awareness and appreciation of Hood River’s cultural and artistic treasures. And, for the students themselves, a deeper understanding of art: what it is, what it means, how to make it.

Hood River Middle School: http://school.gorge.net/hrcsd/hrms

About the Arts Commission

As the state’s leading resource for the arts, the Oregon Arts Commission is dedicated to advancing arts education for every young person in Oregon. By providing technical assistance and competitive Arts Learning Grant awards to local arts agencies, artists, and arts organizations, school districts, and community-based programs, we provide support for innovative ideas and educational practices. Together with the Oregon Department of Education, the Oregon Alliance for Arts Education and other partners, we work to increase public support for arts learning and improve program reach and efficiency.