



# the arts matter in afterschool

## Community Youth Arts and Out-of-School Time

by Lori L. Hager

The afterschool community has long embraced the arts as part of the constellation of services offered to youth during nonschool hours. However, there has been much less comprehensive research in, and support for, the arts outside of school. Despite the fact that the United States has many local, regional, and state examples of excellent partnerships between the arts and afterschool, as well

as model community-based afterschool youth arts programs, in the arts learning field these partnerships and programs are only beginning to foster evidence-based research and disseminate “best practices.” This paper calls attention to community youth arts in order to address the need for more formal and research-based alliances between the arts learning and afterschool fields.

In this paper, *arts learning* is a broad term that incorporates learning in and through the arts both during and after school. *Arts-in-education* takes place during school hours and has academic goals. *Community-based*

*youth organizations* (CYOs) focus on serving youth locally; many CYOs have the arts as central parts of their missions. *Community youth arts* (CYA) refers specifically to partnerships between arts and non-arts organizations that offer OST youth arts activities. One critical distinction is between *arts-in-education*, which takes place in school, and the broader *arts learning*, which can incorporate a variety of arts activities; serve youth both in and outside of school; and have a range of goals including academic support, community building, and social development.

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**SPRINGTIME  
(FLOWER)**  
Focuses on  
something  
colorful.  
*OUR WORLD  
IN PICTURES*

## Historical Perspective

In the U.S., connections among youth, arts, and community are rooted in the Progressive Movement at the turn of the 20th century (Addams, 1910; Ewell, 2000; Jackson, 2000). In Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, and other major urban areas, civic-minded philanthropists led reform efforts in child labor, family health, education, welfare, and recreation. Recognizing the importance of building healthy minds and bodies, Progressives helped to revolutionize city planning by advocating for public spaces, including playgrounds where children and neighbors could gather as well as community centers where the urban poor and recently arrived immigrants could acclimate to American urban life (Addams, 1910; Blood, 1996; Davis, 1984; Jackson, 1996). Integral to the services offered by settlement houses were activities in music, drama, dance, crafts, painting, drawing, and more. The arts were viewed as a means to bring people together to build community, share cultures, and transcend language barriers (Abookire & McNair, 1989; Dubois, 1943; Jackson, 1996). The Progressive ideal included the arts in fostering positive community relations and youth development (Addams, 1910; Kennedy, n.d.)

Community youth arts also grew out of the recreation and playground movements of the early 20th century. Drama—sometimes referred to as “skits and stories”—was featured in summer camps, YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs, Scout troops, and other recreation clubs (Hager, 2008; McCaslin, 1997). These early precursors to contemporary community youth arts helped to cement the arts’ position in community organizations whose purpose was to fill young people’s leisure hours with productive and worthwhile pursuits.

The settlement houses, parks and recreation programs, and Junior Leagues were instrumental in the start of professional arts organizations in the U.S. (Abookire & McNair, 1989; Bedard, 1998; Rodman, 1989). For example, Alice and Irene Lewisohn began their dramatic efforts in 1907 at the Henry Street Settlement in New York City. Henry Street Settlement still offers drama classes to youth today, as does Karamu House in Cleveland, Ohio. America’s cities and towns are dotted with theatres, which the Junior Leagues helped to found, such as Louisville Children’s Theatre, Birmingham Children’s Theatre, and the Nashville Academy Theatre

(Bedard, 1989; Comer, 1946). During the 1950s, as community and recreation centers expanded steadily, universities and community organizations increasingly relied on one another to produce children’s arts activities (Ewell, 2000; Gard, 1955, 1975; McCaslin, 1997).

The establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1965 provided federal recognition for arts in communities and schools. Arts-in-education was formally established through partnerships between the NEA and the (then) U.S. Office of Education. Investments were made toward arts-in-education research and program development. For example, Harvard’s Project Zero received early research funding, (NEA, 1967) and is still critical to arts education through the research of Howard Gardner and many others. The artist-in-schools program established a residency model in 1966 that is the basis for arts in the schools today (see, for example, Arts Education and Americans Panel, 1977; Fowler 1988; Remer, 1996).

Early distinctions between NEA in-school and out-of-school arts learning programs had a profound effect on how each has developed. The NEA positioned community-based arts, including community youth arts, in the Expansion Arts program, which began in recognition of the country’s changing demographics and of changing arts practices and audiences (Hager, 2003). Expansion Arts sought to bring start-up money to community-based organizations that were addressing community problems through the arts, with a focus on “minority” neighborhood community centers that attracted nontraditional audiences and produced diverse American art. Many of these centers also provided educational opportunities and training in the arts for youth and adults through classes and apprenticeship or job skills training programs (Backas, 1977; Mark, 1991; NEA, 1980).

Partnership between the NEA and other federal agencies, such as Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, provided important revenue streams for nonschool-based youth arts that targeted marginalized populations. Job training programs with the Department of Labor focused on the transferability of skills from the cultural industry to other sectors. The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) included partnerships between the NEA and Department of Labor in

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support of the Arts and Humanities Program, which provided funding for artists to work as arts managers and teaching artists (Morgan Management Systems, 1981; Netzer, 1992; Wyzomirski, 1982). Other federal initiatives included Challenge America: Positive Alternatives for Youth (NEA, 2001a), and Creative Communities, a partnership between the NEA and Housing and Urban Development (NEA, 2000), which focused on low-income youth. Since the 1970s the arts and community youth arts have had an important role in the development of cities (Adams & Goldbard, 2001; Ewell & Ewell, 1975; Gard, 1975; Kamarck, 1975; NEA, 2001b; Regan, 1976).

Another influence on community youth arts was the activity of local arts agencies (LAAs), which are part of the state arts agency system that receives federal dollars to support arts in education, community revitalization, and youth development. By 1997, 100 percent of LAAs in the 50 largest American cities “used the arts to address community development issues,” which reflected the “fastest growing program and service area of local arts agencies” (Larson, 1997, p. 84). LAAs were working on community development with schools, parks and recreation, social service departments, law enforcement, and community-based organizations to address issues of economic development, crime prevention, illiteracy, substance abuse, homelessness, and cultural and racial awareness, particularly for youth (Gibans, 1982; Larson, 1997).

When No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was authorized in 2001, the arts were included as a core academic area (Arts Education Partnership, 2001). The NEA re-organized its arts learning category to include community-based programs, in addition to Pre-K and K–12 arts-in-education (NEA 2002a, 2002b). This shift signified an important milestone in federal recognition of arts learning that takes place outside of school.

### Community Youth Arts Models

Two model programs for the arts during out-of-school time have helped to generate momentum for national recognition of community youth arts. These include Coming Up Taller and the YouthARTS Development Project.

Coming Up Taller helps to promote excellence in after-school arts programs that target youth in high-poverty communities by presenting awards that raise the profile for the arts outside of school time and by identifying and stimulating best practices. The YouthARTS Development Project was purposefully designed to study arts programs in partnership with departments of juvenile justice in order to provide hard evidence of positive effects for juvenile offenders who participate in arts programs.

### Coming Up Taller

Coming Up Taller (CUT) is a high-profile national program that annually provides awards to community youth arts programs judged exceptional by a panel of peer experts. CUT is sponsored by the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, the National Endowment for the

Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The goal of CUT is to “identify community programs in the arts and humanities that reach at-risk children and youth and to describe the principles and practices that make these programs effective” (Weitz, 1996, p. 7).

CUT has identified characteristics shared by effective programs, including student engagement, provision of critical “building blocks” in healthy development, creation of safe places for children to develop sustained healthy relationships with peers and adults, opportunities for student success, and innovative teaching strategies including “hands-on learning, apprenticeships and technology” (Weitz, 1996, p. 8). Award-winning programs also build on what youth value, establish clear expectations, help children feel valued, and provide support services. Many of the programs are initiated by arts organizations, but they operate in partnership with “schools, universities, youth organizations, churches, businesses, and health, housing and social service agencies” (Weitz, 1996, p. 8). By identifying best practices and recognizing them nationally, CUT helps to define effective community youth arts practices and to expand support for arts and humanities programs for at-risk youth and children (Weitz, 1996, p. 9).

### YouthARTS Development Project

The YouthARTS Development Project (YADP) was a pilot project among the Office of Juvenile Justice and

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Delinquency Prevention, Americans for the Arts, and community agencies in three cities. The purpose of the development project was to “develop, test, and disseminate ‘best practice’ models of arts programs designed for youth at risk” (Farnum & Schaffer, 1998, p. vi). Though arts organizations have been providing arts programs for youth at risk of juvenile delinquency and truancy for years, most of the evidence in support of such programs was anecdotal, lacking substantive statistical evidence that arts programs can enhance youth development (Farnum & Schaffer, 1998).

YADP had seven goals:

1. To define “best practices” for at-risk youth arts programs
2. To design and test program evaluation methodologies
3. To conduct rigorous impact evaluation of the three sites on risk and protective factors in adolescent behavior
4. To design and test artist and staff development and training
5. To strengthen relationships among local and federal partners
6. To disseminate “best practices” models to arts, social service, and juvenile justice providers
7. To leverage increased funding for at-risk youth programs (Farnum & Schaffer, 1998, p. 2)

Working with information from the youth arts field, social service agencies, and justice programs, the project identified an approach to reducing risk factors while increasing protective factors by using all the community’s resources, including schools, peers, and family support networks.

Results from the YADP program evaluation provided evidence that “arts programs really can have an impact on youth. Not only can such programs enhance young peoples’ attitudes about themselves and their futures, but the programs also can increase academic achievement and decrease delinquent behavior” (Farnum & Schaffer, 1998, p. 3). Youth who participated in YADP art-centered afterschool programs showed improved anger management, increased ability to stay on task, less delinquent activity, improved attitudes toward school, and increased self-esteem and self-efficacy. They also had fewer court referrals (Farnum & Schaffer,

1998). YADP disseminated some of the first critical evidence for how the arts benefit youth at risk of juvenile delinquency and what some of the best programs are doing.

YADP remains one of the most accessible resources for designing, staffing, and evaluating arts intervention programs. Coming Up Taller brings national attention to best practices in community youth arts and OST learning. Both extend the articulated benefits of arts partnerships beyond exposure and enrichment outcomes to include excellence in the arts, as well as in youth development and civic participation. Support of these programs by federal agencies legitimizes community youth arts programming that connects with arts-based social and civic goals. Effective national dissemination of such model national programs helps to develop best practices in program delivery and instruction and to influence funding and policy.

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### Challenges for Community Youth Arts

The research of Shirley Brice Heath and her collaborators provides critical evidence for the impact of the arts in nonschool settings, demonstrating that the value of youth arts programming extends beyond reform or enrichment (Heath, Soep, & Smyth, 1998). Heath describes how participating in arts-based CYOs prepares youth to engage dynamically with their communities, learn leadership skills, demonstrate higher-order thinking skills, and collaborate effectively (Heath & Roach, 1999; Heath, Soep, & Roach, 1999). The research compendium *Champions of Change* (Fiske, 1999) stimulated research that focuses on the range of arts activities that take place during out-of-school time as well as in school, providing some of the critical evidence that the emerging field needs (Deasy, 2002; Fiske, 1999). However, much of the evidence in community youth arts continues to be anecdotal and has not been formally documented or researched.

Though research and model programs for afterschool arts do exist, afterschool arts programs have often been perceived by the arts sector as “enrichment” pro-



gramming that lacks the substance and rigor of in-school or conservatory arts experiences. Historically, afterschool arts programs have received scarce attention in arts education research, professional development, training, standards, policy, and assessment, when compared to in-school arts learning.

A Wallace Foundation study reported that 63 to 67 percent of “youth development, community development, education and recreational organizations are involved with the arts” (Walker, 2004, p. 4). The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program has been critical to the growth of the arts in the OST field through increased participation of artists and arts organizations as service providers for the required afterschool enrichment component. For example, the Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture’s five-year 21st CCLC program worked with nine local arts organizations to provide substantive standards-based afterschool arts curriculum in partnership with some of the city’s poorest schools, putting teaching artists to work, fostering the education component of local arts organizations, and providing rigorous arts learning experiences for youth afterschool (Hager, 2004).

### Arts Organizations as Partners in OST

Performing arts organizations are waking up to the importance of community-engaged programming, not just to build current and future audiences, but for a variety of other social and public purposes, including building relationships with non-arts sectors, strengthening relationships with other arts organizations, and more fully participating in the lives of their cities and communities (see, for example, Bodilly, Augustine, & Zakaras, 2008; Korza, Bacon, & Assaf, 2005; McCarthy & Jinnett, 2001; Zakaras & Lowell, 2008).

Arts organizations’ “education and outreach” programs traditionally tend toward building future audiences through free performances and exhibits education, assembly lecture demonstrations in the schools, short-term residencies that introduce the season’s offerings, or conservatory training for future arts professionals (Polin & Rich, 2007). Contemporary arts organizations are moving from this model of arts learning to more partnership-driven collaborations (Dreezen, 2001; Walker, 2004).

### Training Teaching Artists

Afterschool arts programming in schools and parks and recreation programs are often revenue generators

for arts organizations and artists. Many artists will teach at some point in their careers—in schools, parks and recreation programs, or conservatories. Many artists, having started in parks and recreation programs, move on to work with arts organizations and other kinds of community-based organizations.

Some arts practitioners or teaching artists consider afterschool teaching “gigs” less than desirable for a variety of reasons, including inadequate facilities, low wages, short-term classes, lack of institutional supports including discipline and appreciation for the qualities of arts participation, and youth attendance patterns that make it difficult to sustain substantive arts programming (Hager, 2008). An evaluation of a Phoenix-based 21st CCLC program that tracked changes in the teaching artists showed that, even in well-designed afterschool programs, otherwise highly qualified teaching artists are frequently unprepared for difficulties, including language and social barriers, institutional climates, and conflict between program and partner goals (Hager, 2004). In fact, little has been written about the training for artists in community-based settings, though there are a few exceptions (for example, Hillman, 1996; Farnum & Schaffer, 1998), and regional and local training opportunities are emerging for teaching artists who work in out-of-school time settings.

Awareness is growing of the need for teaching artists to be highly qualified. Eric Booth, founder and editor of *Teaching Artist Journal*, writes about training for artists to teach in schools and community settings, noting that “there is an emerging set of additional skills that are essential” for the 21st century artist (Booth, 2005). The Teaching Artist Research Project is the first national study documenting the teaching artist field (Mehta, 2009).

Programs are emerging in higher education to train artists and arts managers to work in community settings. The emergence of new graduate and undergraduate community arts programs points to the need for such training and education. A few examples include community arts programs at Columbia College Chicago, Goucher College, Lesley University, Maryland Institute College of Arts, California College of the Arts, California State University Monterey Bay, University of Washington, and University of Oregon. Maryland Institute College of Arts’ Community Arts Convening and Research Project brings together academics and researchers, community-based practitioners, and students. Research emerging in conjunction with the project is published in the online journal

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**THE SITUATION (LOVE WHERE YOU LIVE)** A photo of something I want to change in my community. This is a scene that happens in the neighborhood all of the time. *OUR WORLD IN PICTURES*

*Community Arts Perspectives* on the Community Arts Network ([www.communityarts.net](http://www.communityarts.net)). Similarly, Imagining America (IA), a consortium of colleges and universities concerned with civic engagement, brings together higher education institutions each year to share best practices. IA sponsors the Curriculum Project Research related to community cultural development education and training (Goldbard, 2008).

The Dana Foundation's *Transforming Arts Teaching* (Polin & Rich, 2007) discusses how critical it is to prepare artists to teach in community settings, highlighting the role of higher education in preparing artists, educators, and staff. The report presents case studies of 24 partnerships between higher education and performing arts organizations that offer classes to train artists to work in community settings in order to affect the quality of youth arts engagement over the long term. However, the community youth arts field is just beginning to document best practices, to articulate guidelines for trainings and curriculum, and to identify resources.

### **Challenges**

The relevance of the YouthARTS Development Project for the arts sector is that it provided a framework for describing and evaluating quality for effective afterschool programs that include the arts. One important aspect of quality was that the programs focused on staff and teaching training. Most arts educator certification and training programs prepare arts teachers to work in school settings. Though the emergence of community arts programs in higher education institutions will help to identify routes for qualified arts instructors in community youth arts, this is a relatively new development. Research on teaching artist training, in conjunction with the emergence of professional and academic training programs for artists who want to teach in community settings, will likely have a long-term positive effect on community youth arts.

It is not difficult to make a case for the relevance and impact of the arts to the OST community. There are many sterling examples of community-based organizations delivering high-quality arts programming afterschool. The National Institute of Out-of-School Time (2008) reports that:

Engagement in the arts, whether the visual arts, dance, music, theatre or other disciplines, nurtures the development of cognitive, social, and personal competencies. Arts focused afterschool programs can increase academic achievement, decrease youth involvement in delinquent behavior and improve youth attitudes towards themselves and others and their futures.

Local arts agencies that administer teaching artist rosters tend to focus on school-based residencies and to foster long-term relationships with school districts and school personnel. A recent RAND report (Zakaras & Lowell, 2008) found that 80 percent of state arts agencies (SAAs) maintain artist rosters to connect artists with schools and other organizations. However, despite a growing recognition for the importance of providing arts learning for youth in communities, it can be a challenge for SAAs and arts organizations to include community youth arts, in addition to school-based programs, as part of a comprehensive arts learning strategy.

This trend may be changing as foundations and arts policy researchers document and disseminate best-practice models for the arts in afterschool. However, as the RAND authors note, “We have no data on the amount of instruction or number of K–12 children reached by afterschool programs nationwide or statewide” (Zakaras & Lowell, 2008, p. 38). Citywide afterschool programs that include the arts, such as Boston’s Afterschool for All and LA’s Best, are establishing model programs; at the same time “afterschool arts programs are housed within a large network of providers” (Zakaras & Lowell, 2008, p. 37), and, to date, there is no system-wide study documenting the community youth arts field.

Differences between in-school and afterschool programs in their staffing, funding, institutional structures, learning objectives, and access can cause arts organizations to locate education programs in schools because it is easier or more familiar or because the funding to support such programs is more readily available. Community youth arts programs require a different strategy in partnership development and organization. Instruction for in-school programs requires different skills from teaching artists as well, and these programs are usually of shorter duration due to institutional school structures. Furthermore, it can be difficult to identify teaching artists who have the kinds of expertise required for afterschool programs, especially in high-risk communities. The challenge is to bring the youth arts and OST sectors closer together to share resources and training, advance research

and evaluation, and advocate for policies in support of comprehensive, high-quality community youth arts.

The afterschool and arts communities need to work with state and local arts agencies to identify experienced arts educators and teaching artists; define high-quality arts participation; and integrate social, developmental, and academic goals with rigorous arts programming that meets 21st century goals. The expertise that characterizes highly qualified teaching artists and community artists, and a corresponding compensation structure, need to be identified. Arts-based and outcomes-based research addressing arts learning in OST is necessary in order to advance strong policies in support of community youth arts through increased formal partnerships between arts organizations and afterschool and other community-based organizations.

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