

MAKE A CONNECTION THRU ART

Nurturing creativity and self-expression among young people

THE CHALLENGE

In the United States, the public school system is the primary means for educating young people and preparing them to become responsible and capable thinkers and citizens. Due to the focus on academic achievement, few American public schools offer students the opportunity to develop life skills such as creative thinking, respect, and self-confidence in the context of arts education. As a result, students sometimes fail to see the connection between developing these skills and achieving academic and personal goals.

THE PROGRAM

In North Texas, Make a Connection Thru Art provides life skills support to young people right in their school classroom, specifically in the context of arts education and personal expression. The program gives middle school students the opportunity to work together with professional artists to develop and share their own visual art or creative writing. In the process, they develop important life skills, including self-confidence, creative and critical thinking, respect, and communication. Each residency includes a classroom field trip to a local art museum, a program orientation, a ten day in-class arts workshop with a local artist, and a campus event that celebrates students' completed artwork. At the end of each academic year, students share their work—and explore the work of students from neighboring schools—in a district-wide arts celebration. This work is archived and can be accessed by teachers and students at: www.makeaconnectionthruart.org. Now in its third phase, the three-year program will be offered in more than 40 middle school classrooms in Texas, reaching over 2,900 youth.



OUTCOMES

In the long term, participants will become more active, engaged, and productive students and will improve their ability to express themselves. Program outcomes include: trained residency artists will integrate community classroom teaching techniques and life skills into their art curriculum; participants will demonstrate enhanced life skills (e.g., self-confidence, communication, respect, creative thinking, and critical thinking) and increased effort; and students will be recognized for their creative works.

THE PARTNER

Make a Connection Thru Art is sponsored by Nokia, with support from the Pearson Foundation. The program is managed by Big Thought, an organization that inspires, empowers, and unites children and communities through education, arts, and culture to serve children and families. The organization began in 1987 as Young Audiences of North Texas — a handful of local artists partnering with teachers to bring their talent into classrooms to replace the dwindling arts resources of public schools. Since then, the organization has emerged as the leading arts and cultural learning organization in the United States. Big Thought's strategic partners include school districts, libraries, the juvenile justice system, cultural institutions, city government, early childhood learning centers, and a roster of over 150 local artists. In 2005, Big Thought served over 585,000 children, families, and educators.



RESULTS TO DATE

As of December 31, 2006, Phase III of this program had reached 528 direct youth beneficiaries. Initial outcome data will be available in August 2007. In Phase II, Big Thought reached 1,257 direct youth beneficiaries. An analysis of life skills data collected in 2005 revealed that the program had the greatest impact on young people in the areas of critical thinking, creative thinking, and self-confidence, and a lesser impact in the areas of cooperation and communication.

PROGRAM: Make a Connection Thru Art
PARTNER: Big Thought
PERIOD: 1 August 2006 – 31 May 2009
LOCATION: Irving, Texas
REACH: 2,900 youth, ages 11-13
MODEL: Creative self-expression