

## **THE METROARTS INC MISSION**

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### **WHY HAVE ARTS EDUCATION AT ALL**

Time and time again, it's been proven that students who are involved in the arts perform better in all other areas of academics and are more successful in their later careers, no matter what field they choose to pursue. Research has also shown that students who participate in the arts are more likely to become leaders and generally have higher levels of self-esteem, confidence, focus, self-discipline, productivity, tenacity, creative thinking, problem solving, and communication. Being involved in the arts can also combat isolation and create a feeling of belonging for students who may need a place to feel supported. For some, it's like finding a second home.

By the end of middle school, or eighth grade, children must have experienced an education that nurtured and developed the unique potential of each child through hands-on, thematic education. They should have a rich background in academics and the arts, and with a deep sense of who they are and what they can do. They should have command of the traditional "basics"-reading, writing and mathematics – but equally important, they must be thinkers, problem solvers, risk takers. Above all they must have a love of learning, an excitement about life, a maturity, and a self-confidence that will be the foundation for success and growth the rest of their lives. *(from Bringing Reggio Emilia Home, Louise Boyd Cadwell)*

Unfortunately, with many schools wrestling with severe budget cuts and a dire lack of resources, access to the arts has become less and less available for students, especially in the Portland area. Arts teachers are finding fewer and fewer job opportunities in their respective fields. Those who do hold teaching positions in the arts are often discouraged by the lack of commitment to arts education within their school districts, and struggle to adequately present their curricula due to the lack of funds available to them.

My answer to this problem was to create the MetroArts Kids Camp in 1993 at the Portland Center for the Performing Arts.

MAKC gives young people ages 7 to 12 an opportunity to explore music, dance, theater and visual arts all within a week's time during the summer. (An optional second week is also offered.) Students function as choreographers, composers, visual art designers and playwrights, as well as dancers, musicians, artists, and actors, through hands-on "play-work" activities, requiring no prior artistic training. Throughout the week, students collaborate with other campers on performances or projects which are produced each day. On Friday, a synthesis of the creative concepts learned at the camp is used to create a large-scale multi-disciplinary piece based on an ethnic artist's presentation to the camp that day.

## The MetroArts Mission

The MetroArts Project is an educational organization dedicated to promoting lifelong learning through the arts for everyone.

At MetroArts we teach processes of creativity through the arts. Whatever your job in life, creativity is a part of it. How we approach problems and create solutions is central to our ability to thrive and progress as individuals and as a society. Through the arts we can study ways to create, from seemingly disassociated parts, a satisfying whole, using our tools, our bodies, our senses and our developed - and *developing* - processes of creativity.

The power of the arts to affect human beings is immeasurable. It is the mission of the MetroArts programs to not only educate about the arts, but also to provide insight into the nature of the creative process and to provide access to the arts through participation, creation and reflection for all. In short, to inspire every person to see the art, and the potential for art, in everything that they do.

We believe that the arts have inherent worth unto themselves: that interaction with the arts can bring to all people enjoyment, knowledge, and inspiration. Experiencing art leads people to a deeper understanding of an era, a society, a people, a culture, or even themselves. And, of course, the arts give us pleasure and entertain us, inspire us to feel and to think, and even call us to action.

It is our mission to inspire every participant in our programs to contribute to the culture of their own times by doing their life's work in a creative, artistic, joyful and disciplined manner (for true freedom of expression comes through the learning of any discipline in a disciplined way). We believe that striving for excellence matters, but that striving for creative expression at the same time matters just as much. We value and assess the processes used to create a product, not just the product itself in our programs. But the product matters too, and criteria are set for the outcomes of our day's work.

We firmly believe in the inherent value of creative processes: that a product, even an artistic one, is merely a "footprint" in the sand of the process itself. The history, perhaps the essence, of all mankind is reflected through the art of each and every century. To understand how we arrived at our own times and what our place in the story of mankind might be, we look to the cultures of the past: looking not only at their artistic creations, but also at their cultural evolution and their processes of creativity and creative thought.

We value high achievement in our students and regularly assess and reflect upon their work and ours: encouraging the exploration of creative processes and promoting the growth of creative thought and overall excellence.

Most often this occurs through assessing the processes used in "solving" a specific design challenge by the production of an artistic product. In the field of education, it is tempting to attempt to quantify achievement or "progress" through test scores. But we cannot adequately measure our cultural progress, nor ever-evolving and fluid processes of thought, nor can we understand the *essence*

of a person if we only look at test scores (which is why in a museum, I suppose, to understand the greatness of DaVinci we don't look for his SAT scores: we look for his paintings).

At MetroArts we promote the cultural well-being of our own age, advocating for the inclusion of the arts and arts education in every facet of our society. We believe that *every* person is creative, has something to offer our culture and deserves the opportunity to know and experience that fact. Therefore, everyone at MetroArts is an advocate for the arts, for we believe that while you might be able to have a society without the arts, you cannot have a culture.

### **The processes we use at MetroArts: The Path to Creativity**

**a)**

If you think of a child's path to becoming a creative thinker as literally that –a road along which he or she travels – Then the first step on that road is found in experiencing the domain to be studied (in our case music or art or dance or theater) in a TRULY AUTHENTIC ENVIRONMENT. For as the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy have shown us, the environment is a key part of the process. This often means setting up a class room or other space as a "studio", with the rules of the studio carefully taught and based in the rules that actual artists use in order to promote their creativity.

The Emilia Romagna region of Italy has within it one of the most imaginative pre-school programs run by any municipality in the world. Within the town of Reggio Emilia are schools that incorporate an atelier (which is a French word for studio or workshop) and an atelierista (a studio teacher who is an artist). The Reggio Emilia schools emphasize the importance of team teaching and pair regular classroom teachers with the atelierista in providing an education that is designed to liberate "childhood energy and capacities" and promote the harmonious development of the whole child in communicative, social, and affective domains.

**b)**

The next step is found in experiencing the domain itself. Experimenting with and playing with the tools and the elements of the discipline in an organized manner, but always leaving room for the child to direct his or her own path of discovery.

**And it is here that we arrive at some creative questions. I have eight of them which teachers can ask students and students can ask themselves during an arts project:**

**What do we know before we start?**

**What goal do we have in mind?**

**What skills will we need to have to get there?**

**What processes will we need to experience?**

**What if...?**

**What next...?**

**What happened...?**

**How do you feel about ...?**

Children can be guided through these questions in probably any order, and not

all questions need be answered in any specific activity, but the point is that in asking these questions the teacher is providing an opportunity through an authentic artistic experience for the child to think for themselves, as artists do, and chart their own course through the artistic challenge at hand.

### **c) Experiencing FLOW**

The goal for the learner is to have early experiences with what the psychologist Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi calls FLOW, best described as how it feels when an experience is deemed “enjoyable”, when one is doing something for the love of it, when one is experiencing a quality of experience that CANNOT be found in relaxing. Rather this experience is often found in the doing of difficult, painful, risky, challenging activities that STRETCHED the person’s capacity and involved an element of novelty and discovery. Csikzentmihalyi calls this optimal experience FLOW, because there is a feeling when things are going well that in an automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness.

**Nine main elements were mentioned over and over again to describe how it feels when an experience is enjoyable.**

**There are clear goals every step of the way. In the FLOW mode we always know what needs to be done.**

**There is immediate feedback to one’s actions. The musician, for example, hears right away whether the note played is the right one.**

**There is a balance between challenges and skills. In FLOW we feel that our abilities are well matched to the opportunities for action.**

**Action and awareness are merged. In FLOW our concentration is focused on what we do and nothing else.**

**Distractions are excluded from consciousness. We are only aware of what is relevant here and now.**

**There is no worry of failure. We feel in complete control of the situation.**

**Self-consciousness disappears. In everyday life, we are always monitoring how we appear to other people. In flow we are too involved in what we are doing to care about protecting the ego, yet somewhat paradoxically, we generally emerge from this state with a stronger self-concept, we know we have succeeded in meeting a difficult challenge.**

**The sense of time becomes distorted. Our sense of how much time passes depends on what we are doing. A figure skater may report that a quick turn that in real time takes only a second seems to stretch out for ten times as long.**

**The activity becomes autotelic – the activity becomes an end unto itself. Some activities such as art, music and sports are usually autotelic: There is no reason for doing them except to feel the experience they provide. Most things in life are exotelic. We do them not because we enjoy them but in order to get at some later goal. And some activities are both: The violinist gets paid for playing as well as getting enjoyment from what he does.**

**In many ways the secret to a happy life is to learn to get this FLOW experience from as many of the things we have to do as possible. If work and family life**

**become an enjoyable end unto themselves, then there is nothing wasted in life, and everything we do is worth doing for its own sake and gives us enjoyment.**

It is in the forming of new insights to a domain as we experience that we feel the excitement of FLOW energy, the energy of discovery. This energy helps us to get through the painful parts of the creative process, the times when we must reject some of our work, or we become frustrated with the lack of progress towards a goal.

This exciting yin-yang of discovery and frustration and exploration occurs in the midst of what I call the “pre-creative” processes. These are the tasks enjoined by the questions “What if...” and “What next” And during the process of artistic creation, as well as during the process of solving any complex problem in any domain, artists will go through the some or all of pre-creative processes of:

**Re-ordering (their knowledge within and without the domain to fit the challenge)**

**Re-formatting (their knowledge base)**

**Re-conceiving (previously held assumptions)**

**Interconnecting (seemingly disconnected parameters of one domain or parameters across domains)**

**Interrelating (seemingly unrelated principles of one domain or principles across domains)**

**Synthesizing (elements within and across domains)**

**Deconstructing (beliefs within a domain)**

**Reconstructing (beliefs within a domain)**

**Considering the absurd (in order to perceive an original idea)**

**Courageously attempting the ridiculous (in order to experiment with new methods)**

**Breaking the known rules (again, to perceive an original idea)**

**And with any luck will**

**Create new and original thought or output within a domain**

**Other values of arts education**

*On the value of team-based experiences*

In many cases it is erroneous to conclude that the knowledge required to execute a task resides completely in the mind of a single individual. This knowledge can [might] be “distributed”: that is, successful performance of a task may depend on a team of individuals, no single one of whom possesses all of the necessary expertise but all of whom, working together, are able to accomplish the task in a reliable way. relatedly, it is too simple to say that an individual either “has” or “does not have” the requisite knowledge; that knowledge may show up reliably in the presence of the appropriate human and physical “triggers” but might be otherwise invisible to probing. (p.172)

*On A New Conception of Intelligence:*

Each culture emphasizes a different set of intelligences and combination of intelligences. These intelligences are embedded (or perhaps embodied) in the employment of the various **symbol systems**, notational systems, such as musical or mathematical notation, and [domains] of knowledge, for example graphic design or nuclear physics. (p.121)

It is in rich, situation-specific contexts that intelligences are typically and productively deployed. The kind of knowledge required in workplaces and in one's personal life usually involves **collaborative, contextualized, and situation-specific thinking**. (p.121)

## THE NOUNS AND VERBS OF CREATIVE PROCESS

Niel discusses MetroArts

From *Creativity* by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Creativity is any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain (like music, or math), or that transforms an existing domain into a new one. And the definition of a creative person is: someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain, or establish a new domain. It is important to remember, however, that a domain cannot be changed without the explicit or implicit consent of a field responsible for it.

Creativity occurs when a person, using the symbols of a given domain such as music, engineering, business, or mathematics, has a new idea or sees a new pattern, and when this novelty is selected by the appropriate field for inclusion into the relevant domain. The next generation will encounter that novelty as part of the domain they are exposed to, and if they are creative, they in turn will change it further.

It seems that the men and women we studied were not shaped, once and for all, either by their genes, or by the events of early life. Rather, as they moved along in time, being bombarded by external events, encountering good people and bad, good breaks and bad, they had to make do with whatever came to hand. Instead of being shaped by events, they shaped events to suit their purposes.

According to this view a creative life is still determined, but what determines it is a will moving across time – the fierce determination to succeed, to make sense of the world.

It may not be important to know precisely where the seeds (or curiosity) come from. What is important is to recognize the interest when it shows itself, nurture it, and provide the opportunities for it to grow into a creative life.

If being a prodigy is not a requirement for later creativity, a more than usually keen curiosity about one's surroundings appears to be. Practically every

individual who has made a novel contribution to a domain remembers feeling awe about the mysteries of life and has rich anecdotes to tell about efforts to solve them.

Creative persons differ from one another in a variety of ways, but in one respect they are unanimous: They all love what they do. It is not the hope of achieving fame or making money that drives them; rather, it is the opportunity to do the work that they enjoy doing. The inventor Jacob Rabinow once said: "You invent for the hell of it. I don't start with the idea. 'What will make money?' This is a rough world, money's important. But if I have to trade between what's fun and what's money making, I'll take what's fun."

When people are asked to choose from a list the best description of how they feel when doing whatever they enjoy doing most – reading, climbing mountains, playing music, whatever- the answer most frequently chosen is "designing or discovering something new."

It is likely that the evolving human organism, through random mutations in some individuals, must have developed a nervous system in which the discovery of novelty [something "new to the discoverer"] stimulates the pleasure centers in the brain. Just as some individuals derive a keener pleasure from love and others from food, so some must have been born who derived a keener pleasure from learning something new. It is possible that children who were more curious ran more risks and so were likely to die early than their more conservative companions. But it is also probable that those human groups that learned to appreciate the curious children around them, and helped them protect and reward them so that they could grow to maturity and have children of their own, were more successful than groups that ignored the potentially creative in their midst.

If this is true, we are the descendants of ancestors who recognized the importance of novelty, protected those individuals who enjoyed being creative, and learned from them. Because they had among them individuals who enjoyed exploring and inventing, they were better prepared to face the unpredictable conditions that threatened their survival. So we too share this propensity for enjoying whatever we do, provided we can do it in a new way, provided we can discover or design something new in doing it. That is why creativity, no matter in what domain it takes place, is so enjoyable. In fact, every new little discovery, even a tiny one, is exciting at the moment of discovery.

But we are also programmed to relax as human organisms. To NOT work so hard at something. This too is a survival mechanism built into our genes by evolution. It gives us pleasure when we relax, we can get away with feeling good without expending energy. If we didn't have this built in regulator, we could easily kill ourselves by running ragged and then not having enough reserves of strength, body fat, or nervous energy to face the unexpected.

In most individuals entropy seems to be stronger, and they enjoy comfort more than the challenge of discovery. A few are more responsive to the rewards of discovery. But we ALL respond to both of these rewards. Which one wins depends on our genetic makeup but also presumably on our early experiences. However, unless enough people are motivated by the enjoyment that comes from confronting challenges, by discovering new ways of being and doing, there is no evolution of culture, no progress in thought or feeling.

*On cognition (the act or process of knowing) and art:  
From Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice (Basic Books)*

*Is there an artistic intelligence?*

**Technically, no intelligence is inherently artistic or non-artistic. Rather, intelligences function artistically (or non-artistically) to the extent that they exploit certain properties of a symbol system. (p.46)**

Evident among lay individuals, but also noticeable among art educators and theorists, was the belief that the arts were primarily a realm of emotion, mystery, magic or intuition. Cognition was associated with science and problem solving, not with the creativity needed to fashion and appreciate artistic masterpieces. (p.136)

Whatever else they may be, artistic activities are seen as occasions for mental activities, some shared with other pursuits (such as attention to detail), others of special moments in the arts (sensitivity to compositional patterns, for example). **One who would traffic in the arts must become able to “read” and to “write” [cognitive activities] the symbol systems featured in the arts. (p.136)**

*On art education:*

**Particularly at younger ages (below, say, ten) production activities ought to be central in any art form.** Children learn best when they are actively involved in their subject matter; they want to have the opportunity to work directly with materials and media; and in the arts, these strengths and inclinations almost always translate into the making of something.

Perceptual, historical, critical and other “peri-artistic” activities should be closely related to, and (wherever possible) emerge from, the child’s own productions.

**Arts curricula need to be presented by teachers or other individuals with a deep knowledge of how to “think” in an artistic medium** (note: that is, for example, one should teach music *through* music and not through language-Niel) To the extent that teachers do not already possess these skills, they ought to enroll in training regimens that can develop these cognitive capacities.



**Whenever possible, artistic learning should be organized around meaningful projects,** which are carried out over a significant period of time, and allow ample opportunity for feedback, discussion, and reflection.

In most artistic areas it will NOT be profitable to plan a K-12 sequential curriculum. Artistry involves a continuing exposure, at VARIOUS developmental levels, to certain core concepts, like style, composition, or genre; and to certain RECURRENT problems, like performing a passage with feeling or creating a powerful artistic image.

Assessments must respect the particular intelligences involved-musical skill must be assessed through musical means, not through “screens” of language or logic.

**Students need educational vehicles to explore and encounter their own feelings as well as those of other individuals when learning art. They must see that personal reflection is a respected and important activity; and their privacy should not be violated.**

It is important for students to understand that the arts are permeated by issues of taste and value that matter to anyone who is seriously engaged in the arts.

Art education needs to be a COOPERATIVE ENTERPRISE involving artists, teachers, administrators, researchers, and the students themselves.

Students should all have extended exposure to some art form, but that it not be one of the visual arts. Indeed, I would rather have an individual well versed in music dance *or* drama than one with a smattering of knowledge across the several lively arts. The former student will at least know what it is like to “think” in an art form and will retain the option of assimilating other art forms in later life; the latter individual seems consigned to remain a dilettante, if not to become a drop-out. (pp.141-143)

**What are we trying to accomplish through arts education for each and every child?**

Howard Gardner writes in *Creating Minds*:  
*Creative individuals wish to be creative, and they organize their lives so as to heighten the likelihood that they will achieve a series of creative breakthroughs.*

One of the things we teach through the arts is the manner by which creative artists organize their world to create the best environment for producing new thought. From the way a painter sets up her studio, to the way a dancer prepares her body each day for the new steps to be created with that body, arts experiences show the value of organization and discipline and the truth that the only true freedom in art is found through a thorough understanding of the discipline itself and its rules.

**VI a The Reggio Emilia method.**

**The educators in Reggio Emilia view**

**The child as protagonist. All children have preparedness, potential, curiosity, and interest in constructing their learning, negotiating with everything their environment brings to them.**

**The child as collaborator. Education has to focus on each child in relation to other children, the family, the teachers, and the community rather than on each child in isolation. There is an emphasis on work in small groups. This practice is based on the social constructivist model that supports the idea that we form OURSELVES through our interaction with peers, adults, things in the world and SYMBOLS.**

**The child as communicator. This approach fosters children's intellectual development through a systematic focus on symbolic representation, including words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, and music, which leads children to surprising levels of communication, symbolic skills, and creativity. CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO USE MANY MATERIALS IN ORDER TO DISCOVER AND COMMUNICATE WHAT THEY KNOW, UNDERSTAND, WONDER ABOUT, QUESTION, FEEL, AND IMAGINE. IN THIS WAY THEY MAKE THEIR THINKING VISIBLE THROUGH THEIR MANY NATURAL "LANGUAGES"**

**The environment as third teacher. The design and use of space encourages encounters, communication, and relationships. Every space in a classroom has an identity and a purpose, is rich in potential to engage and to communicate, and is valued and CARED FOR by children and adults.**

**The teacher as partner, nurturer and guide. Teachers facilitate children's exploration of themes, work on short- and long-term projects, and guide experiences of joint open-ended discovery and PROBLEM SOLVING. To know how to plan and proceed with their work, teachers listen and observe children closely. Teachers ask questions, discover children's ideas, hypotheses, and theories; and provide occasions for discovery and learning**

**The teacher is seen as a researcher and engage in continuous discussion and interpretation of their work and the work of children. THE CURRICULUM IS A LIVING BREATHING ENTITY, NOT SOME DOCUMENT.**

**The documentation of outcomes produced is the communication of the process involved**

**The parent as partner. The exchange of ideas between parents and teachers, favor the development of a new way of educating, which helps teachers to view the participation of families not as a threat but as an intrinsic element of collegiality and as the integration of different wisdoms.**

**On assessment**

**From *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice (Basic Books)***

To my mind, it is the proper mission of educated individuals, as well as those who are under their charge, to engage in regular and appropriate reflection on their goals, the various means to achieve them, their success (or lack thereof) in achieving these goals, and the implications of the assessment for rethinking goals or procedures.

**I define assessment as the obtaining of information about the skills and potentials of individuals, with the dual goals of providing useful feedback to individuals and useful data to the surrounding community. What distinguishes assessment from testing is the former's favoring of techniques that elicit information in the course of ordinary performance and its general uneasiness with the use of formal instruments administered in a neutral, decontextualized setting.**

Rather than being imposed "externally" at odd times during the year, assessment ought to become part of the natural learning environment.(p. 174)

*On promoting "specialization" during middle childhood:*

I recommend some degree of specialization during middle-childhood -roughly from the ages of eight to fourteen. While children are mastering the crucial literacies, they should also have the opportunity to attain significant levels of skill in a small number of domains (disciplines). ...A ten year old might take music or art lessons, , engage in one after-school sport, gymnastic or dance activity, and have regular cumulative lessons in a subject like history, biology, or mathematics. I favor this, for two reasons. First of all, I think it is important that youngsters early on receive some demonstrations of what it means, on a day to day basis, to master a subject matter or a cluster of skills. Secondly... an individual is more likely to achieve a satisfactory life-to make a contribution to society and gain self-esteem-if he or she finds vocational and avocational niches that complement his or her own aptitudes.

How should one go about choosing these areas?...I believe that reasonable assessments of a child's strengths can be made in middle childhood...however, it is possible that even when these couplings are made at random, the results need not be unhappy...children become quite attached to those areas to which their attention has been directed and in which their skills have been assiduously cultivated.

**I would urge that at the beginning of any specialization, there needs to be a period of relatively unstructured exploration, during which the possibilities of the medium or symbol system are widely sampled. (pp.194-195)**