

VANCOUVER BOARD OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Arts Policy Research Findings 2003

The following research describes the relationship that participation in the arts has to a wide range of social sectors and interests. The illustrations provide related examples of projects that have taken place within Vancouver in the past ten years. Some, but not all, came out of Park Board funded projects.



Community Walls Community Voices
Clark Park along Commercial Drive
Artists, Dan Bushnell, Richard Tetrault and
Gerry Whitehead
Sponsored by the Native Education Centre, this
project was funded in part by the City of
Vancouver Community Public Art Program,
the Park Board Neighbourhood Matching Fund
The artists worked with community members
on the theme of 'Origins'
2003

HEALTH

The relationship of community arts to health was elaborated in a draft research paper entitled *Arts and Culture in Medicine and Health* commissioned by the Cultural Services Branch of the Province of BC.

“Community based arts initiatives contribute to the development and maintenance of supportive community environments that are positively correlated with health. Research in both the United States and the United Kingdom demonstrates that engaging in community arts projects can:

- develop community identification and pride;
- build community social networks;
- provide vehicles to recognize all participants in a community, including affirming the pride of marginalized groups and improving their local image;
- promote inter-cultural understanding
- provide safe avenues for addressing difficult social issues;
- reduce or resolve interracial, intercultural and intergenerational fears and conflicts;
- build local organizational capacity.”

Mike White, Director of Projects, Centre for Arts and Humanities in Health and Medicine at the University of Durham, England, wrote a paper called *Arts in Mental Health for Social Inclusion*. He found that “by its very nature art pushes against barriers, boundaries and preconceptions and its creative energy in promoting social inclusion may necessarily be volatile. This is why qualitative evidence from participants repeatedly affirms the felt experience through art as a counter to the circumstances and symptoms of mental ill health. The most successful projects are those that lay down a social pathway to channel awakened enthusiasm.”

Professor Graham Welch, Chair of Music Education at the University of London has spent 30 years studying aspects of singing and reports that “people who sing are healthier than people who don’t. Singing gives the lungs a workout, tones up abdominal & intercostal muscle and the diaphragm, and stimulates circulation. It makes us breathe more deeply than even many forms of strenuous exercise, so we take in more oxygen, improve aerobic capacity and experience a release of muscle tension as well.”



Strathcona Marimba Project
Artists in Residence, Terry Hunter and Harvey Desroches, built marimbas with the Strathcona community to be used for community events. (2001)

LEARNING

Numerous studies describe the benefits of the arts in learning. Dr. Mark Jude Tramo, a neurobiologist at Harvard University Medical School studies music and learning.

“Undeniably, there is biology of music.... Many of the same neurons that are used in music are also used in math, language, and thinking. Scientists believe that learning how to play an instrument like the piano or drums will not only make you a musician, it may make you a better student.”

In South Africa, “Edudance” is a successful program that uses dance to teach academic principles to children in the townships.

Community Soundscape
Artist Luke Blackstone worked with students at Strathcona Elementary and others in the neighbourhood to create kinetic sculptures reflecting the cultures of Strathcona (1995)



A National Assessment conducted in 1999-2002 by Queen’s University Faculty of Education researchers, Dr. R. Uptis and Dr. K. Smithrim, found that students enrolled in Ontario’s Learning Through the Arts (LTA) program scored 11 percentile points higher in mathematics than their peers in regular school programs.

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

Researcher, Robert Putnam, did a study of Italian regions called *Making Democracy Work*. He discovered a positive correlation “between the vigour of voluntary organisations, particularly choral societies and choirs, and the level of civic engagement. In other words, the more people sang in groups, the higher the level of involvement in the tasks that a healthy community needs to do to care for itself.”

Youth consultation on the arts
Asset Mapping
Roundhouse September 2003



SOCIAL INCLUSION

A draft report by researcher, Steven Jang, commissioned as a starting point for a cultural plan for the Downtown Eastside in 2003 by Vancouver’s Office of Cultural Affairs, states that “community development workers and their organizations report again and again the unique power of arts and culture in outreach to otherwise alienated communities.... Research has shown that an increase in community arts and culture programming leads to increased rates of civic participation in general”



Mosaic Creek Park
Grandview Woodlands residents created and installed over 300 mosaics for a new park at Charles and MacLean Streets. Project facilitated by Sarah White with artists Glen Andersen and Kristine Germann (1996)

YOUTH

Shirley Brice Heath is a Stanford University professor whose research has centered on the out-of-school lives of young people and who has studied the effect of both sports-based and arts-based activities on youth. While acknowledging the value of sports, she also studies how the arts build self-esteem. “In arts -based environments, young people draw upon many sources of authority. They bring in television, their family, their teachers, their opinions, anything, and they are able to do so as authorities themselves. Many youth programs talk about helping young people ‘find their voice’ but it’s only the arts that deliver on that promise.”



Graffiti mural on Cedar Cottage Park Photo G. Maurer

PLANNING

In Great Britain art projects are used to stimulate urban regeneration. François Matarasso, a writer and researcher in England, specialising in the role of culture in democratic society has studied the social impact of participation in the arts and how the arts reduce exclusion of groups in society. He discovered that “the imaginative use of arts techniques in involving communities in decisions about the nature and direction of local government helped residents and councils to work together.”

The Trout Lake Restoration Project brought together community members to create through art processes a Community Action Plan presented to the Park Board for implementation (1996)



CROSS CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

In New Zealand, the City of Bournemouth commits to using the arts “in raising awareness of environmental and social issues and contributing to the greater understanding and appreciation of our world and its many varied cultures.” The arts, not always dependent on the spoken word, can cross language divides and provide valuable opportunities for expression by those not sharing a common language.



Artist at Work Program
Dahabo and Khadija from Somalia
demonstrate traditional weaving at
Kerrisdale Community Centre

SENIORS

The City of Christchurch acknowledges that “the arts play a role in enabling older people to uphold their rights to independence, participation, access to opportunities and resources and contribution to the economy. Scientific findings show that music-making helps make active older Americans healthier. Significant increases in Human Growth Hormone, (*implicated in such aging phenomena as osteoporosis, energy levels, wrinkling, sexual function, muscle mass, and aches and pains*) decreases in anxiety, depression and loneliness resulted following keyboard lessons.” (Frederick Tims, Ph.D., MT-BC, Chair of Music

Therapy at Michigan State University)



Many Faces, Many Places, Many Flavours, Many Living Things

A 100 year old resident and friend at Mount St. Joseph's Hospital , paint banners on a theme of health and diversity for Banners on Broadway in Mount Pleasant (1996)

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Parallel to concepts of financial, physical and human capital, social capital describes the capacity for mutual co-operation towards the collective well-being within a community or wider society. In 1994, the Community Cultural Development Unit of the Australia Council for the Arts supported a national study to examine the long term value of community based arts projects. By Deidre Williams, the study, *Creating Social Capital* indicated that community based, collaborative arts programs and projects are highly effective in producing the following social capital outcomes:

- Improved communication of ideas and information
- Improved skills in planning and organising activities
- Improved understanding of different cultures or lifestyles
- Improved consultation between government and community
- Increased appreciation of community arts

“The social legacy (of mosaic making) is in giving ordinary citizens, artists and non-artists alike, the opportunity to learn a traditional technique and contribute personalized markings to their neighbourhood. In turn, the viewing public expands its sense of how the individual can interface with modern society, seeing a visible confirmation of citizenship in action.

With each new project, I am encouraged by people's eagerness to take on this opportunity, reinforcing in me a general recognition that liveable environments, in order to feel and look healthy and encourage belonging, must bear the stamp of human hands and voices”

Glen Andersen, Community Artist



Pebble mosaic in West Point Grey facilitated by Artist in Residence Glen Andersen (2000)

In some towns in the United Kingdom, dance has been integrated into the fabric of society and its institutions, and has become recognized as a powerful tool for social development. Dance has also been used as an alternative approach to teaching key life skills such as raising self-esteem, cooperative and creative problem solving, improving social behaviour, and addressing issues of social exclusion and access.



Move It,
A dance residency with Joe Ink,
at the West End and Coal
Harbour Community Centres
sees senior, Lilo Petermann take
a lead.
(2002)

In 2001, The Rockefeller Foundation published a valuable resource document called *Creative Community, the Arts of Cultural Development*. Authors, Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard indicate that two of the tenets of this practice are:

- Culture is an effective crucible for social transformation, one that can be less polarising and create deeper connections than other social-change arenas.
- Cultural expression is a means of emancipation, not the primary end in itself; the process is as important as the product.

Celebrating the Lunar New
Year in Victory Square,
with Dragon River musicians,
Zhongxi Wu and Karen Wong
This event was a first-time
collaboration among the
Friends of Victory Square, the
Carnegie Community Centre,
Downtown Eastside Residents
Association and the Chinatown
Revitalization Committee.
2003



THE ENVIRONMENT

The field of environmental or ecological art often involves a collaboration between artists and scientists. In the words of Ruth Wallen, a teacher at Goddard College Vermont and UC San Diego, it “addresses both the heart and the mind. Art can help develop an intuitive appreciation of the environment, address core values, advocate political action and broaden intellectual understanding. Eco-art may explore, re-envision, or attempt to heal aspects of the natural environment that have gone unnoticed or reflect human neglect.”



In my forest...

In my forest, we are all equal
In my forest, we do not have any problems
In my forest, we are free
In my forest, we only have bodily needs
In my forest, we do not need the city
In my forest, we are all treated with respect
In my forest, we have the mind and heart as one
In my forest, we hear with our heart
In my forest, we have a forest body
In my forest, we learn our lessons from the forest

Michelle Silongah

Forest of Words

Students from John Oliver and Churchill Secondary Schools, worked with Park Board staff at Queen Elizabeth Park and artists, Ahava Shira and Tina Overbury, creating images and poems to increase their understanding of the importance of nature in their lives.

1999

JOY, ENCHANTMENT, PASSION, IMAGINATION

Beyond all the social values that the arts bring to our lives is an experience that defies categories. Art opens our hearts and intensifies our lives, provides substance for contemplation and transports us to distant realms.

“..one thing I have learned and believe with unshakable conviction, is that engagement with art - with the product of someone else’s imagination - can change your life for the better and sometimes profoundly.... A moment spent with art can provide direction, meaning, balance and order in a world that all too often seems unadulterated chaos”

Max Wyman July 2003

‘If I had my life to live over again, I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once a week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied would thus have been kept active through use.

The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.’

Charles Darwin



Artist Kira Schaffer performs aerial Dance at the Roundhouse for the BCRPA Conference in May 2003

"The arts are more than just a major attraction for businesses and visitors; more than an economic boon; more than a quality of life issue. Arts give a city a voice. They shape and define an identity for a community -- pride, ownership, understanding and awareness. The arts embrace differences, possibilities, and the imagination. They are the essence of how our global society can be intimate, connected and engaging at a very human to human, neighbour to neighbour capacity -- and have universal implications and reach."

Community input to the City of Calgary' s Civic Arts Policy Review, March 2003