

## Performing Arts Workshop Programs at a Glance



- **Artists-in-Schools** places artists in Bay Area public school classrooms, where they teach residencies in Creative Movement, Theater Arts, and World Dance for students from preschool through middle school. Children of all abilities enjoy an exhilarating and affirming introduction to artistic expression while building skills such as critical thinking, communication, cooperation, and aesthetic and kinetic awareness.
- **Artists-in-Community** serves young people with tailored arts instruction in settings such as after-school programs, transitional housing facilities, and county community or court schools. The goal is to utilize the arts to develop academic, critical thinking, and social skills as well as enhance efficacy by strengthening esteem, knowledge, and respect.
- **Professional Development Workshops** give educators ways to strengthen concentration, enhance verbal and non-verbal communication skills, and encourage their students' participation and imagination through the arts.
- **Artist Internships** train artists to teach the creative process to young people using the Workshop's methodology. Internships provide mentorship and observation opportunities in conjunction with our Artists-in-Schools program.

For more information about our programs, please contact us at (415) 673-2634 or [paw@pawsf.org](mailto:paw@pawsf.org).



**Performing Arts Workshop**  
Fort Mason Center, C-265  
San Francisco, CA 94123



Visit the Workshop's Web site! [www.pawsf.org](http://www.pawsf.org)

# WORKSHOP *Notes*

Newsletter of the Performing Arts Workshop • Summer 2003

## The Impact of Improvisation

By Anne-E. Wood

*Anne-E. Wood is a Workshop artist who teaches creative writing, theatre, and improvisation at Impact Community High School, a collaborative program for youth who are working towards completing their terms of juvenile probation. Anne-E. describes a recent class in creative problem solving through improvisation.*

I ask the class to pick a setting and one student screams out "psych ward." My instincts are to quickly veto that one: playing crazy is too easy. Too easy to justify all actions by saying "I know it doesn't make sense, but I'm crazy, so it doesn't have to." But I don't want to squash the energy that the kids are pouring into this small improvisation class. They are "on" today. They are listening, performing, laughing, responding, and offering constructive criticism. So I decide to go with it. "Okay, okay, the setting is a psych ward. But I want you to show me who you are, where you are and what you want. And it must be clear and specific, and you must react to the reality of the materials around you. That means no busting through walls, or instantly turning into superheroes. And the scene has to have a beginning, middle, and end, so no breaking character or laughing or shrugging your shoulders when you feel the story is dying." A handful of students volunteer to go up in front of the class.

The scene begins with a man in a straight-jacket. The student has put on his street jacket backwards to show an actual physical restraint. He comes up with a voice that suits this character: it changes back and forth from a very low growl to a high-pitched scream. The student has come up with a clear objective: to get out of the hospital. I coach him a little. "Keep the voice, but make sure we understand the actual words you're saying." He responds and almost instantly finds the humanity in this character: underneath the external per-



Students participating in a creative movement residency at Mission Education Center

formance of "craziness" is a character who really needs out. The actor shows this by pursuing this objective whole-heartedly.

The scene the students improvise involves four actors: the man in the straight jacket,

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his bunkmate, a doctor, and a character who hides under his hood and makes obscure comments that the others understand as clues that could possibly point to an escape. (I asked a student who almost never speaks and always hides under his hood to invent a character with the same habit).

The straightjacket man grows increasingly frustrated by the hooded man's vague comments while his bunkmate honestly tries to solve the puzzle. The doctor comes on and off stage, an authoritarian trying to keep down the noise and restore order in this establishment. This adds an enormous amount of tension to the scene: we see the characters' motivations for wanting to get out. The scene escalates as the characters humorously play off each others' frustrations. It becomes more physical, funny, sad, surprising and absurd as they begin to search the possibilities for escape and establish the boundaries of this oppressive setting. "Find an ending," I coach from the audience when the lines become circular. Their ending isn't realistic, but it is imaginative, and they perform it as though it is real: the "crazy" characters find a secret window and jump onto running horses to make their escape. The scene ends with the doctor wandering around the stage looking very angry and confused. I lead the audience in a round of applause.

**IMPROV - Continued page 3**

Performing Arts Workshop is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping young people develop critical thinking, creative expression, and basic learning skills through the arts.

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**Becoming an Advocate for Arts Education**

In a public opinion survey conducted by the California Arts Council last year, 100% of the random sample of 593 parents stated that the arts should be part of every child's school experience. These parents know that to have a chance at success in our society, all children need adequate language, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. Arts education is a powerful and proven method of building these abilities.

Research done by Elliot Eisner at Stanford and Howard Gardner at Harvard has shown that skills acquired through the arts are highly transferable to other areas of learning. Students can readily apply arts-related skills to academic subjects such as literature, math, science, or social studies. Moreover, participation in the arts can provide a reason -- sometimes the only reason -- for youth who are at risk of failure to become actively engaged in school. Studies show that many "problem" students become high achievers in arts education settings where their special talents and abilities can emerge.

*Champions of Change*, a study conducted in 1999 by the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities found that "the arts reach students in ways that they are not otherwise being reached... and recent educational research has produced insights into different styles of learning. This research addresses examples of young people who were considered classroom failures, perhaps 'acting out' because conventional classroom practices were not engaging them. These 'problem' students often became the high-achievers in arts learning settings. Success in the arts became a bridge to learning and eventual success in other areas of learning."

Most importantly, arts in the schools give every young person, regardless of talent or ability, the opportunity to transform their relationship to education. By learning to experiment uninhibitedly, by learning to follow curiosity for the adventure of discovery, students learn to perceive effort, work, and challenge as a pleasure. Dr. James Catterall of UCLA analyzed the school records of 25,000 students as they moved from grade 8 to grade 10. He found that students who studied the arts had higher grades, scored better on standardized tests, had better attendance records, and were more active in community affairs than other students. He also found that students from poorer families who studied the arts improved their overall school performance more rapidly than all other students.

You can support the role that art and culture play in improving student performance, promoting intercultural dialogue and in developing active citizenship, both at the local and global level. Please let your school board, your board of supervisors, your congressperson, and the



**CASE IN POINT**

Dr. Shirley Brice Heath of Stanford University completed a 10-year national study called, "Imaginative Actuality: Learning in the Arts During Nonschool Hours," based on the records of 30,000 young people participating in non-school youth programs of various types in urban areas where students were more likely to come from families on welfare or single family homes. Young people who participated in intensive arts programs after school stood out from the control group as listed below:

- Four times more likely to win an academic award such as being named to the honor roll.
- Eight times more like to receive a community service award.
- Three times more likely to win a school attendance award.
- Four times more likely to participate in a math or science fair.

The study looked at the unique aspect of the arts programs, peer critique and its contribution to fluency in language and self-confidence.

Source: CAC Web site (www.cac.ca.gov)

**ADVOCACY - Continued page 3**

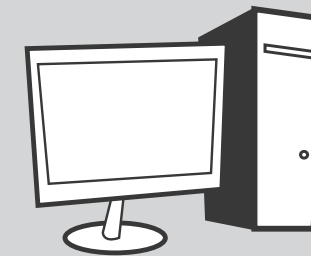
**A New Look for the Workshop**

As you may have noticed in this issue of *Workshop Notes*, Performing Arts Workshop has adopted a new logo design. The new logo was the product of three months of research and staff collaboration with San Francisco-based designer, Seth Goldstein. A new logo was required for two main reasons: First, public feedback indicated that the Workshop had outgrown the existing logo's ability to represent the mission and culture of the organization. Second, another Bay Area non-profit already used the P.A.W. acronym, prompting some confusion among people unfamiliar with our organization.



At the beginning of the design process, staff members described what they liked and disliked about the existing logo and what they wanted to see in a new design. Staff members also reviewed dozens of logos from all types of public service agencies and corporations to identify desirable concepts and aesthetics. Then, Mr. Goldstein presented several symbols to the staff that could serve as a starting point for the logo design. Among these, the hanging lightbulb stood out because it embodied a set of ideas that suited the mission and culture of the Workshop: Creativity, energy, innovation, the performing arts, and so on.

Finally, stakeholders reviewed graphic treatments for the lightbulb icon, varying in color, illustrative style, texture and typography, and through a process of feedback and revision the new design was agreed upon. In the coming weeks and months, you will probably notice our new design showing up on everything from stationary to our Web site (www.pawsf.org.) We hope you like it! ■



**We need a computer!**

The Workshop is looking for a new or used PC in good condition for use as our office server. Have one you'd like to donate? It's tax-deductible! Contact us at paw@pawsf.org or (415) 673-2634.

**IMPROV - Continued**

Stanislavsky says "Acting is behaving truthfully in imaginary situations." We cannot cover all the nuances of this idea in an hour acting class at Impact. But just by experimenting with this scene, the students learned that the best acting does come from the honest, relentless pursuit of specific objectives. I learned when they are given some boundaries, a group of probation high school students can turn a potentially disastrous scene it into a piece of art that is dynamic, outrageous, and most importantly, alive. ■

**ADVOCACY - Continued**

President know that you want the arts to be a part of every young person's education. Join Performing Arts Workshop, the California Arts Council, Americans for the Arts and other advocacy groups working to make sure that youth have the benefit of a complete education, one that provides them with an opportunity to explore ideas about themselves and their world. ■

Give the gift of creativity!



The Workshop is dedicated to keeping art alive in public education and after-school activities.

The facts are that arts education:

- Is essential for young people to develop to their fullest ability.
- Strengthens student problem-solving and critical thinking skills.
- Can help at-risk youth, providing an alternative to destructive behavior and another way for students to approach learning.
- Helps students develop a positive work ethic and pride in a job well done.
- Helps children and youth develop the mind and body by encouraging reflection and higher level thinking as well as active learning.

Research tells us what the arts can do. Please help make the arts a part of every young person's education and support Performing Arts Workshop with your contribution today.