

The beauty of Art in elementary schools



Pressured to raise test scores and squeezed for dollars, school districts have taken it out on the arts. They've treated them as expendable, though they're critical to the well-being of children.

But slowly and patiently, grants from the non-profit Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley have helped to restore arts education in elementary schools of Santa Clara County.

On Monday, Cultural Initiatives' Creative Education Program marked its 5th birthday — a graduation of sorts for 127 schools. Representing 17 of 21 elementary districts in Santa Clara County, they've been weaned of funding and are now on their own, with the arts firmly in place in their classrooms.

Some \$3.6 million in grants have enabled them to buy supplies, create an arts curriculum, bring in artists in residence, and train classroom teachers to work dance, music and visual arts into their studies.

Until recently, the state didn't require that elementary school teachers take courses in teaching the arts. And so a generation of teachers missed that training to their students' detriment.

A grant from Cultural Initiatives enabled Mount Pleasant Elementary School District to hire Julie Van Dewark, a specialist in visual arts, to work individually with 100 classroom teachers five times a year. She demonstrates how to teach techniques of line, shading and primary colors, to work with collages and different me-

diams and to integrate arts into the curriculum. Her job, essentially, is to make herself obsolete. At first, she leads the classes and the teachers watch. Eventually, the teachers take over.

By exercising different parts of the mind, the arts can provide an avenue of success for students struggling with math and reading. They build self-confidence and keep kids engaged in school. They also bring out talents that teachers wouldn't otherwise see in students with learning disabilities or struggling with a new language.

BEAUTIFUL FUNDING

Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley was established with funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and two-dozen other foundations and corporations. For information about the Creative Education Program and a list of participating districts, see www.cisv.org/cep.shtml

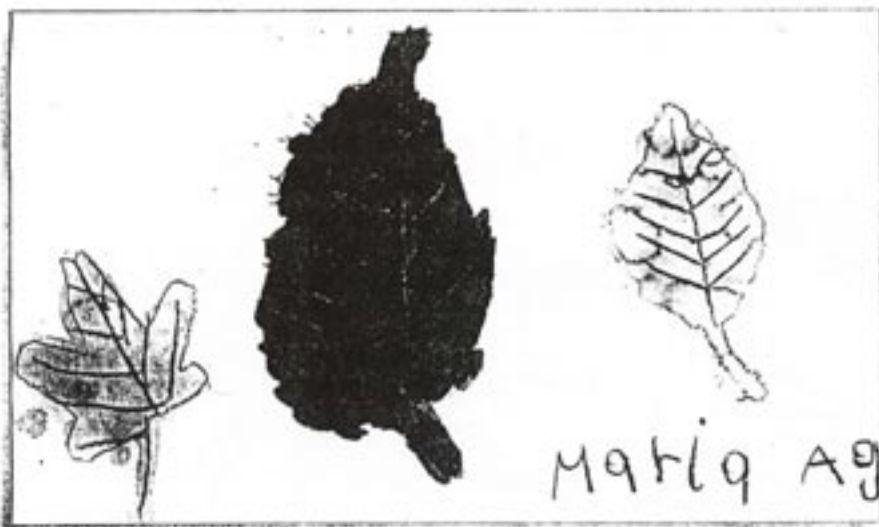
On Sunday, Oct. 3, March for the Arts, a major fundraising effort for youth arts programs, will take place in downtown San Jose. To learn more, see www.march4arts.com.

"Teachers will tell me, 'I didn't know a student could think that way,'" says Van Dewark. "They are amazed at what students can do."

In accepting the Cultural Initiatives' grants — about \$8,000 per school per year — districts agreed to adopt the state arts curriculum standards and, by the fifth year, to be self-supporting. The Cambrian School District is replacing the grant with money from a parcel tax.

Other schools use proceeds from scrip or regular district funds. San Jose Unified is creating an arts endowment in honor of retiring Superintendent Linda Murray. The initial fundraiser last Friday raised \$25,000.

When given the chance, the arts prove their worth. That starts with elementary teachers who are knowledgeable and comfortable including them in their classrooms.



Maria Aguilar drew this during a lesson in free-form shapes in Mrs. Campbell's kindergarten class at the Valle Vista Magnet School in the Mount Pleasant Elementary School District in San Jose. The classroom teachers get tips on teaching techniques from Julie Van Dewark, an arts specialist funded by a Cultural Initiatives grant.