

Preface

In 1993, the Arizona Commission on the Arts hired me to evaluate its Artist-in-Residence Program. For six months I traveled to different parts of the state, including urban Phoenix, rural Maricopa County, the pine-studded Coloradan Plateau, and the desert outskirts of Tucson. I collected extensive ethnographic data through observations and interviews. I found many fine examples of artists working with students to bring about extraordinary arts learning.

I found something else extraordinary: these programs were pulling parents and community members into the schools in ways they never had been before. Parents were volunteering; they were enthusiastic audience members; and they were collaborators with teachers and students in rich, arts-based projects. Time and again, my observations of these effects were confirmed by the testimony of teachers, administrators, artists, and the parents themselves. Later, in many other evaluations in the District of Columbia, Idaho, North Carolina, and Washington State, I saw these effects repeated.

Today we know that parent involvement is an indispensable ingredient in the menu of student success. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2002) recognizes this and makes it a core requirement of federal funding. And yet the engagement and often even the presence of parents remain elusive in many schools and districts. What then is the potent magic that will make this happen?

I believe that the answer, or a large piece of it, has always been right in front of us. It is the development and maintenance of good arts programs. This approach has all of the attributes of a good solution: as I demonstrate in this book, it works—consistently and significantly. It is politically acceptable, as hardly anyone anywhere does not appreciate and value some form of artistic expression. It brings about important outcomes for students by helping them learn. And in contrast to the many costly interventions schools have tried and continue to try, beginning an arts program can be relatively inexpensive.

Building Parent Involvement Through the Arts is designed to help make such programs a reality. It is intended for school administrators, teachers, and parents. It may also be very relevant to community arts and cultural organizations that work in partnership with schools (including museums, libraries, and arts organizations). It is designed as a ready-to-use tool kit of simple steps. It is not primarily a research publication, exploring the *why*, which is documented amply elsewhere, although several of its chapters explore the research base.

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Instead, it is mainly designed as an action-planning tool kit focusing on the *how*.

This book helps you to design and implement a program that uses the arts to increase family involvement. Chapter 1 summarizes what we know about the interconnections of the arts, parents, schools, and learning. Much of this current knowledge is reflected in federal and state programs, most notably NCLB, which mandates significant parent involvement outcomes as part of school reform.

Chapter 2 explores the many ways in which the arts create welcoming schools for parents and family members through the alteration of school cultures, and it looks at the exciting research emerging about the role of the arts in student achievement and the implications for parent involvement.

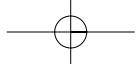
After these introductory chapters, the book moves more directly into applications. Chapters 3 through 7 describe ways to develop programs in visual art, theater, dance, music, and literary arts. Chapter 8 looks at folk and traditional arts from the same applied how-to perspective, with some additional explorations of the multicultural implications of traditional arts and their power to bond home to school. Each of these chapters includes specific project ideas and lesson plans.

From the traditional arts, Chapter 9 transitions to a consideration of ways to utilize community resources, including the wealth of arts organizations that many schools have at their doorsteps. Chapter 10 lays out specific plans for designing spaces for engaged learning and parent involvement, including arts-based classrooms and arts-based family centers. Chapter 10 also discusses the exciting potential of schools as centers of adult education in the arts.

Chapter 11 tells you how to begin planning, starting with an assessment of your school's current status and potential. It continues with specific guidance in developing integrated curricula and finding funding and support for your program. Chapter 12 explains how to evaluate your progress.

Throughout these chapters, *Building Parent Involvement* provides tools, templates, and forms for direct use in planning and creating programs. These complement the lesson plans and detailed project steps. It is hoped that through this design, practitioners will find this book not only readable but eminently practical on a daily basis.

Last, no work reflects a totally objective view of the world, unfiltered by the life experiences and critical judgments of its creator. Thus a word is in order about my philosophical stance and the approach of this book: in *Building Parent Involvement*, these precepts will be obvious and may provide comfort to some and discomfort to others. For example, purists, those who come from an *haute* culture view of the arts, may find occasional discomfort in this book's ready acceptance of pop culture and crafts as equally at home at the arts table. But my view is that the arts are as vital, organic, and ceaselessly changing as the peoples who gave life to them. After all, yesterday's bawdy entertainment in the Globe Theatre is today's Shakespearian masterpiece, and the barbaric thundering of an upstart nineteenth-century German pianist is today's Symphony No. 5 in C minor by Beethoven.



It is hoped that by reading a little more deeply, the guardians of high culture will find that behind the catholicity and openness of this book lies a deep reverence for the traditions and treasures that we have brought along on our human journey. Some are in the Louvre under glass, and some—maybe the next ones to be revered—are in the streets of our cities.

