

Arts education is vital at all stages for a well-rounded life



Amanda Karioth Thompson

MY VIEW

I remember it so clearly. Standing in Diane Whitney's music class, learning the lyrics and melody to her original song celebrating Tallahassee, my hometown. Even 30 years later, the chorus pops into my head every now and then.

It was magical, the idea that a group of elementary school students could give life to her unique invention and learn about musicianship and our community in the process. I realized then the power of arts education.

Many others recognize that power too, and seven years ago, Congress passed a resolution designating the second week of September as National Arts in Education Week. It states, in part:

"Arts education, comprising a rich array of disciplines including dance, music, theatre, media arts, literature, design, and visual arts, is a core academic subject and an essential element of a complete and balanced education for all students."

I would even go further to contend arts education is an integral part of living a fulfilled life.

I was raised in a household where arts and culture were part of the daily conversation. Family lore has it I at-

tended my first play as a newborn and appeared on stage just a few months later.

During grade school, I was involved in performing arts and was part of a local children's theater company. I also loved the visual arts and in third grade realized I wanted to be an art teacher. I loved my own art teacher, Priscilla Armor, and I loved the way I felt in her class.

I wouldn't have been able to articulate it, but I'm sure I wanted to make people feel that same way, valued and encouraged to explore and create. I went on to study visual art and art education at FSU, and had inspirational mentors whose lessons I carry with me today.

I was hired to create education programs at the Council on Culture & Arts before I'd even finished graduate school, a dream come true. By coincidence, COCA's executive director at the time, Peggy Brady, had also been the founding director of the same children's theater company I was part of as a little girl. It was as if my early arts education had come full circle and it was time for me to start passing along what I'd learned.

I've been at COCA for more than a decade and I continue to advocate for arts education programming, as do many others in our community. As an adjunct professor, I've been able to teach more than 250 education majors how to incorporate arts into their classrooms and I have the opportunity to work with arts teachers and stu-

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dents every day. I believe in life-long learning and I will forever be a student of the arts. I can't imagine a more joyful, satisfying, and creative life.

You can help ensure children and adults in our community have access to educational programming that inspires artistic exploration and creative development. Thank school board members and administrators for their support of arts education and advocate for more.

Tell your elected leaders arts education is an issue you care about. Volunteer in a school or a cultural institution to help support the good and vital work that our arts educators do. Donate supplies, materials and resources to help teachers and students get the tools they need to be successful. Share your own stories about arts teachers who helped you discover your own creative capacities.

Together we can ensure that the arts are part of a holistic and well-rounded education for everyone, at all stages of life.

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