

Doing Art Together and Re-Start sites Children's Village, Euphrasian House and Odyssey House

By Miranda K. Pennington

"The kids were very excited and we did great work. I think they were happy about [learning in English and Spanish]," said Mr. Garcia after a Doing Art Together art workshop at Children's Village. This year, Doing Art Together teaching artist Katherine Korba designed her curriculum in collaboration with Re-Start classroom teacher Flora Aller after being inspired by the work of poets such as Rubén Darío, T.S. Eliot, and Whitney Smith. In a recent lesson, the bilingual class discussed playgrounds, looked at examples of playground-inspired sculpture such as Isamu Noguchi's Slide Mantra and Patrick Dougherty's Stickworks, then the students began making their own playgrounds out of paper shapes.

After the workshop, Ms. Korba recalled one student's reflection on her own playground that she was very pleased with. She described her slide and jungle gym area with excitement and pride at the end of class. The works the students created are colorful, elaborate and inventive – and also distinct from one another, proof that they are thinking and imagining independent of one another.

The paper playground activity was also an opportunity to teach the students about careers in engineering and design – wherever possible, Doing Art Together (DAT) connects the art experience in the classroom to a real-world opportunity to use these skills. The students will go on to apply the construction techniques and understanding of balance that they learned from designing their playgrounds when they begin building with wood and studying architecture.

Teaching artist Nina Tantillo-Elton recently noted after a painting workshop at Euphrasian House that "it seemed as though some of the students were painting for the first time. . .At Odyssey House, one student said he'd 'never done anything like this' as he drew meticulously" over all four hours allotted for the project over two weeks of class time.

The student work speaks for itself – in their DAT workshops, Re-Start students develop their awareness of colors, shapes and artistic techniques. Not only building their visual literacy and vocabulary, they will expand their skill set over the course of the residency this semester. Since there's no pressure or criticism of their creations, they are free to experiment and play with materials in a nonjudgmental atmosphere of encouragement and creativity.

The relationship between Doing Art Together (DAT) and Re-Start is a longstanding and enriching one. Working in tandem, DAT and Re-Start have made hands-on visual arts workshops possible for the populations of Children's Village, Euphrasian House and Odyssey House for fifteen years. This partnership has helped residents of these Re-Start sites develop creative thinking and an understanding of artistic techniques that will allow students to express themselves in a brand new way.

All three workshops in the 2010 session are still in their first month of programming, so students are learning the basics of working with brushes, oil pastels and other unfamiliar tools and materials. DAT's philosophy is that the process is more important than the product; no student's work is critiqued or compared to the work of their classmates. Over the course of the semester-long residency, DAT teaching artists will provide their students with critical skills that transfer from art creation to life outside the classroom and residence facilities, such as self-expression, observation and patience. Bilingual instruction promotes literacy and facilitates English-acquisition in a fun way, incorporating new vocabulary into the art projects.

Each activity connects to the next, creating a sequential arts learning experience that builds from lesson to lesson. Following the workshop's completion, each site celebrates the experience with an exhibition. Time to reflect upon the process and the lessons learned is a crucial part of Doing Art Together's approach to arts education. Reflection is imperative for teaching artists as well, to ensure our programs are as rewarding as we know they can be for children and youth who need an artistic outlet in their lives.



