Part V

ANOTHER VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE
School Art Programs in Brooklyn District 15

Marjorie Wilson
Art Education Consultant
CONTENTS

Section
1. INTRODUCTION ................................................. 5-1
2. THE SETTING .................................................. 5-5
3. THE ART PROGRAM ........................................... 5-12
   The Face: Autonomy ........................................... 5-12
   The Obverse: Structure ....................................... 5-14
   The Structure of the Art Program ......................... 5-15
   Contests and Competition ................................. 5-22
   The District Art Show ....................................... 5-24
4. PRACTICE .................................................... 5-31
   The Perception and Purposes of Art and the Art Program 5-31
   Learning: The Face ........................................... 5-31
   Learning: The Obverse ........................................ 5-31
   The Learner: The Face ........................................ 5-34
   The Learner: The Obverse .................................... 5-36
   Elementary Classrooms and Teaching ....................... 5-37
   The Cluster: The Face ....................................... 5-37
   The Classroom Teacher: The Obverse ....................... 5-37
   Junior High School Classrooms and Teaching ............... 5-44
   The Face ..................................................... 5-44
   The Obverse .................................................. 5-46
5. SUMMARY ..................................................... 5-47
1. INTRODUCTION

A conversation with the Director of Art for the New York City Public Schools reveals—here as elsewhere—a deep concern for the state of art education. The highly autonomous nature of the thirty-two districts that comprise the complex educational structure of New York City would seem to make a uniform, structured, sequential curriculum unrealistic. Yet such a curriculum, in which art history, art criticism, and studio activities each have status is what Marcia Friedmutter\(^1\) would like to see in the city's public schools. It is her strong conviction that, if any of the community districts under her directorship approach the fulfillment of these desirable goals it is Brooklyn District 15.

With the advent of decentralization in 1970, New York City divided the centrally administered school board into 32 self-administered district school boards, the purpose being to "allow districts the flexibility and differentiation necessary to meet the varying needs of their students." The same publication of the New York City Board of Education states:

At the same time, the decentralization law also continues the powers vested in the Office of the Chancellor to "promulgate minimum educational standards and curriculum requirements for all schools and programs throughout the city district."\(^2\) It is hoped that Minimum Teaching Essentials K-9 will provide every educator with the knowledge of what must be taught in content and basic skills for each grade level in all curriculum areas, thus offering every student an instructional program governed by the approved curriculum. Presenting such essentials is also a step toward creating the continuity of instruction desirable for a city with high pupil mobility.\(^3\)

The expectation was that each city district should follow the prescribed approved curriculum consisting of content and basic skills for each grade level in all curriculum areas but that, because of the districts' newly assumed autonomy:

Students in most classrooms will be taught more than is specified as a minimum. Supervisors will innovate, enrich, and extend curricula whenever possible.

Minimum educational standards within the city districts are more highly specified for such subject areas as reading and mathematics, for which individual districts and personnel—superintendents, principals, teachers—are held accountable. However, autonomy allows districts to include as much or as little art education beyond the minimum standards as they wish.

A preliminary study of the Brooklyn 15 site revealed:

The superintendent, Dr. Jerrold Glassman, was seen as a strong proponent of the arts. He not only has extensive knowledge of the arts himself, but he sees them as having a central educational role and has given the arts top priority in his district. He believes that poetry, writing, art, and music are the things that will shape the lives of students.

There was a pervasive immersion in, concern with, and commitment to culture in general and to the arts in particular—by classroom teachers as well as art teachers, principals, and assistant principals. They worked independently and collectively to involve students in arts

\(^1\)Marcia Friedmutter is the Director of Art for the New York City Public Schools. Unless otherwise noted, all names used in this document are pseudonyms.

\(^2\)New York State Education Law, Article 52, paragraphs 2590-h.

\(^3\)Minimum Teaching Essentials, New York City Board of Education, Office of Curriculum Development and Support, Division of Curriculum & Instruction, 1979, p. v.
programs and to assure their education in art. As one administrator said, “I want them to know there is a Picasso.” It is this prevalent attitude, and the relentless quest for and pursuit of culture, that makes the arts at District 15 an exciting and a vital part of its programs. It was particularly exciting to see this involvement because of the ethnicity of the community. The population of one school in the district, for example, is more than 98 percent Hispanic, and the majority of the residents derive from perhaps three small neighboring towns in Puerto Rico. They live in Brooklyn as they did in Puerto Rico—in barrios. Brooklyn District 15 offered the opportunity to see the effect of immersion in the arts and in museums on culturally diverse groups of children and to hear those children discussing their expanding vision of the world as seen through the wonders of art.

The autonomy, coupled with the strong commitment to the arts, allowed individual principals and assistant principals to establish elementary school programs involving the arts far beyond the minimum requirements. In one school, for example, the principal and assistant principal had designated one teacher to be a full-time art appreciation teacher—in addition to the teacher who taught “studio” art. For every month of the school year, a painting was assigned to each classroom—Grades 2 through 6—to be a part of the ongoing general curriculum taught by the classroom teacher; and once a week the children carried this Painting of the Month to the art appreciation room, there to be studied, discussed, described, analyzed, and interpreted.

The arts coordinator had worked to assure that in each of the 25 schools in the district, there were teachers who taught art. In addition to art teachers at the two intermediate and three junior high schools, there was one teacher designated as art specialist in 19 of the 20 elementary schools; 18 schools in which there was also at least one teacher using the district’s nonremedial version of “Learning to Read Through the Arts.” In essence, these teachers became additional art staff; and there were selected classroom teachers in the elementary schools into whose programs the arts were fully integrated. In most schools a separate room or rooms was designated for the teaching of art.

The arts coordinator had conceived a program, based on curriculum guides of New York City and New York State, supplemented by a guide written by the arts coordinator herself, and a yearly thematic infusion, often involving use of the museums and cultural resources of Brooklyn and New York City. Themes such as “Art Through the Ages” and “The Treasures of New York” ensured the study of art and artists. In the latter case, each school adopted one of New York City’s many museums and the students then set up a mini-museum in their own schools.

To support the arts coordinator's basic formulation and to ensure its application, an extensive in-service program was established, including in-class demonstrations, morning-long workshops with lunch hour evaluation sessions, bi-monthly meetings with teachers responsible for art programs, and regular after-school workshops. In addition to the demonstrations given by the arts coordinator herself, experts were frequently brought in to demonstrate quilting, puppet making, or drawing or to speak on contemporary Brooklyn portrait artists, or fiber artists, how to look at a painting, and the use of the museum as a resource.

To supplement meager funding for art programs, sources of grants and funding were assiduously sought, and the cultural resources offered by the city were fully utilized.

Grants such as Project Muse, “a collective effort between teachers and administrators of [District 15] and instructors and consultants from the Brooklyn Museum,” funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, provided the opportunity to write an entire year’s program incorporating museum study into the general classroom curriculum.
Some of the cultural resources involving students and teachers are such programs as The Lincoln Center Institute (ten representatives of the staffs of seven District 15 schools attended the summer institute), Eliot Feld Ballet, and Brooklyn Arts and Culture Association (the first two are primarily performance oriented, and the last includes children’s art exhibits and scholarships for talented art students as well); and The Studio in a School, an artist-in-residence program.

An integration of art history into the art and general classrooms was made possible by the effective use of the cultural resources of Brooklyn and New York City. The utilization of art museums, in diversely distinct and separate ways, is an ongoing part of the art program.

In one elementary school all of the students make at least one trip to an art museum each year, with some classes making as many as six additional trips, often to museums.

One series of museum visits—coordinated with the yearly art theme—also illustrated the immersion of children in works of art, and the production of works based on the styles of artists. In the resulting set of four murals depicting Prospect Park (in Brooklyn), each mural was painted in a particular style of art—Cubism, Pointillism, Expressionism, and Surrealism—observed by students at the Museum of Modern Art.

Another school assures that students will be exposed to the arts in museums by training parents to serve as docents; in this way several small groups are able to visit the Brooklyn Museum and the Metropolitan Museum in lieu of a single, less wieldy group. The parents come into the classroom and, for a period a week for four or five weeks before the scheduled museum trip, they prepare students to look at and to talk about the works of art and try to stimulate the students’ thinking about the decisions faced by the artist in the production of the work.

Museums Collaborative, a program offered to only one school in the district in the school year 1983–1984—but since expanded—trained teachers and administrators to integrate museum and cultural education into the curriculum, worked at curriculum development, offered workshops, conducted long-term projects with students using the resources of many of the city’s cultural institutions including the Brooklyn Museum, Metropolitan Museum, Cooper-Hewitt Museum, Asia Society, and the Jewish Museum.

Some of the schools had developed their own art “museums” consisting of rooms that had been set aside for changing monthly exhibits of student artwork. There was also a complete Colonial Museum, ensconced in two rooms of one elementary school, complete with an extensive collection of art and artifacts worthy of a more distinguished home. This latter museum was available for visits from other schools, both in and out of the district.

A strong tradition of the presentation of student artwork to the community prevailed. In addition to the community contests and competitions, the yearly “Salute to Brooklyn’s Creative Youth” exhibition produces works that are selected to hang in the Brooklyn Museum’s community gallery, while the remaining pieces are hung in libraries, banks, and merchant’s windows, such as the Brooklyn Gas Co. Some of the paintings of the Brooklyn Bridge this year found their way into the Fifth Avenue (N.Y.C.) windows of Fortunoff’s. The culmination of the year’s work on the theme takes place through individual building exhibitions and a major exhibition at the district office. Selected works from this yearly exhibit in May have also periodically been shown in the windows of Abraham & Straus—a major Brooklyn department store—the Brooklyn Museum, and Radio City Music Hall.

Possibly the most vital aspect of the program at Brooklyn District 15 was the high level of energy that was continuously recharged. The arts coordinator had devised a program that was yearly revitalized, renewed, and recreated, that dealt with and tied together all the diverse
demands of an autonomous district, the city and state requirements including art history and art appreciation, various contests and competitions—optional and obligatory—the yearly theme, individual school, district, and citywide art shows and activities. At the same time the program continued to search out, select from, and append the extensive educational opportunities offered by the many and varied cultural resources of New York City.

With all of its diversity, Brooklyn District 15 is still greater than the sum of its parts. It has, at the district level, all of the necessary and sufficient pieces for a basic program. It is united by a spirit and a desire for art and culture that transcends its often less than aesthetic surroundings, and by the considerable efforts of the superintendent, arts coordinator, administrators, and individual teachers.\footnote{For more information about Brooklyn District 15's art program, contact Dr. Jerrold Glassman, Superintendent, School District 15, 360 Smith Street, Brooklyn, New York 11231.}

Because Brooklyn District 15 is less a corporation than an amalgamation, I have deemed it best to present the pluralistic and often contradictory nature of Brooklyn's art education in the words of those who have forged and shaped it.
2. THE SETTING

When you have forded the river, when you have crossed the mountain pass, you suddenly find before you the city of Moriana, its alabaster gates transparent in the sunlight, its coral columns supporting pediments encrusted with serpentine, its villas all glass like aquariums where the shadows of dancing girls with silvery scales swim beneath the medusa-shaped chandeliers. If this is not your first journey, you already know that cities like this have an obverse: you walk in a semicircle and you will come into view of Moriana’s hidden face, an expanse of rusting sheet metal, sackcloth, planks bristling with spikes, pipes black with soot, piles of tins, blind walls with fading signs, frames of staved-in straw chairs, ropes good only for hanging oneself from a rotten beam.

From one part to the other, the city seems to continue, in perspective, multiplying its repertoire of images; but instead it has no thickness, it consists only of a face and an obverse, like a sheet of paper, with a figure on either side, which can neither be separated nor look at each other.  

Italo Calvino

Notes: M. Wilson

Coming from the securely middle-class suburb of [Whitehall] into the sometimes garbage-strewn streets of Brooklyn creates a kind of culture-shock, and when confronted with reticence and suspicion in place of openness and acceptance, with tales of one young boy being stabbed outside of one of the district’s schools as he waited to enter, to start the school day, or of another who was shot and killed in the crossfire between two rival street gangs as he returned from a birthday party with his family, or finding oneself drawn to look beneath the wheels of the car for the cause of the children’s curiosity and finding a dead rat there, or encountering signs outside of a school reading: “WARNING: AREA PATROLLED BY ARMED GUARDS,” one begins to wonder what the study of art, of art history and criticism has to do with these people. Poverty, rats, drugs, garbage, prostitution, language barriers are the reality. Perhaps the idea of introducing art history and art criticism in the schools along with studio art is elitist. The same questions keep coming to mind. What are the realities of teaching in an urban setting such as this? of teaching art history and art criticism?

Jerrold Glassman, Superintendent

It’s a tough time; it’s tough in terms of what these people are living through out there. With inadequate medical care, undue pressures on them, unemployment. Yeah, I’m talking about where the kid LEAVES at 8:40 in the morning.

Harvey Possner, Principal

We do have students representing 32 nationalities. In fact I like to refer to this school as the “Little United Nations,” cause it’s a melting pot; and the community itself is a melting pot.

---


6These notes have been excerpted from fieldnotes made from December, 1982, to June, 1983.

7Jerrold Glassman is the Superintendent of Schools, District 15, Brooklyn, New York.

8Harvey Possner is the Principal of P.S. 154, District 15, Brooklyn, New York.
And integration in our school or community has not been forced; it's just evolved naturally. I think we are rather a unique community.

Rosa Lopez, Principal

When I have morning duty they are all talking about what happens—this one and this one dies and that one got killed and I know it's not what we would like them to talk about but that is the reality of their lives.

You have complete command of English language; my kids don't. They are fluent in English; but no way do they have English language acquisition like you do. When kids go home here they watch the Spanish soap opera. I did the research myself. The whole neighborhood speaks Spanish, they go to the grocery store they speak Spanish, go to the drug store they speak Spanish, they go to the bank they speak Spanish. What the kids learn at school here, they don't practice it. There's no reinforcement of the English language skills at home.

Mata Scalzi, Principal

All the gangs in the city of New York are right here. You name the gang, I'll tell you the gang members.

Harold Cartwright, Principal

We have in this school about 50-51 percent white, 24 percent Hispanic—not all Puerto Rican—many from the Islands, from South America, 23 percent black children and about 2-3 percent Asian. But my white population is very diverse. I have at least 60 to 70 children who are Russian Jews—recent immigrants whose home language is Russian. I have a good percentage of Albanians, Yugoslavians, Gypsies, and then I have everything else—all mixed. It's beautiful. I wouldn't trade that percentage.

The principals in District 15 characterize their individual school neighborhoods as “a melting pot.” The total number of Hispanic students in the district is 62 percent, but the range is so great that one school's population is 99 percent Hispanic, another is 85 percent, and yet another 24 percent. The black population seems to remain in the 20 percent range; the largest white population is 60 percent, the smallest 1 percent. This latter often consists of such diverse mixes as Russians, Albanians, and Yugoslavians; Germans, Lebanese, Israelis, and Iranians. Many of these students are non-English-speaking immigrants (ESL—English as a second language—is a staple in the curriculum); 24 of the 25 schools in the district meet the poverty guidelines for Chapter I—defined by one principal:

Getting Title [Chapter] One status is [determined by] a very cut-and-dried statistical survey. They take all the children in the school and they check if they are on or entitled to a free lunch and that becomes a percentage—the number of children on free lunch to the total number of children in the school. And then they go into the entire attendance district of your school, which is your whole pattern of school and they do a study and they find out the percentage of children in that area who are on Aid to Dependent Children and those two percentages are averaged and if it falls below a certain cut-off—which also changes yearly—you don't get Title One status. And there are many, many demographic reasons for whether you get it or not—depending upon where you live.

Reading scores for the year 1980-1981 show that 51 percent of second-graders tested were reading at or above their grade level; 6 percent, two years below grade level. Only 35.6 percent
of ninth-graders tested were reading at grade level or above, and 30.9 percent, two years below grade level.

Lon Gileski, Jr. High School Art Teacher

These are basically city kids. They're urban New York kids who have, to a greater or lesser degree, street savvy. There are any number of behavior problems, nothing drastic but kids who can't sit still in their seats, who erupt into fights, reading difficulties or comprehension difficulties masked by acting up.

My feeling after all these years is that these are junior high school kids who are basically street people. They deal with each other on that basis and although I try and curtail some of the more deviant or obvious verbalizations they still will continue to deal on that basis and you have to let some of that stuff slide. And you can talk about respect for others, not offending people, but you can't say "ladies present"; that doesn't work. The girls will say "I hear that goddamn stuff all the time." They're at a point now where they're neither kids nor adults and they're going through hormonal changes and they're really firecrackers just waiting to be lit.

Jerrold Glassman, Superintendent

This is a city and it is the confluence of ideas that makes the city and here's where they are going to see all of the various groups and sub-groups and all of the excitement of what does occur in a city as opposed to the homogeneous, suburban or rural ennui. There's nothing as exciting as the city. With all due respect to isolated inland cities, who is going to be the leader in the communication fields, in the media, who is going to be at the center of this when the industry emanates from the major cities? One of those kids at P.S. 131 may be involved in TV one day and will be able to speak from a street fair to the launching of a missile to a black market in orphan babies.

And, of course, there is the obverse: the vast cultural oasis that is New York City, that is a reality to which most teachers of art, as well as administrators, aspire for the children in their charge, its theater and dance and music and art. Indeed, the intellectual roots of the Brooklyn District 15 art program are firmly founded in culture and its pursuit and in New York City. In his essay "Here Is New York," E. B. White describes three New Yorks, the one of the native-born New Yorker, that of the commuter, and that of "the person who was born somewhere else and came to New York in quest of something," and then adds:

Of these three trembling cities the greatest is the last—the city of final destination, the city that is a goal. It is this third city that accounts for New York's high-strung disposition, its poetical deportment, its dedication to the arts, and its incomparable achievements. Commuters give the city its vital restlessness, natives give it solidity and continuity, but the settlers give it passion.

Perhaps it is the passion imparted to the city by "the settlers"; certainly it is "its poetical deportment, its dedication to the arts, and its incomparable achievements" to which District 15 aspires, native, commuter, and settler alike.

Jerrold Glassman, Superintendent

This is a city and we get these kids and we move them from their own little barrios. I want to give kids an appreciation of the arts in general, because what I teach them in elementary and junior high will stay with them throughout their lives. The appreciations that they
develop now will be the appreciations that they will pass on to their kids and that will affect the way they keep their homes.

I personally feel that education is more than technology; I want poetry, writing, art and music, dance fairs: every elementary school has a dance fair, it may have come over with the Pilgrims. The principals accept the dance fair because when they were in school, they danced and their parents told them that when they were in school, they danced. It's the same dances all over the city. Here every year there is an art fair, so they accept that. It's part of the district.

Harvey Possner, Principal

My wife is very artistic. I've always liked the cultural arts. I like baseball better, and basketball better, but I was always interested in opera. In fact Dave Bellantonio9 last year used to walk around singing opera in the classroom. And it reached the point where the kids wanted to write their own opera. And they did. We encourage six museum trips per year. I don't mandate it to the teachers. Some of them go on more than six. I don't think there are any who go on less than six. Every museum visit there is always a follow-up and you can see the follow-up not only in the three classrooms that you visited but in every one. And libraries and any cultural institution, at least one of my classes has been to. We reach out into the communities that are surrounding us. The Brooklyn Museum is not the only museum and I want to expose them to every one possible.

In order to understand the importance of community resources to the Brooklyn 15 story and the way in which these resources are utilized, one must first consider the community in which the district lies.

New York Post, May 24, 1883

The height of Brooklyn's ambition—to be really a part of New York—was realized today, and the town across the bridge went wild with delight. A New Yorker going down Fulton Street, New York, could see by the crowds of people in holiday dress trooping over from Brooklyn that something extraordinary was going on over there.10

Although the span across the East River joined Brooklyn and New York City one hundred years ago, one senses that Brooklyn's ambition was not realized on that day in May 1883, but those aspirations—to be really a part of New York—continue to shape the psyche of the Brooklynite today. I have already indicated that there is a powerful and pervasive sense—from the superintendent and the arts coordinator to the individual principals and to every teacher with whom I spoke—of the span that both joins them and separates them from New York City, the cultural hub of the country, and consequently, of the cultural aura that surrounds and sometimes eludes them.

Jerrold Glassman, Superintendent

Learning about museums was an interesting thing. It was the most interesting of all, because our kids live in a barrio. They stand on Sunset Park and see Manhattan and have never been there.

Teachers aspire to culture for themselves and for their students whom they try to expose to culture in all forms, not only the visual arts, but music and the performing arts. Because

---

9David Bellantonio is an elementary classroom teacher at P.S. 154, District 15, Brooklyn, New York.
10Salute to Brooklyn's Creative Youth, BACA (Brooklyn Arts and Culture Association), 1983.
they grasp at every cultural straw, the special arts programs in the schools are many and diverse, all of which variously engage selected students and teachers. Some of these programs are described below.

*Lincoln Center Institute,* connected with the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. This program involves teachers who attend a three week summer session of workshops, seminars, and performances. The number of teachers who may voluntarily participate is determined by the willingness of the individual principals to become involved in the program and by the number of slots allowed per school district. Aileen Golden, the arts coordinator, has managed to have the numbers increased each year, and in the summer of 1983, ten teachers representing seven schools will attend the Institute. The cost to the teachers is principally time and commitment; or if they wish academic credit beyond the Masters degree, it is available through Teachers College, Columbia.

There are separate experiences for new participants and for those returning, so that a teacher may increase her (most appear to be women) knowledge of and expertise in dance, drama, visual arts, aesthetic education, and music. These experiences are then passed on; and techniques and terminology taught will be brought to their students. Also during the school year, the same performing artists who taught the summer workshops—dancers, musicians, actors—come to the schools to work with the children, and there are often visual manifestations of these encounters—e.g., maskmaking as a component of a drama experience. The purpose of these experiences is to produce not performers, but consumers of culture.

*BACA,* or *Brooklyn Arts and Culture Association.* The range and scope of the programs offered by this association is mind-boggling. The activity that most affects the arts program in the schools, however, is the yearly *Salute to Brooklyn's Creative Youth* exhibit, installed at the Brooklyn Museum. In 1983, the apt subject of the art exhibition was "One Hundred Years of the Brooklyn Bridge: Classroom Art, Kindergarten Through High School." Curators select the works that will hang in the community gallery of the Brooklyn museum from the artwork submitted by District 15 and all of the Brooklyn school districts and high schools; other District 15 pieces are hung in banks and libraries in the community. Still others are displayed in the windows of Brooklyn's largest department store; a few find their way into selected windows in New York City. BACA also identifies students who display particular talent and offers them scholarships and the opportunity to attend the art classes at the Brooklyn Museum, for example. Madeline Gaynor, the program's tireless director, espouses the philosophy that if children are to absorb and become consumers of the culture, then it will have to be offered to them, not at Lincoln Center or in New York City, but in their own community. Consequently, BACA's continuous schedule consists of workshops and cultural events for both adults and children, including "Sundays at the Brooklyn Museum," a series of concerts and poetry readings; an annual "Summer Celebration" with special children's programs composed of puppet theater, magicians, mime, and art workshops; jazz in the streets, etc.

*Museums Collaborative.* This is a fairly new program, but it is to the arts coordinator's credit that these programs all find their way into schools in Brooklyn District 15. Madeline Gaynor of BACA attributes the district's participation in programs such as these to Aileen Golden's ability to do research—to do her homework, to find out about programs that are available and then to pursue them, to refuse to "take no for an answer." When District 15 was not chosen to participate in the first year of Museums Collaborative's program it was certain to be one of the second year's participating districts. This program was offered to only one school

---

11For nine years through the school year 1982-1983, Aileen Golden was the Cultural Arts Coordinator of District 15, Brooklyn, New York.
in the district; the sizeable commitment on the part of the teachers in terms of time and program was matched by a financial commitment on the part of the district and the principal.

The following are features of the program: a) a training component—teachers and administrators are trained to develop skills to integrate museum and cultural education experiences into the curriculum; b) hands-on workshops for students and teachers; c) extended classroom opportunity—programs are conducted in the participating schools and take advantage of "the vast cultural resources of New York City"; d) special long-term projects—these might use the resources of several cultural institutions; and e) technical assistance—curriculum development, designing a mini-museum, individualized staff development. P.S. 230 this year used the resources of The Brooklyn Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cooper-Hewitt Museum, Asia Society, and Jewish Museum.

Brooklyn Museum. The schools of District 15 use the facilities of the Brooklyn Museum in several ways. Classroom teachers take their students to this nearby facility—it is perhaps a 15 minute bus ride—for the study of cultures probably as often as for the study of art, but many take their students not only to look and examine works of art, but to sketch as well. The wonderful Brooklyn Bridge exhibit, which included photography, painting, and sculpture relating to the bridge as well as original architectural drawings, facts, and artifacts of the building of that ambitious and magnificent structure, drew a good many of District 15's teachers with their classes. For the month of May 1983, the number of reported "one-shots" for the district was 6 out of a total of 21 for all twelve Brooklyn districts; 11 sessions for a series on the Brooklyn Bridge; and 10 one-shots not related to the Brooklyn Bridge. Both the superintendent and the arts coordinator report, however, that because of the difficulty in making appointments for museum visits and the necessary advance notice teachers find it more expedient to take students during lunch periods (so these numbers are not reported in the museum's records).

School Volunteer Program. As in the case of Museums Collaborative, this project is being used in only one school in the district. This program differs from any of the above as it involves classrooms but not teachers. It is a cooperative effort between the school and a group of parents who prepare students for a museum visit by showing slides of the works they will see in the museum. They come into the classroom for one 50 minute period a week for four or five weeks. They follow up the preparation with the museum visit, one adult to five children (this way they are counted as a family group; these visits are not reported in the museum's records), which includes discussion with the children about the works of art. The following is an excerpt from a letter to the teachers:

They not only discuss specific works of art, but also try to stimulate the children's thinking as to some of the things an artist has to consider when creating a masterpiece—such as how to choose a material which best suits the building an architect wants to construct, how to apply paint to a canvas, or how to direct the eye of the viewer into a painting.

Miscellaneous programs. There are numerous other programs in one school or another, e.g., the Eliot Feld Ballet auditions children in the schools and then offers them scholarships to attend ballet school. "The Studio in a School" is in some ways like the artists-in-residence programs whereby an artist works with the children in the schools—in District 15 this allowed Aileen Golden to have the equivalent of an art teacher in a school that had none.

This list leads one to wonder whether the district's cultural quest adds to or subtracts from the effectiveness of the total art picture. The reasons for this diversity are clear enough; because the school district has little money for enrichment, it expends monies on these various programs rather than on an expensive single curriculum. Nor would a single package, however
marvelous, jibe with the autonomous nature of the school system. Although there is no doubt that some of these programs are interesting, even exciting, are more than a few isolated students reaping the benefits of this shotgun approach to cultural education?

Harold Cartwright

We'd be very interested in the Lincoln Center program if I could get it. I don't have a big enough staff and I couldn't get anybody to give the summer. Young audiences are fond of touring groups, musicians or dancers. They come in and perform in schools. And it's sponsored by the district, paid for to some extent by the board and some extent by the district, and they'll come in with a string quartet, a brass ensemble, opera in a suitcase, or a certain little act. We've been having at least two or three shows every year as long as they've been in the district.

A gentleman enterprise himself into a very nice business. He called himself the Arts Connection. Now he hooked himself up with a number of different organizations, with the Alvin Alley dancers and the Big Apple Circus. They must have gotten a very, very nice grant; they did it professionally. They wanted to know if we wanted to be involved with the Big Apple Circus and we said fine. They sent in professionals. They screened our second and third graders to be acrobats—all circus acts. They did a whole thing, but then they said that they would have to come to training and we had to train at 105th St. in Manhattan in the middle of a terrible neighborhood. I had to take these 12 children and put them on a bus to Manhattan and I told them I would do it and I honored it for the first year. Well we had trouble with buses and we had kids on the parkways for four hours to get an hour of instruction. And the instruction for acrobatics is slow. Then they wanted a commitment for two days a week and I wouldn't give it to them. They were very organized and very structured and there were a lot of people on the payroll—evaluators on evaluators—and it wasn't worth it. If they would send in the people and teach my children here, okay.

Madeline Gaynor, Executive Director BACA

What people don't realize is that students know what's happening in their own neighborhood. They refuse to leave that place because another place will be more broken promises. That's why when they say "bring them here in buses," they've got blinders on. They're not seeing this sort of thing that's going on here, it's a day away from school; it's not the kids' museum; it's nothing to them. The Joffrey came and said they would do a performance in Bed-Stuy. So what if the kids loved it? Could they afford to see it? What if they wanted to learn to dance; could they afford to learn? If you were to say that you could own this, it's yours, it belongs to you. It's the same thing with art. When the Van Gogh exhibit was here the teachers would come in with their classes. That to me was like the refurbishing of the soul and the teachers would be interested and the kids went through the Van Gogh and the teachers said "Oh yes we taught them and we brought them up on this and that and everything like that" and the kids went through with blinders. "Oh, yellows," and really it meant nothing. But after school, you would find kids coming on their own from our workshops in Brownsville, from our places who have shown in the museum and the community gallery cause this was their museum, cause they had hung there.

This was the first community gallery in the country and District 15, because we were doing work with Aileen, those kids came and it meant something to them. And people think because you take these children to these things, that it means something, this is not the way it's done.
3. THE ART PROGRAM

THE FACE: AUTONOMY

Although it is strongly supported by the superintendent, promoted by the arts supervisor, and has the added impetus of a very strong, pervasive New York City sense of being, if not in, then on the periphery of, the cultural hub of the country, art education exists in a strange kind of limbo. One assistant principal stated that he would fight to retain art in the curriculum because he believes that “it’s one of the things that makes us human”; a principal declared that if he couldn’t have a “gem,” he would not have any art teacher.

Harold Cartwright

I don’t have an art cluster [relief teacher] for art’s sake. I have an art cluster because I think the arts are important, but I also have a “gem of a teacher” which is of utmost importance.

As with every facet of the program, the very fact of its existence appears to depend on autonomous individuals.

The source of this state of limbo lies in the autonomous organization not only of the entire school district, but of the New York City system as a whole. At one time New York’s schools, of which Brooklyn is a part, were centrally administered, but in 1970 they were decentralized. Instead of one large central school board, there are 32, one for each district. These school boards are responsible for administering only elementary schools, intermediate schools, and junior high schools; the high schools are separately administered. Each autonomous school board hires a superintendent, who often—the case in District 15—reflects the philosophy of the board. From the very top to the bottom ranks of the New York City school system, there is agreement that decentralization and autonomy are eminently desirable.

Jerrold Glassman

The chancellor of the City of New York went to the City Council, and he asked them for money for certain projects—in guidance, in prevention of delinquency—and Carol Bellamy [President of the City Council] said, “Give me the model that you are going to use.” And he said, “There is no model. There are 32 districts; I can give you 32 models.” She said, “We can’t fund that”; and he said, “I’ll give you a model, but it won’t work.” Now is that a weakness? I don’t know; I think that that is a strength. And it’s the city. Not only my 25 schools here; it’s just the way this city works.

This story was offered to support Glassman’s own philosophy in allowing autonomy to the 25 principals in the district.

The principal is accountable for his results; he’s accountable to me. The state mandates only physical education; I say “Marty, Lou, go do your thing.”

In this city, the group of people that travels on the F-train is completely different from the group that travels on a GG-train; and they’re both right underneath us. And the trains look different and the graffiti is different; everything is different but they were made about the same time. I don’t know why. Can you get 15 artists together and have them all work the same way? Can you expect 15 groups of school kids to work the same way?
Say I mandated at a very elementary level. I mandated that every kid was going to do three flat watercolors a term, for example. I don’t have enough paint and brushes in the schools. Am I going to mandate something that I can’t get? But if the school decides that they want to do oil painting that’s going to cost a hell of a lot more, they’ll get the oil paints on their own. They’ll badger manufacturers. If you get people together, they have ownership, they decide; they’ll work hard and they’ll feel good. You mandate something, you’ll satisfy me briefly. Are there commonalities? Are there basic items that should be done by everyone? Sure. Capitalization, spelling, etc.; it will be achieved in a different manner, but it will be achieved.

**Harvey Possner**

Basically Aileen Golden has given me the encouragement that I needed. And that is if you believe in something, do it—which is what I carry through to my staff. I believe in you as an educator. Do it and let me know how it works out. Let me know the strengths and weaknesses of what you have done and let’s work together—if you like what you have done—to eliminate the weaknesses.

I called Jerry Glassman up. I said, “Jerry, I have an idea for a reading program.” He said, “Harvey, do you like it?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Do it.” I did it.

In some schools the autonomy stops with the principal; in others it is passed on to the staff. Perhaps the autonomy stops there, perhaps not.

**Ira Boltermann, Teacher**

The principal is responsible for a lot of the creativity that goes on here. He gives us the freedom that we need and at the same time he’s giving us the direction that we need. It’s really pleasant. And that direction and freedom we get from the administration filters down to the kids. It makes us creative and it makes them creative. The kids feel the same thing.

**Lon Gileski**

It’s not the kind of situation where you can say: “Today we’re going to sit down and discuss Picasso for an hour.” They need active involvement. Although you can work with a syllabus, I find the city syllabus limiting in terms of timing. The kind of classroom I want to run is a tremendous amount of freedom and what at first may seem chaotic, but I find that the thing that works best is having a number of activities going on at once. Some kids simply don’t draw as well as others. Some can handle one form better than others. Some prefer to do pencil, some prefer to do pen and ink, and they can start off in one particular area, they can interpret. So what I generally do is a presentation of what we’re going to work with—a theme general enough so that we have any number of things that can be worked out, for example this salute to literature. Doing Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet” we had murals, we had drawings, we had costume design. That’s two dimensional, then we had the actual building of figures; we had that huge stage set, we had small figures. And although somebody might have been comfortable doing one aspect, they were very quickly drawn into doing something else. One kid bounces off the other. There is time for planning and pulling your thoughts together, and what are you going to do, and where is it going to go, and what’s your beginning idea. And then from that it starts to move on out and it goes from a small miniature that somebody is comfortable with to a huge mural. As Frankie said, “I don’t want to do this small stuff, I want to do something really big. I want a big involvement.” A lot is trusting the kids to know their own level and stopping in when they don’t reach that level or if they exceed it. And you really have to be able to let go.

---

12Ira Boltermann is an elementary classroom teacher at P.S. 154, District 15 in Brooklyn, New York.
Autonomy is assumed to be the ultimate good, equated with freedom, innovation, and creativity. These educators pride themselves on diversity rather than uniformity.

Jerrold Glassman

We never do the same thing twice. We never have the same approach twice. What you saw out here was totally different from what we had out here three years ago. Not better, not worse, but different. We had a much more cluttered kind of exhibit with a lot more individual effort and less group effort. I'm not saying that one was better; it's just the way it worked out.

Of curriculum models, Glassman (tossing a pile of state guides in my direction) scoffs, "This is not the real world." Any kind of formal, prescribed instructional practice or curricular idea is viewed as undesirable. Glassman is describing a school he wishes me to see, giving it his highest praise, "It is the antithesis of P.S. 131; it's not sequential, it's not historical, it's not patriotic, it's creative." At another time he referred to the program at P.S. 131—which I will later commend—as "pedantic and structured."

THE OBVERSE: STRUCTURE

Autonomy and, conversely, accountability are handed down from superintendent to principal to teacher. In New York, the subject for which districts are held most accountable is reading, and reading scores are an understandable concern. Teachers are judged by them; principals are evaluated by them; superintendents' reputations rise and fall by them. They are published in the New York Times with the lowest scores on the bottom—for all the world to see.

In such a climate, one is led to wonder if the dream of the Director of Art for the New York City schools for "a common citywide curriculum, articulation among schools, between grades" might ever be realized.

Because of the strong belief that each of the 32 districts in New York City's decentralized school system should maintain its autonomy, and that each of the 25 schools in this particular school district, at least, should maintain its autonomy, we can almost discern 25 separate and discrete autonomous programs. However, it is possible to consider the unification efforts of the arts coordinator, Aileen Golden (and the way she works with all of the schools for the end-of-the-year district art show), as one program and as providing the structure—giving consistent support to the teachers, from workshops to a self-generated guide; contributing to in-service with whatever visiting artist or luminary she can enlist; and always encouraging and reinforcing.

The coherence and continuity that exists within the art program, whether it is across grades or schools, or between art and general education, is mainly that provided by the arts coordinator, by her newsletters, meetings with each principal and school art coordinator, promptings, reminders, workshops, in-servicing, and financial and moral support. It is through her efforts in identifying and enlisting the best teachers in each school to the cause of the arts that art has become as much a part of general classroom practice as it now is.

Director, Cultural Arts Unit, New York City Board of Education

In District 15 Aileen Golden has made sure that every school has a teacher that is teaching art and music. That is not the case all over because the cluster teacher can teach science, and
remedial anything, library, physical education, and music and art. So in 50 percent of the cases there is no art in the school.

Jerrold Glassman

I have a teacher in every school that is responsible for art in some way.

Charles Taylor, Principal

There are periods when we don’t have an art teacher in our school. In an elementary school, unfortunately, the school develops a program around the talents and the abilities and the interests of the personnel on board. Unfortunately there were periods where there was no art person. There were no teachers who had that talent or that proclivity. Consequently the program would naturally have to die. It’s only because of Mrs. Golden that we now have a better art program.

But without the strong support of the superintendent, there might be no program at all.

Jerrold Glassman

Math and reading scores appear in the paper and I am judged on that. But I feel that if I teach writing I am going to get more in terms of reading. If I teach art and music, I am going to get more in terms of reading and interest. You can’t teach reading in a mechanical fashion; you can teach reading by having kids read. I want those kids who are interested in sports to read about sports; I want those kids in whom I built an interest in art and music to read about art and music and in so doing my scores will go up. And we just got our scores since we last met—the improvement in District 15 was greater than the citywide improvement in reading though we are still below many districts. The improvement in math was greater than the citywide improvement in math. And I think part of it is due to a humanistic approach to education.

Sixty-two percent of this district is Hispanic. The way this city sets up its reporting of reading scores, if the kid is excused from the test because of language problems the score is automatically zero. Of all the districts with 60 percent or more Hispanic kids (there are eight in this city) we are number one. But when the public sees that District 15 is down there and people run for the school board and they want to get rid of the superintendent, I have to have enough faith in the humanistic approach to say: “Well, this is what I stand for, if you want to fire me ‘cause my scores don’t come up, then you’ll fire me, but as long as I’m here this is where I want to be in my education.”

Of the half of the schools that you have seen in District 15, you make that assessment. That if the principals understand that in this district they have to be involved in an art program they may resent the work, they may wish that we stopped it to a degree, but they understand that it is District 15. If you want to be a principal in the district, you’ll get some great benefits, but one of the things that you are going to have to do is to get involved in the arts.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE ART PROGRAM

Aileen Golden’s Curriculum

This “curriculum” developed as the coordinator attempted to deal with all of the exigencies of an autonomous system. It is implemented by the coordinator through a reorientation each year, meetings with each school principal, school arts coordinator, usually an assistant principal, and with individual teachers, in a thorough and systematic search for classroom
teachers teaching the arts who would be positively disposed to working with Aileen Golden throughout the year. She might work through the principal to enlist classroom teachers, as in the 1982-1983 school year when she was instrumental in bringing the “Learning to Read Through the Arts” program to 18 of the 25 schools. With this program Golden was able to offer funds as an incentive to the schools to participate. She was not only able to fund another art program—District 15’s nonremedial version of the “Learning to Read Through the Arts” program—to offer supplies to schools that could otherwise ill afford to offer art to the children, but she was able to add at least 18 teachers to the ranks of those with whom she worked (and it was these teachers who supplied the majority of the work for the district show).

Aileen Golden

The program [Learning to Read Through the Arts] is excellent and Bernadette O’Brien is fantastic. I brought the program in for several reasons. I wanted it all because I wanted the Salute to Literature and I knew everybody would be involved. The other thing is that we were offering $700 to each school. It was a way of getting art supply money, it was a way of getting manuals so I didn’t have to start writing again this year. They were already introduced and written by capable teachers and it was a way of getting teacher training if someone wanted it.

The Cluster

The teacher who has the responsibility for teaching art in the New York City elementary schools is generally not a trained specialist. According to a United Federation of Teachers (UFT) contract, a teacher must be given two preparation periods a week—in Chapter I schools, five preps are designated; the teacher who covers the classes during these periods is called a “cluster.”

Director of Art, N.Y.C. Public Schools

The cluster teacher actually gives these other teachers free periods—the whole thing was a UFT contract situation. The people who are teaching art in the elementary school by and large have no training. Real art trained people may be scattered throughout but it’s minimal.

It is the individual principal’s choice whether that person will be a science, library, physical education, music or art cluster, so it is to the credit of the efforts of the arts coordinator and the strong support of the superintendent that in 24 of the 25 schools in the district, one of the cluster teachers is an art cluster.

Aileen Golden

People taking the cluster position—which is a word that I no longer use because it signifies that you cover people—are used as cover teachers, there’s no question about it, but to raise the status of their positions, I have said that they are art specialists and are responsible for many different activities. . . . I have also said they are coordinators, meaning they are not only involved with their own classes, they’re involved with other teachers in other classes and they coordinate a program for a school.

In most cases none of the art coordinators are really art trained. Some of them have had some art courses.
Rosa Lopez

It's a cluster program, it's not really an art program.

Jerrold Glassman

Only the junior high school has art teachers. There are no art teachers in the elementary schools [although I have a teacher in every school that is responsible for art in some way. In 131 there's an art appreciation teacher. She's being paid to give a teacher a free period. The principal can have her teach art or family living, sex, hygiene—anything he wants. If I were to mandate art, art history let's say, can you imagine the miserable level of instruction we would get from people [who] have no previous experience in art? Never took an art history course? And now, I'm telling them, "You are going to teach art history."

Aileen Golden

When I first came in, there weren't very many art clusters. So I really went from class to class, those who asked me to come in obviously were interested and so I learned who they were. And I learned some of the strengths and where I could, I made recommendations of teachers to be made art clusters. The principal very often goes along with my recommendation. I think I am very creditable in that way. If I say that someone is going to work out, they are going to use that person.

Aileen not only works with the principals to assure that there is an art cluster in each of 24 schools—in the 25th art is taught on a regular basis by a parent volunteer—she also carefully guards the hard-won positions, and, like a game of chess, maneuvers teachers from one position to another where needed, finding places for teachers who will work better in one situation than another.

Aileen Golden

I have pressed the principals on programming and scheduling so that they're not just "covering" the positions.

One art coordinator went on maternity, and when she came back she took a kindergarten, but to make sure the art was there in the afternoon she took the art program, because I asked her not to give it up. Because I felt if she gave it up she'd never be able to come back. In the afternoon she was given art, in the morning she was given kindergarten. . . .

At this point I took another person from left field. Over the summer two of the junior high schools were moving their teachers. I then called everybody and I got this teacher. I interviewed her and I took her resume and recommended her. Then I asked her, "Do you know anybody?" and she recommended another teacher. And I pulled him into the other position because I did not want the position to fold. . . .

Now, one teacher got sick in the middle of the year; I picked up someone who is a special education person that I had worked with, an artist who helps children after school and gets paid for that. So I brought her in and the children were able to continue. So you see that we will lose one and try to pick up someone else. We don't lose positions. . . .

I picked up Judy Oates who is a math teacher. But Judy had artistic talent. When I went around I used to give demonstrations in the classes and then they used to finish the lesson themselves. I did a poster lesson for her and she did a wonderful job.

---

13Judy Oates was then an elementary classroom teacher at P.S. 154, District 15 in Brooklyn, New York.
Judy Oates, Teacher

When I was in P.S. 38, Aileen Golden was the art teacher at first, then there was another teacher who became pregnant and left. Aileen asked me to take over as the art teacher in the school and she became the curriculum person at the district office for art and music. I took it; I was a little wary because I really never taught it full scale. I only taught it as a classroom teacher.

Aileen Golden

They had a program, "Studio in the Schools." I took it out of one school, because they were relying on that, and I put it into another. I purposely took it out... They had had several teachers; each one was an artist more than a teacher. One of the teachers whom I had picked up and who originally was with the Studio in the Schools program, I didn't want back. So I changed the program to another school. I got her into another school as an art teacher because she was losing that job and I wanted her to be part of the district. She worked with me over the summer. She is now a teacher in an intermediate school. Now that she works as a teacher her artwork is much different than when she worked as an artist—a different calibre of art, different kinds of materials—she was much freer, letting the children just do and express. All the work was just that way. Now there's training skills.

Programming

In addition to the district arts coordinator, one administrator, usually an assistant principal (AP), is assigned to be the school arts coordinator. There is a cluster in all but one of the elementary schools and a trained art teacher or teachers in the two intermediate and three junior high schools. The decision regarding which children will have art, as opposed to systems where every child has an art experience at least once a week, is up to the principal or AP doing the scheduling at the elementary school. The reasons for the inclusion or exclusion of art in a particular class schedule can range from the disposition of a "problem" class (art was considered to be the least demanding alternative) to the necessity for a stable of "talented" students to participate in contests and art shows. With this arbitrary scheduling, a child could conceivably pass through the elementary school without ever having had an "art" class.

At the junior high school, the determination of students who would or would not take an art class is made by a combination of academic track and the state mandates for subjects necessary for promotion to the high school. Students are grouped in all schools in classes designated, e.g., 7-1, 7-2, 7-3 according to academic standing—determined by math and reading scores. The higher second numbers indicate lower ability, except at P.S. 131, where the numbers are reversed to avoid stigma. Although each junior high school certainly makes its own autonomous arrangements outside of the state mandates of periods for health education, science, social studies, mathematics, language arts, and music, and each principal supports art to a lesser or greater degree, the general structure would have certain similarities (for example, every school claimed a "talent" program).

Steven Maar, J.H.S. Assistant Principal

We have in this school a talent art program. A class can take two periods of general art in addition to four to six periods of talent art; that's in addition to their program. There's a parallel program in music and drama and TV production. Now the students in the talent art program, let's say in the seventh grade, meet an additional four periods a week. Now the eighth and ninth grades meet an additional six periods a week, so in some classes they are
getting a total of eight classes of art a week. That exceeds—for some students—social studies. It becomes a major subject.

The following is an example of the programming of one junior high school:

1. The 1, 3, and 5 classes take “talent” (a parallel program given five times a week—1/3 take band; 1/3 take chorus; and 1/3 take theater arts).

2. The 7–2 and the 8–2 classes take art talent.

3. Art talent classes have art four or five times a week (the next year it was slated to expand to five).

4. Classes other than 1, 2, 3, and 5 may have art two or three times a week.

5. Each of the two art teachers teaches five classes, or an approximate total of 300 students, a small portion of the total school population; there are 300 students in the seventh grade alone.

This particular assistant principal described the position of the cluster at the junior high as “teachers working as a resource person with other teachers.”

**Steven Maar**

We have always had two to three art teachers in this building; even when the budget cuts became very bad in 1975 and 1976, we maintained our art program. Historically, we have always doubled up our art instruction. In programming a junior high school, art, physical education, music are programmed first; they go on the board as double periods. Those programming periods never change, the reason being that we want to give the class enough time to get into an art room, get their materials out, have instruction, do some physical artwork, have enough time to clean up. A single period of instruction would only be between 40 and 44 minutes, so getting in, working, surely is reduced.

All of the junior high and many of the elementary schools that I saw had separate art rooms for each art person. I saw only one school (described as the “lowest” in the district—certainly the lowest economically) in which the cluster traveled from classroom to classroom. Supplies were more plentiful in schools that had received the $700 for the Learning to Read program, but funds are otherwise allotted according to the priorities of the principal in every instance. But “more plentiful” does not approach plentiful by any means, and funds in any guise are sought as assiduously as is culture.

**Harold Cartwright**

A lot of people are losing Title One status . . . and it means a lot of money; it doesn’t only mean five prep— it means para-professionals in all Title One programs, reading labs, math labs—everything.

**Organization and Orchestration**

Aileen Golden’s very careful organization and orchestration of people and programs seems to reflect her sense of what is right and “proper,” as much as her professional concerns for the program.
John Jones, Cultural Arts Unit, New York City Board of Education

There are two aspects to Aileen Golden's "strengths," a component of leadership and a component of the human spirit. She's a unique spirit who strives toward excellence. Aileen is not a trained art person. And she's not an art person who's striving so much to promote the arts in education.

Aileen Golden's leadership is more that of a conductor than a director; in other words, for things to conform to her exacting standards, whether it is the choice of student artwork, matting, labeling, or its display, she will take on the gargantuan task herself rather than leave it to others. Of all the student work that I saw—including one massive wall of a local bank and several walls of a library—the one display that she did not select, mat, label, and hang was the display commemorating the hundredth birthday of the Brooklyn Bridge at the Brooklyn Museum.

Director of Art, N.Y.C. Public Schools

Aileen has everything documented, she has everything organized. She's doing a fantastic job. She is the kind of person that can make it all happen. She is, in my opinion, a very capable administrator.

Madeline Gaynor, Brooklyn Arts and Culture Association [BACA]

Aileen will try anything new. The woman does research; many of them don't. She is not a typical person who has been burnt out. Aileen does research and she looks and she finds out now, "What is the museum doing? What is Botanic Gardens doing? What is BAM doing? What is Madeline doing that I can tie it in?" Very few people will do that. Aileen has an immense imagination and then she has the tenacity and the determination to follow through. And she will work harder than anybody else, she will type the proposal, she will talk to the person, and she will set it up and she will do it. She had the poets and writers, then. She had her festival. She believes also—which is very important—in the result. Children have to see a result of what they do. She is the only supervisor who will bring the children to see the work. She will hit the community gallery on a day that the museum is closed; she will bring all the children, plus the teachers, plus the principals and the parents and the district superintendent down to the community gallery. It's so beautiful. She absolutely goes right from the beginning to the end. So many of our educators do it cause it's something they have to and when it's over with, it's over with, but she has a follow-through. It inspires the parents and the teachers cause they get the credit.

Glassman has known what he's had there. So he let his have her own way pretty much; anything that she wants. And she doesn't take no for an answer. When she wants something, she drives us crazy here. She wants it done right and she believes in discipline. Her teachers have to work, the students have to work. It becomes part of the curriculum, which is very important.

Bonnie Baker, Teacher

She's been very helpful in getting us supplies, and actually bringing the art programs into the schools. I think that the reason why art is so popular in this district is really through her efforts. She has really worked at it. And people know that she is a worker and wants the best for the children. She works like ten people all day long. I think one of her real strong points is that she can put groups of people together and all of a sudden have a wonderful end result to a project. People look forward to it. They are all enthusiastic; I think that's purely due to her and her enthusiasm. She can see something here and tie it in with something there and develop a whole program from it. I think it is because she works 24 hours a day.
Lon Gileski

I think Aileen and I are touchstones for each other. We feed each other and we feed off each other. There is the same kind of sense of excitement in having things happen and seeing them evolve. We bounce off each other ideas, how things can go, where they can go, what you can do. She has really been responsible for a tremendous amount of the excitement that’s been generated.

Mata Scalzi

In helping with the training of the teachers, she has been invaluable. She is the expert: she knows art. I could look at the curriculum bulletin, but I really wouldn't know how to train a teacher with those particular skills. She not only knows how to do it, she’s willing to do it.

Aileen Golden

Demonstrations are something I do. My strongest points were the classroom demonstrations and the workshops. I didn’t let the teachers sit and watch; they had to work with me.

I frankly think that the workshops, the conferences, all of those are very important for the growth of the teacher. People never stop growing. You cannot let people do their own thing in their own way. The guidelines are important. And to build that quality into a program, there has got to be some kind of overseeing and suggestions. It has to be suggested, it cannot be a demand.

I use the city and state guides. I find they are extremely helpful; I wrote my own book based on what is practical and the materials that you have and a kind of sequential learning that people should have. Not just product, but process. And you are building skills and knowledge. I was physically an art cluster at one point. I wheeled a tray and I set up a whole paint system in 25 minutes. I was like a little machine that came in the room, but I wanted the children to have the opportunity to paint. So the lessons that came out of it were lessons that worked in that situation. A lot of the teachers picked the lessons out and found them very helpful. Something immediately to hang on to. I did that in 1968. If I were to rewrite it it would be quite different.

Judy Oates

Aileen was a terrific teacher. She came in and gave demonstration lessons, which were absolutely superb; I remember everything that she taught me, and it came out great. She was really my teacher and after I learned the basic things from her, I was able to extend myself and find new ways of doing things. I follow her plan because it is like the bible to me. I find that there are times that something leads me somewhere else. But I always start with what she has given me.

Aileen Golden

I see each teacher several times a year—personally, at least three times. That’s quite hard to do but in most cases I do manage, and in most cases they are so anxious ‘cause they are planning things that they have to know about so it is easy to set the appointment up. I have meetings with their staff. We bring in other teachers. In all schools I do not work with only one person. A person’s a coordinator in different periods of time. The principal's always there.
Bonnie Baker

Aileen works with us on a very close basis and she always has. Usually at the end of the year all the art teachers discuss the next year's program. What we will do for the Art Fair, different suggestions that we would like to follow. And she brings many people into the district to show things and to encourage them. I find that very helpful; she is innovative and when you see what other people are doing from other districts I find that all of a sudden you say, "That's a great idea," and you'll do it your own way. Sometimes when you have been teaching and you have been doing it a while, it's good to see something else. It gives you enthusiasm; kind of like a little bit of energy to try something that you haven't done before.

Aileen Golden

The assistant principal himself was an art person. And I've asked him to give workshops to teachers and he's very good. One thing I do is that everyone I meet I somehow utilize at some time. I've really built a network starting right here that moves out. I went to a science meeting the other day and at that meeting I must have gotten about six telephone numbers that I will use at some point [for in-service training of teachers].

In spite of her careful organization, coordination, and orchestration, however, instruction is frequently superficial, perhaps cursory, at the elementary level, because “clusters” are primarily teachers without any art education, led by an arts coordinator—no matter how able, efficient, and dedicated—who herself has little formal art background.

There are also exciting things being done by cluster teachers. I was impressed with the art lesson in a school where not only were funding and supplies obviously low, but I had been told that this was the “lowest” school in the district—certainly the one closest to the river and the “el”—with a Hispanic population of somewhere close to 99 percent. This is the one teacher who “travels” from room to room. Her lesson was well-planned, got the kids excited, and involved more art “content” than others that appeared to be designed simply to keep kids busy.

There was also the teacher who was given the title of Art Appreciation teacher, in whose classes students learned about art and artists and styles of art.

CONTESTS AND COMPETITION

At the junior high schools, where there are trained art teachers, for some a comprehensive art education still appears to be less than possible because of the constant imposition of the necessity to participate in endless contests and art shows.

If the much sought-after special programs intrude upon and prevent a comprehensive art program and take such a large amount of energy, so too do the continual demands of contests, competitions, and art shows. And the benefits that accrue are to the district—Aileen says it gives them sponsorship, ready money—to the schools, to a small number of kids, and perhaps even to the art program, because the students who are chosen to take art are often selected for their “artistic ability.” Contests are a way of life, a very real and stable component of the district philosophy—not only art, but poetry and writing to a lesser extent—but surely no art teacher can hope to conduct a carefully devised and designed program under these conditions.

Two art teachers at a junior high school believed that the program is too much geared to contests and displays and shows.
Mata Scalzi

We plan next year to have two art complexes, one will be an eighth grade, one will be ninth. They will be programmed in four or five periods a week of art. And they will be the art center for the school. They will take part in all the activities, in the various contests that we enter within the district and the community as well as contests that come from the central board.

Steven Maar

As a supervisor what my social studies, or mathematics or science teachers, French or Spanish teachers do never gets out of this building, but my art program enhances the image of this building. So for a public relations purpose, cultural arts are essential.

Lon Gileski

The students also need a lot of self-worth reinforcement, short term goals with payoff, ego reinforcement, artistic reinforcement. This is a place where they can achieve. Some may never achieve academically. We go for things in which the kids are either going to get a certificate or the work is going to be on exhibit or they stand a chance in competing in something—some kind of recognition.

Mata Scalzi

These teachers have to program their time. Remember that we enter many contests. Sunset Park contest; Be Kind to Animals; What would I do if I were Commissioner for a day? I believe in them. We have the material that we gave to the Lever House; that’s somewhere too, and the stuff for the cats and dogs! The assistant principal and I try to enter all the contests that come up. I feel that students are putting into action what they are learning in the classroom. It isn’t because we want to win, but I feel that it is a purposeful piece of art. It isn’t just “draw a cat.” There’s a reason for making it and it’s very creative. And very often we do win. You need a purpose in everything you do or it doesn’t have a value. I believe in competition.

Steven Maar

There’s a tradition. A first-year teacher walks in. Every contest that comes across my desk goes to her with a little note, please enter, please enter. She better have the confidence and the desire to do these things and she does them.

We don’t want to consider it a contest or a competition. Art is on many levels. One—in the teaching of art you’re dealing with the history of art, the development of art, art as a world around us, art as a living experience, as a practicum, whatever. The second level of art instruction of course is the production. The kids have a hands-on experience. They should be able to get through the theory and now produce. The third level of art is the exhibition. Where students work should be observed by not only in-house people, but the outside world, and there should be that recognition or reward. “Beautiful job, Johnny,” “Beautiful job, Mary.” We don’t enter a contest or an exhibition for the reward, per se, although we love it when we do get our first prizes or whatever. It’s our method of saying to a student: “art is exhibited, art is to be seen, art is a living experience.” So our students produce for that part of the art program. It’s essential. We’re not concerned about the public relations that an organization is getting; we’re concerned about how our student artwork is being observed. When we go to the Brooklyn Museum to see our artwork, they do a magnificent job. Each student’s work is beautifully exhibited, with a tag, item, whatever. That’s the point and product of art instruction.
Harold Cartwright

But we can get 50 contests, which is outrageous, so we don’t enter all the contests. Everybody has jumped on the contest bandwagon. First of all, I try not to go to cultural or ethnic competitions because they’ve all picked up on it. And in this city every other week can be a culture week. The new thing is that everyone has a poetry contest, an art contest, an essay contest. You could run a curriculum with that. I try to do them where the prizes are nice, enough value, some are regulars. I think the fire department contest deserves to be entered. We give some loyalty to the state. Others from the Midwest give very nice prizes. We’re still waiting for the prize that one of our little girls won from Q-Tips. They could be like $1000. And the local bank has a very small one. That was a good contest. Send us your one entry and it’s automatically a winner of a $50 bond.

Lon Gileski

The contests can seriously get out of hand, I mean you’re absolutely inundated with one contest after another. And I select the contests that we get into on the basis of either the long haul or what they have shown that they will do. Some will provide material for the school, others, for example, MacDonald’s last year, had a contest “I love New York in spring.” We had one piece of work from one student that appeared in Albany and then appeared in the local MacDonald’s as a tray liner. So one of our kids received national recognition. Automobile safety poster contest; things are used in the city and fire prevention—again that was done here. And the kids don’t feel that it’s any kind of cutthroat thing. They’re involved in doing it. They like to have their works seen and if they’re not winners or competitors whose work is sent in then it’s set up here as a show.

THE DISTRICT ART SHOW

Aileen Golden manages to keep everything in control—all of the energy—the organization of teachers and principals, the quest for special programs, the contests and displays. Every year for eight years she has been able to leash that energy and to bring off a District Art Show, with a common theme for all 25 schools. Not only does the theme unify, but it also allows Aileen to introduce art history and the study of museums. The themes to date:

- 1983, Art and Literature
- 1982, Art Through the Ages
- 1981, Unique Cities of the Americas
- 1980, A People’s Heritage
- 1979, Treasures of New York—Mini-Museums
- 1978, Our Brooklyn
- 1977, The World We Live In
- 1976, Bicentennial “Salute to America”

At the offices of District 15, the site of the spectacular culminating art show, a colorful banner hangs over the doorway announcing the District Art Show and the entire building seems to brighten at the prospect of children and music and art.

Aileen Golden

This is our quality exhibit where we’re taking the best from the schools and sharing them with the community and other schools.
The first year we called it the Festival of the Arts. I had no idea about thematic approaches at that time, just that everyone was going to share artistically what they had been doing. I found the talented teachers in the school and I gave them the workshop and asked them to go back and coordinate and get people involved and then I started that intern project. The interns then became my liaison to the district and to the school because they were such outstanding teachers. They felt recognized; they felt they were special in the school and they were our leadership. They shared "hands-on" activities; and they shared what they were doing. They then brought it back to the faculty conferences.

The Festival of the Arts was our first districtwide event. The idea came as a result of doing it in my own school with about 40 teachers. So I thought how easy, I have 25 now. So I simply was going to take the district office over and make it into a museum. I did not really tell anybody other than "We're going to have an arts exhibit." And again it was going to be on this scale. As I started to do it everybody in the office was upset. This was a business office, they'd never had this happen before, their walls were very sterile and the only artwork was at the entrance. In that room when there was a banner opposite someone said, "You're not going to leave that up very long? It's too colorful." I started to put up paintings, and the superintendent said, "But just put one thing up from every school." I said, "That's ridiculous. The children come here, they want to see their work. If they see their work, the parents see their work. And then the teachers are happy, the parents are happy." "It doesn't work that way," he told me. I said, "Well I'm doing it. There's got to be a lot of work because when people come in they want to recognize many people, not just one." At that point they didn't realize I was going to have [musical] performances where there were going to be horns and drums. I don't know what they thought I was talking about because they had okayed it, but when it actually came about the building was in an uproar. The people came here and they raved about it, and they looked for it again the next year. And the next year they said, "Put the nails in; watch this; watch that." So I said Friday go around with me and whatever you don't like I'll change. The third year people started to look forward to it and they still criticized. They went around saying, "This one isn't right" or "Fix this." Now nobody says anything except, "When is it going to happen?" It took. Since then there has been a lot of cooperation. Working with 25 principals, they are not all starting at the same point as you or I. Nine years later, it is incredible, I feel I could call any one of them and ask anything and they would respond.

The year following was 1976, the year of the Bicentennial, and all of the district art efforts were concentrated on Colonial America. Because of the success of a focused show, the idea of a theme that would tie together all of the activities leading to the now annual art show seemed naturally to evolve. Unfortunately the theme doesn't always lead to the study of art history and museums, but when it does, as with Project Muse—the theme that year (1979) was "The Treasures of New York"—the results are quite extraordinary.

Jerrold Glassman

Project Muse was a grant, but it was very interesting. I took the deadest school in this district, intellectually, the most apathetic principal and kids. For the first time that year they were really involved in that Brooklyn Museum. And they were going there and they were coming back and working on their own exhibits, doing masks the way the museum had masks, and that archaeology exhibit, they liked. And when it was over, there was some carryover into the school.

Aileen Golden

Project Muse started a movement to the museums, because now these teachers were used to that and what we were training them to do was to be a little more literate when it came to museum visitations. They felt more capable and confident in bringing a class because they now had a fuller understanding of what museums show and of their environment. So many museums now give the teacher material: pre-kits that help the teacher prepare, and there should be preps occurring in the classroom.
Project MUSE (Museum Understanding Serves Education) was a grant written by Aileen Golden in conjunction with the Brooklyn Museum education staff; the curriculum was written by both the museum staff and a group of teachers from each of three schools. The introduction to the project reads:

Through an interdisciplinary approach, humanities areas including history, linguistics, archaeology, and art history and criticism were explored by the Brooklyn Museum and school personnel in three of the elementary schools in District 15. Nine classes from each school participated in a ten week module. Each module consisted of four class visits by the Brooklyn Museum staff member and three museum visits per class. Teacher-training workshops, class demonstrations, and faculty conferences were activities designed to familiarize and train teachers and students in the value of utilizing museum collections with class curriculum. Ultimately, humanities materials have been developed and prepared jointly by the Brooklyn Museum staff and District 15 elementary school teachers. An outgrowth of Project Muse was the involvement of all the schools in District 15 to select or "adopt" a different New York City cultural institution for their artistic studies in humanities/art projects. Each school developed its own mini-museum for children, staff, and parents to view.\(^\text{14}\)

The culmination of this project was the year-end exhibition at District 15's central office, with the added distinction that many of the museums represented claimed much of the artwork, either for a brief showing or as part of their permanent collections.

It is important to view the various events and enterprises engaged in by the district in terms of ritual. The culminating District Art Show may be the best example. Victor Turner says:

Ritual is a mechanism that periodically converts the obligatory into the desirable. In the action situation of ritual, with its social excitement and directly physiological stimuli, such as music, singing, dancing, the ritual symbol effects an interchange of qualities between its poles of meaning. Norms and values, become saturated with emotion, while the gross and basic emotions become ennobled through contact with social values.\(^\text{15}\)

The District Art Show, then, serves two purposes: it unifies the art activities of all schools in the district toward a single end, and it converts what might otherwise be seen as obligatory to what is seen as desirable.

Aileen Golden

They [principals] always come here at the culmination and there is a meeting here. Part of it, of course, is for them to see what has happened. It's very important, because when they face their own exhibit, they see the comparision of what is happening in their school with someone else's. One principal in particular started with no art at all and was not interested in art and she did not let me in the school. In fact the first exhibit I had she wasn't even going to give anything to the exhibit! When she saw the other schools putting up the work she cleared the whole wall and we had three tables.

Of course the parents are invited. This is how you pull everyone in to the arts festival. Invariably the parents are very pleased about it. And we want to pull in the parents as much as possible. I have spoken at parent meetings; I have given workshops, co-anchored meetings with them. It was always set in the third week in May because that is when the community school board meeting convenes. That's when the parents come in, so that we are sure we are going to get one group of people [every] year and then I have a visitation schedule and I serve refreshments to pull them in. I send out letters to every community group: the library, all the contacts I have made with bank managers, Con Edison, everyone in District 15, the nonpublic-school people that we deal with.


It's a lot of publicity. Same way with the science fair. I've invited the world. What it does is it gives you a sponsorship; not only by the community, it gives us things like the park, which was sponsored by Con Edision only because they had seen what we had done before. So the more you reach out, the more you get in return; the more interest and involvement you generate.

Jerrold Glassman

No principal would refuse to participate in that show, because they understand that it is expected. Not one principal has had his school absent in the past few years. But look who's in it: we have the school board meet in there. During the course of the week and a half that the show is up we have 2000 people in here, I make sure to have many of the meetings that are held within the district take place here. It's a window; the local paper writes it up—it's a part of District 15. Another district makes a big deal out of consumer education or career education; that's just what this district does. Every elementary school has a dance fair, it may have come over with the Pilgrims. The principals accept the dance fair because when they were in school, they danced and their parents told them that when they were in school, they danced. Here every year there is an Art Fair, so they accept that. It started with my predecessor, when Aileen Golden came on. I was here as deputy superintendent in charge of curriculum. I was as much involved in planning for the original one as was the superintendent.

Harold Cartwright

As far as the district show goes, it's become a little too competitive. Maybe some good work comes out of it but I don't know how much or how much is teacher-motivated work. Like my big Paul Bunyan. My teacher designed it, he structured it, and the kids put on the papier-maché, mix the paste, cut the paper, they'll paint with his instruction. But it's not like an original piece from the fifth grade. Some of the people who tend to be a little bit lazy get a little impetus.

Jerrold Glassman

From my point of view, it's powerful because whatever variety in this district of language, economic, social, and all the rest, the kids are working on similar projects, and when they come down here there is some kind of sharing and recognition and the school on 7th Ave is as different from the school in Redhook as is the school in Myrtle Beach from California. Geographically they are in the same city but there is a tremendous difference. And yet when these kids come down here they're sitting outside and one school is entertaining the other and they walk around looking at the exhibits. There is a tremendous feeling of communality. It's an amazing thing—communication. And kids from one school are communicating with kids from another school through art. That exhibit of the Globe Theatre looked at by junior high kids from the so-called gifted magnet, a tremendous amount of discussion was engendered by that. Kids are not that used to looking seriously at other kids' work. It's not only an individual expression but it's an expression for a certain purpose.

Mata Scalzi

I find that the District Show is a good thing. However, I feel the children are deprived. If my children didn't go play with the band, none of my children would have seen that show. I feel that it is much ado about nothing. It's very, very good public relations; the school board goes, the parents do see it, and the parents' association sees it. Those people would probably see these things anyhow. Classes come to put on the music program. Each performing group
brings two other classes with them. We had one performing group—about 45 kids in the band—and two classes to watch plus two classes from another school. But my children could have watched my music here; they didn’t have to go down there to watch it. And if the art show were here they could have seen it here. There they got an exposure where they saw all of it, but only the three classes, which is only 100 kids out of a 1000. I think that it is much ado about nothing, maybe I’m wrong.

Planning

In January Aileen Golden sent a notice to every school to prepare for individual school arts fairs. In this way teachers and principals—through whom the notices were always channelled—were alerted to begin to plan for the District Art Show. The teachers were asked to show the best work from their classes in their school shows with an eye to selecting, for the larger exhibition, the best of the best.

Aileen Golden

I introduce the programs at the principals’ conference. I give them information and then I follow that up with individual visits. For one fair I invited the principals for lunch—they are more receptive then. It’s important to have them so involved that they have to see the culmination. I follow that up with visits to the classroom and the teachers. I meet with the teacher first, then I give a demonstration lesson. I go to the grade conference, to the faculty conference. The more you are in the school, the more movement, the more personal contact you have, the more effective you are. The rapport you set up with the principal is extremely important. Because when you call for whatever reason, you want that cooperation, so you have to give cooperation. I have been very fortunate that way. It’s the project that makes it happen because those are the visual experiences. We don’t want to teach by projects, or products alone, but they serve a purpose. It’s the process that is the most important. But how do you share that? How do you show what you are doing? By display, exhibition. So that serves a very good purpose—recognition of the teacher as well as the student.

I send a list of schools and chosen topics for the district show to each principal in a December newsletter. If a school has not chosen a topic I leave it out, and it’s very conspicuous, so by that time the principal says, “My God, my school isn’t in here,” and they call a meeting of the teachers and they must come up with a topic.

In addition to individual school exhibits and the district exhibition, in June each of the areas in the district hosts a different festival in which artwork is displayed in the store windows.

In June in Sunset Park all the windows have artwork by the children. Usually it’s put up on a Tuesday and the Thursday or Friday we have the music festival; and the children who won or whose work is outstanding are then called and they get a reward in front of everyone. The tickets are given out to every student to see their work put up, but the community again sees their students and their schools. We have about 40 seats for guests. Community leaders do show up so we get most of the community leaders to come here: from the public school principals to pastors to bank managers. I worked with bank managers very closely; we asked them for support for many of our projects.

Setting Up the Show

Aileen Golden

Every class puts their name and the teacher’s name on their work; that’s very important because it makes the teacher feel responsible for the work if their name is up there. The work is going to be produced better, be of better quality, have more quantity—be put up nicer.
When I go to a class I always have several ideas and I say, "Oh, did you see this?" One of the ideas I was bringing out last time because of the theme Art and Literature was the booklet. Because of my own experience I bring new ideas, say that you're doing this and you could do it better this way, or you can do it differently, or here's another approach.

Carrie Dane, formerly artist/teacher at District 15

I find some of the level of the work not as good. A lot of it is pushed, a lot of it is like Bloomingdale's and I don't like that. I don't like kids working like that and there is a lot that has to do with show, and not that much content. Although the content, the theme is there. I think Aileen has very good intentions and good effort and she gets people to do things and that's important, but the shows reflects a little too much of her. By the third show that we had in the school—a lot of glitter and gold—it was a little bit too much. Also it was kind of King Tut, you know, the show and all the things.

Aileen stays in the building while teachers from all participating schools put up their displays for the District Art Show. She supervises the operation, makes suggestions: "Use clear polyurethane paint; use red paper on the entire wall"—even types name cards to replace a not-quite aesthetic sign—"Cover the table with green"; "This school used a tablecloth and it adds a nice texture"; or [to another teacher] "I suggested that this teacher use a color and look how it makes the face look—brings out the color, etc." A teacher who is having problems receives her immediate attention—when encouragement on the phone fails to reassure. She runs directly to the school—granted it is next door—but she is always available. She does not go to lunch.

By 8:45, Aileen has already been to a school to see the art show. She answers phone calls. At 9:15 teachers arrive, ready to hang their exhibits. Aileen continues to answer phone calls—some on music performances for the show, some on art teacher availability for hanging exhibits, calls for piano tuner. Returns to the exhibition area: "There's some silver paper upstairs. I think it will add something to it." "Have you something to cover the table?" She tries to place another school's exhibit; helps to carry tables; directs placement; takes paper off the walls. She tells how another teacher had solved the problem of bits and pieces on the table by buying cloths. Meanwhile the business of putting up the exhibit stops while teachers run out to buy paper, etc. to comply with her suggestions.

She always has a sense of what is right. Lon and I had one idea of what looked best; Aileen had another. Lon did not argue. I have been told that Aileen is frequently looked to as an authority figure, even by some that really know more than she.

At least two teachers feel that the district show in particular—along with other shows, contests, and competitions—is an intrusion. Neither thinks that a common theme is either necessary or desirable. They would prefer to see the culminating show a true showcase for the year's work instead of something that is forced upon them from outside and little relates to their own curricula. They see as useless and not related to "art," perhaps unprofessional, removed from their own sense of "art show" all of the things that Aileen values—without, I'm sure, knowing that it is she—all of the "touches," the shiny paper, the gloss, the "show." They also voiced dissatisfaction with the fact—something I keep hearing again and again—that so few of the kids whose work is part of the show ever get a chance to see their work hung; and so few of their peers ever see it. The intimation is that it is strictly P.R.—for the administration, etc.
Harold Cartwright

We have a lot of community support. How can you walk into that district office after seeing an art festival like that and talk against the arts? I mean it's gorgeous work.
4. PRACTICE

THE PERCEPTION AND PURPOSES OF ART
AND THE ART PROGRAM

There appears to be no explicit theory of learning in the teaching of art in District 15. Implicitly, however, at least four theoretical stances play a major role in the way in which art is perceived and taught in the district.

LEARNING: THE FACE

The Superintendent, Dr. Glassman, holds the strong conviction that the process of learning (in general) is more important than what is taught, and that the context should determine the content. This idea, then, as it is passed down from the superintendent to the principals, to the teachers and often to the students themselves, gives rise to the high degree of emphasis on the unusual, the innovative, the creative. Because the context determines the content, it is possible to have a new theme for art each year, and the subject matter of what is taught one year need have no apparent relationship to what may be taught the next.

Ira Bolterman, Teacher

A lot of what we are doing is actually at the moment. I'm a musician; I enjoy jamming with other musicians. That's going in without any chart and sitting down and playing and whatever comes out comes out. That's what I do with the kids. I'm jamming with them.

LEARNING: THE OVERSE

The autonomy allowed to principals makes possible programs that illustrate the antithesis of these goals, and programs exist in which what is taught takes on greater importance than the process of learning. Some principals have developed strong curricula in which the student or learner is seen as one who learns through example.

Louis Staiano, Principal

We had already instituted a writing program, a poetry appreciation program, writing in poetry, literature books that we give to our children, and a music program. Then we said, hey, it's time for art. After all we are in a great city with all kinds of art and our kids should know about these things.

Along with learning the saying of the day, the poem of the month, reading literature of the month, and learning about the painting of the month, every child in the school is required to keep a journal which is submitted to and personally checked by either the principal or assistant principal weekly.

16Louis Staiano is the Principal of P.S. 131, District 15, Brooklyn, New York.
Louis Staiano

You see the journal is a personal thing. There is no correction in the journal because we don't feel that a child should have red marks on any personal writing that he has done. It's something that he wants to build on and if he makes a mistake in spelling, big deal. He said what he wanted to say and that's the important thing. Now we do have a composition program in which all of those corrections are made. So every child has a journal from Grade 2 to Grade 6; some children in Grade 1 volunteer for it. I don't make it a requirement. What we require is one page below the grade level. In Grade 2 we require one page a week. In Grade 3, two pages; on up to Grade 6, five pages. It really amounts to one page a night. And we find everything in those journals: poignant things, funny things, poems—my sister Kathy, says a second grader, gives me a pain in the head. That's right! They have complaints. They mourn over deaths in the family—i.e., grandmas—and it's a good catharsis for them. They talk about funny incidents that happen to them, fights that they get into, but we never make any comment about their topics, except in some instances if we find a problem in there we will give it to the guidance counselors and say, "Hey, he is thinking about this subject, you better just talk to him." Most of the time it is just innocuous things that they like to write about. We encourage anything that they want—poetry in there, drawings in there, but they have to have writing with it.

Back in 1973 we started to collect compositions every week from every teacher in the building including Grade 1. I select one composition from every class in the building and then make a bulletin board called The Writers of the Week.

Martin Wasserman, Assistant Principal17

We decided that the area was right for art appreciation, but it had to be an appreciation of well-known paintings with an introduction to well-known painters. The children should be familiar with the paintings that are immediately recognizable—the Mona Lisa and Blue Boy and American Gothic and Van Gogh's Sunflowers. This was just an introduction to great art and great painters.

I do appreciate art and I feel that we are living in the greatest country in the world with access to everything. And I think the children that we send forth from elementary school should have this smattering at least of what great literature, great poetry, great art, and great music is all about. They don't have to love every painting by Picasso, but they should know that there is a Picasso.

So what we did was to ask the teachers. We told them that there was going to be an art appreciation program and we asked for their input as to what paintings we should use. And we got a great many suggestions from the teachers. However, Mr. Staiano and myself reserved the right to edit.

We did not want postage stamp copies. We wanted large, larger-than-life framed pictures that could be hung in each classroom. We selected ten per grade per month, for Grades 3, 4, 5, 6 and our special education classes. The program was so successful, by the way, that the Parents Association gave us the extra money to buy them for Grade 2. There is a different painting each month that is given to each class. There are ten on every grade level. At the end of the term the child can recognize the paintings.

All the teachers were asked to submit one lesson plan or in some cases two, or three when they loved art so much. Now, we have all the lesson plans in the office and on the back of each painting, in case the teacher wants some information for herself. So what we did was call on the resources of all our classroom teachers and the help of one of the other teachers in the school who was a cluster teacher interested in the program. The last composition of every month must be devoted to The Painting of the Month that the child is studying. Occasionally, we go down to the lunchroom and ask a child, "What is your painting of the

17Martin Wasserman is the Assistant Principal of P.S. 131, District 15, Brooklyn, New York.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>SEPT</th>
<th>OCT</th>
<th>NOV</th>
<th>DEC</th>
<th>JAN</th>
<th>FEB</th>
<th>MARCH</th>
<th>APRIL</th>
<th>MAY</th>
<th>JUNE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-1</td>
<td>Lady Jean</td>
<td>Ground Hog Day</td>
<td>Le Gourmet</td>
<td>Pinky</td>
<td>Bullfight</td>
<td>Young Woman With a Jug</td>
<td>The Bath</td>
<td>Woman With A Mango</td>
<td>Peaceable Kingdom</td>
<td>Boy With a Lute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BELLOWS</td>
<td>WYETH</td>
<td>PICASSO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VERMEER</td>
<td>CASSATT</td>
<td>GAUGUIN</td>
<td>HICKS</td>
<td>HALS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-2</td>
<td>Ground Hog Day</td>
<td>Pinky</td>
<td>Lady Jean</td>
<td>Le Gourmet</td>
<td>Boy With a Lute</td>
<td>Peaceable Kingdom</td>
<td>The Bath</td>
<td>Woman With A Mango</td>
<td>Bulfight</td>
<td>GOYA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WYETH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>GAINS-BOROUGH</td>
<td>BELLOWS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>Lady Jean</td>
<td>Pinky</td>
<td>Ground Hog Day</td>
<td>Woman With a Mango</td>
<td>The Bath</td>
<td>Boy With a Lute</td>
<td>Peaceable Kingdom</td>
<td>Bulfight</td>
<td>Young Woman With a Jug</td>
<td>VERMEER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PICASSO</td>
<td></td>
<td>GAINS-BOROUGH</td>
<td>WYETH</td>
<td>GAUGUIN</td>
<td>CASSATT</td>
<td>HICKS</td>
<td>GOYA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HC 31</td>
<td>Pinky</td>
<td>Le Gourmet</td>
<td>Ground Hog Day</td>
<td>Bullfight</td>
<td>The Bath</td>
<td>Woman With a Mango</td>
<td>Young Woman With a Jug</td>
<td>Boy With a Lute</td>
<td>Lady Jean</td>
<td>Peaceable Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GAINS-BOROUGH</td>
<td>PICASSO</td>
<td>WYETH</td>
<td>GOYA</td>
<td>CASSATT</td>
<td>GAUGUIN</td>
<td>VERMEER</td>
<td>HICKS</td>
<td>BELLOWS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>Bullfight</td>
<td>The Bath</td>
<td>Woman With a Mango</td>
<td>Ground Hog Day</td>
<td>Peaceable Kingdom</td>
<td>Le Gourmet</td>
<td>Pinky</td>
<td>Boy With a Lute</td>
<td>Lady Jean</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VERMEER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GOYA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1—The second-grade chart showing the distribution to classrooms of the Painting-of-the-Month. There are also separate charts with progressively more complex and sophisticated paintings for grades 3 through 6.
month?" and if the child gets it right, with the artist, we give them a commendation card. The kids love it.

Every room has the painting of the month with the title underneath it. The child can look at the painting for the entire month; he doesn't have to look at it all the time, but he can see it peripherally, subconsciously. When we send our kids to the junior high school for a preliminary visit, I understand that they walk through the halls pointing out paintings without names and saying: "That's a Renoir, that's so and so." And they come back and say, "You know they have our paintings!"

We have two book reports a month—every two weeks. They must do a book report and submit it to us. We look at each one of them. One of them is a book report of their own choice that they take from the public library or the school library; the other one is a famous classic, in some cases an adaptive classic, which we give the children. In other words we have enough copies so that in the third grade, for example, the children one month will get Little Women, the next month Robin Hood, then they will do Black Beauty, Heidi. The upper grades, of course get different ones. A test goes along with each one of these books that the teacher must submit to the class and then submit along with the book reports. We check compositions, journals, book reports. We also have social studies projects, four a year, research projects, and each class in the school has its own set of encyclopedias which we have purchased through yard sales, etc.

Louis Staiano

And you didn’t talk about the music program with grade 4, or Lincoln Center.

THE LEARNER: THE FACE

Lon Gileski, the art specialist at a junior high school, who was seen by his assistant principal as having turned the school around, where “art became a way of life,” perhaps best expressed one pervasive attitude toward the child of District 15 as “learner”: 
Fig. 2—Catalogue of Acquisitions—P.S. 131, Museum Americana

6. *Dictionary Stand*
   A structure that enabled two students to use reference material at the same time.

6a. *Currier & Ives Print*
   “God Bless Our School” Donated by B. Hyman, School Secty.

7, 13. *Bound Slate Board*
   A reusable writing surface used in school. Paper was largely unavailable because of its expense.
   Sticks of graphite were used to write with. Donated by Martin Wasserman.

8. *Trestle School Benches*
   Students’ benches. Constructed by the children of P131K.

9. *Edison Mimeograph*
   A hand-operated device that used stencils, ink, and roller to duplicate typewritten materials.

10. *Water Bucket*
    A wooden container used to make well water available for drinking in the schoolhouse.
    Also used to prevent spread of possible fire from overheated stove.

11. *Book Shelf*
    A small wall unit for displaying books. Made by students of P131K.

12. *Book, 1898*
    Pictorial Atlas of the Spanish American War.

14. *Slate Writing Boards*
    Used by children as a reuseable surface. Donated by E.G.

15. *Book, 1859*
    *Summary of the Evidences.* Donated by D.P.

16. *Child’s Notebook, 1912*
    Notebook of Josephine Wells, grade 2. Donated by Martin Wasserman.
The student needs a lot of ego reinforcement or self-worth reinforcement. The things that I pick for our involvement are geared to a point of determination. They're short term goals with feedback at the end—feedback either in terms of ego reinforcement or artistic reinforcement, an exhibit, a certificate or a publication. I don't generally put something into competition where the kid is not going to get some kind of a return. I think it's very important, particularly with the kind of academic standards that many have. This is a place where a child can achieve and enjoy recognition. A child who will never get high academic grades can find a niche here and can feel rewarded. Carlo who's tremendously creative working 3-D is a Gates student; at 15 he is still in seventh grade because he can't read. And none of the reading programs have successfully motivated him in terms of getting him going. Each one has kind of fallen off, and he's run out of the class and he's come to my class as a last ditch stand.

THE LEARNER: THE OTHER

Still another attitude was demonstrated and expressed by the two art specialists at another junior high school. They are not concerned with stroking, or with offering compensation where academic achievement is not deemed possible.

To fully understand this attitude, it is important to know that these two teachers are black, and that their concern for minorities has personal meaning. On the television show "Fame," which deals with students in a replica of New York City's High School of the Performing Arts, the black dance teacher is rigidly demanding of her students' performance. She says, "Where I grew up, you were arrested for dreaming." It was action and performance that counted. Like Lydia of "Fame," Laura Madison presents her students with a stern, professional, and demanding demeanor. Typical was her emphatic criticism of the High School of Art and Design because of its concentration on the arts. Her concern was that the students could not pass their science regents' exams. She contends that especially for minority kids, scores in subjects other than art are most important: "If they have talent in art, it won't go away; their survival will be the ability to excel in science, etc."

Notes: M. Wilson

No two situations could be more disparate than these two junior high schools. The conversation of the two teachers here seemed to contradict everything that had been "sold" by others—e.g., "Kids are streetwise." Somehow these two seemed to be more sympatico with the kids and their situation. They say, "Brooklyn is the country; New York is the city—kids are wise about their own streets." The point was that it is slower, more comfortable where they are coming from—they don't relate to, understand, or even fear the violence that might be in "the city." They are like babes in the woods when they are taken out of their own environment. Laura and Troy are both firm believers in discipline and demand a high level of performance from all kids, treat 7.7 or 8.7 in the same way as the 7.1s and 8.2s. The calligraphy in the art exhibit was done by Troy's 8.6 class; because she expected it of them, they were able to perform.

Louis Staiano and Martin Wasserman, the principal and AP of P.S. 131, have an attitude toward the learner that relates to those of the two art specialists from the junior high school, although for different reasons. They have directed their entire curriculum toward the advanced, even the "gifted," learner, in contrast to those programs that aim at the lowest common denominator. They expect—and their expectations are often met—excellence from all students. Staiano told me that his school's programs were of benefit not only to the more advanced student, but to the slower students as well, who, although they might not be able to achieve all that is expected, might still reach higher than they ordinarily would.
ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS AND TEACHING

Although the cluster teacher devotes an entire 45 minute period to art, the quality art experiences at the elementary school level appeared to be the province of the classroom teacher who values art not only for art’s sake, but as a way of life, who demands that all work—whether drawing or mathematics—be “art”ful, and who makes art a part of every activity every day.

THE CLUSTER: THE FACE

In one particular art room that I visited, there are sometimes 36 or 37 children in a class, not an entirely unusual situation; there are often these same numbers in other schools, but without the behavioral consequences. The situation is compounded by teacher absences. There are no substitutes, so there are always additional students in each class. Classes are back-to-back; one class goes out, another comes in. Many of the classes are given art not only as a “relief” measure for the classroom teacher, but also as the least demanding alternative for “problem” students to whatever “cluster program” is being offered. For the cluster, maintenance is the name of the game. Prizes (pretzels) are given to the monthly winner of points for setup, working, cleanup, lineup. One wonders, “Where is the art?” This cluster teacher works with five classes in grades 4, 5, and 6, but not all classes in all grades. Usually two times weekly for 45 minutes, sometimes only once. These are probably the “better” classes—according to the needs of the “schedule” (teachers’ prep periods). The work these kids produce is all very much the same—busy work—and it is hard to see how it can be otherwise. These kids have been told that they can’t do the artwork; they believe it. The teacher is given an “Art Club” once a week for 45 minutes—her pretzels.

Although I was welcome in the building and announced on the P.A. by the most gracious principal (whether it was the superintendent’s edict, I don’t know), I got the distinct impression that visitors were seen as an imposition. The art cluster expected my visit on a second day, but she greeted me at the door:

Notes: M. Wilson

The teacher asked me not to come into her room today. She says she does not have the control that she does when she is alone with the kids; has no time to talk; cannot see me after school or for dinner.

Overheard in the teachers’ room during discussion about a fired teacher aids from Long Island who had shot a kid, an assistant principal, and subsequently, himself: “Believe me I know how that guy felt.” More talk about kids coming to school and keeping in their desks a “martial arts” device made of “two pieces of wood with a chain across it.”

THE CLASSROOM TEACHER: THE OBVERSE

In this same school I learned of parent volunteers working in conjunction with classroom teachers to introduce and to take students to museums; and although the teacher is asked to do nothing but find the volunteers, the coordinator of the program (Museum Cultural Resources: School Volunteer Program) reports that there are many classrooms in which the teachers have “taken off” with projects related to the children’s museum visits. And I observed and spoke with a classroom teacher whose room was filled with “art” and projects that his students had made—in this and previous years:
Notes: M. Wilson

The room is filled with drawings. All art done in the service of other subjects: the solar system, figures hanging from ceiling on wires, on the walls—Condorman and more, paper bag puppets, banners, dioramas. There are also neatly ensconced mummies, sarcophagi, hieroglyphics—vestiges of an earlier District Art Show—and a newly constructed riverboat, part of their contribution to this year's show. Another year they had done Ancient Rome. Last year the class had constructed a Colonial house, sketched furniture at museums—they had used two or three museums for their research—and furnished the house, as well.

The teacher is an example of the kind that Aileen seeks out, capitalizing on his natural inclinations, but as a teacher of a sixth grade class designated as "gifted," his own major concerns take a more academic turn. This day he is testing the class for an upcoming city math examination:

If they don't get high reading and math scores, if they do not get promoted to a good junior high class, I'm held accountable.

In every instance, the principal sets the tone; the school, the teachers, the way art is programmed and taught, the kids, all are a reflection of this autonomous individual.

Notes: M. Wilson

The school (P.S. 154) was involved in a rehearsal for Guys and Dolls so that Judy's third, Ira's sixth, and David's fifth grades were all working very hard at rehearsing and only a few at any one time were in the classroom. Ira and David are both teaching the kids how to play Chess.

Judy Oates

I always loved music and art, but in other schools it's always somehow in the background. It was just added to the curriculum. But here it's in front of the curriculum. It comes before everything else. The principal makes it like that. I think, when they say come down for Guys and Dolls practice in the multi-media now, you go down immediately. And you stay there until it's finished. And if you don't do reading or you don't do math or science, you just do it twice the next day or something—just try to catch up on it. I think that the children learn a lot from this type of education. When you are learning the songs, you are also learning how to read; you are learning comprehension; and you are learning to act. And you are also learning discipline.

Ira Bolterman

When I attended the seminar, Learning to Read through the Arts, at the beginning of the year, I found out that I'd been doing that all along. That's why it came easy to Dave and Judy and me. Our rooms have always looked like this. We have always related art to every subject area that we've taught. And a couple of years ago we even started doing it in unheard of areas like mathematics. You can get beautiful artwork and have a beautiful room in a period of two months when you apply the art to every area. We've been doing that basically. How can other subjects suffer when the art is related to every academic area that they are doing. Our reading scores have been going up every year. Kids can learn in all the academic areas and they can produce in art at the same time.
David Bellantonio

I have always integrated art in the curriculum because children like to draw. Even if it's squiggly lines, they like to. And only with a little instruction and they begin to see what they are capable of doing. Even with a little instruction, they begin to produce. So I gear the art lessons to these particular academic lessons. In social studies this year we started out with a map of the school. We actually constructed a small blueprint of where we live and then we extended from the school. “Put the school in the middle of the big piece of paper” and then “Let’s start drawing lines” and then they inked in and then they drew the trees and we made jokes about it. They really did phenomenal pieces of map work, artistically rendered, very beautiful to see, but they were brought home because we had no more room to do other things—to put anything else up. As we went along, I would teach the group more refined rules, such as the Golden Mean. I showed them that and that also worked well with the math lesson dividing up a piece of paper into 2/3rds, and lo and behold I found out that people didn’t know how to use the ruler. So you see that then went into “so let’s learn how to use a ruler.”

Judy Oates

Mr. Posner couldn’t give me an art position because the art position was already taken in the school, so he gave me a classroom position. But I find myself exposing all the art that I have learned; I can’t keep it locked up inside of me. As a regular classroom teacher without that background I would have just done what a regular classroom teacher does, but being that I did have all that art behind me, it spilled into everything that I was doing: whether it was social studies or reading or math or anything—it just came out.

Ira Bolterman

This is what we spent three days on [a prop—a wedding cake for the school production of Guys and Dolls] and they spent a lot of time making those flowers, painting it, those are four cartons the kids picked up from the garbage on the street, which we cleaned up quickly and painted. This is one of the most creative bunch of kids I've ever had. Did you see our stuff in the district office? They surprised me, they really did. When we studied architecture at the beginning of the year, we studied various aspects of details in the architecture and they studied, for example, different types of roofs—eaves, window trimmings—that were done in concrete and clay. We walked over there to look at the different houses. They did houses and they did aliens this year. And, you know, when you get a creative bunch of kids you never run out of ideas. A lot of our stuff is at the district. Before that the room looked a lot better.

[Ira is a musician] You are looking at a person who can’t tell a Picasso from a Rembrandt; I don’t consider myself to have any “taste” in art. You could put me in an art gallery and say, “Well, Ira, what do you think of that?” and I’d say, “Well, it’s nice; the colors are pretty.” I’d probably make a fool out of myself even trying to give you a subjective opinion about it but I am developing it now. Now I start to see. Dave and I have been working for a long time, but now I think I am starting to develop some sort of taste in art. I am also realizing that adults’ taste in art is totally relative, just like it is in music. I can hear a very short piece of music and think that it is brilliant; Dave might hear it and think that it is garbage. So it is also a tender area; it’s very tough.

David Bellantonio

Well, I’m a professional photographer, self-taught so I have an awareness of color, tones in terms of black and white photography. I studied fine art for a long time to study composition, color—although I don’t do it myself. So I have good, self-learned training in the arts.
Wall of art in David Bellantion's classroom, P.S. 154.

Closeup of student art in Bellantion's classroom.
Judy Oates

Working with Ira and Dave is terrific. It was like icing on the cake to have the two of them here, who were so artistic and so musically oriented to bounce off my ideas from. It was terrific to have people like them who were good to work with, who had such a nice sense about themselves. When I was working on the figures for the superheroes, I would know if something was wrong with it but I really couldn't put my finger on it. And when I would look at a figure from a distance I said: "There is something wrong there but I can't really tell." I'd go over to Ira and say, "Ira could you come into my room for a second and tell me what's wrong?" He might say the legs are too short, arms are too fat, or the head is too small. And he would say cut it down here and take a piece of chalk and draw it on for me and tell me where to adjust it. He's making a birthday cake for the show Guys and Dolls and he didn't know how to make flowers. So I said, "Well, I know how to make flowers, so I'll give you some tissue paper," and I demonstrated how to make them—this is what you do, very simple. And we went into his room, put a few on and, did you see the cake in there? Isn't that gorgeous? He asked me about the cake so I told him about the cake and David's constantly calling me into his room to show me the work that his children are doing. He's very proud of what they are doing. And I love all the writing that he's doing with his class. I think it's a tremendous undertaking and I thought they looked great at the district office.

Ira Bolsterman

If you were to stay here for a few days you would see Dave and Judy and me running excitedly down the hall to each other, showing new ideas that we've thought of, that we could help the others with. You'll see us running down the halls exasperated, not being able to figure out what to do, and getting help from the other two. The three of us are very involved just as a group of teachers. Coincidentally, we happen to be involved in the program, which I thought was very fortunate. It enhanced it a bit, you know it formalized things a little more. But the three of us working together, it's like a dream. We're having a good time.

We share ideas constantly. We eliminate bad ideas together. It's like two teachers teaching one classroom full of 60 children. They are different grades but we're sharing our ideas so often that we naturally eliminate the bad ones quickly. I'm sixth and Dave is fifth. Dave prepared these children to have an art appreciation base, so to speak, like a foundation. Many of these kids wouldn't have been able to do that detail you see up there. That was done at the beginning of the year, by the way. That's amazing work for the beginning of the year. You can see all the detail, that's exceptional. And you're looking at 25 pictures right there. I didn't choose the best, I put them all up. I give Dave a lot of credit for that. They were prepared right away to do that. Dave and I are also into different things. I like collages, Dave never does collages. I'll do architecture, Dave, I don't think, does too much of that. They'll do that here. It works out beautifully. I like making things, Dave likes pictures. So I'll have my kids doing dioramas, he'll have his kids doing murals. I don't do murals; he does. My bulletin board out there, I took that from him. It was a good idea. He said "put up a couple of real big pictures"; it worked out beautifully.

I think Judy used some of my kids for a project while I was out. That's another thing: we use each other's resources as far as the children are concerned and that's another testimony to the administration; there's no objection to that. Judy will come in, "Ira, I have to have a picture of a man that looks like this, and my kids, they're just not making it. Can I have a couple of your kids to help my kids do it?" Oh sure, go ahead. It's another way we cooperate. It makes everything better.

David Bellantonio

Museums are my favorite places. So these things do help me bring to them that kind of feeling. When we went to the museum, by the way, they were enthralled. When we go on trips it's a very elaborate procedure. It isn't "Here, let's run, let's eat lunch." With a sixth grade class it's even more refined. We take our sketch pads, and they're encouraged to sketch at random what interests them. As they're doing the sketching, I'm doing the commentary. And I also have a large fund of historical knowledge and they're amazed by this information,
mythology and anthropology and all these things, and the ritual connected, for instance, with the Egyptian things. They, in turn, return that in terms of their own fantasies and dreams. Viewing the mummies occasions a lot of fantasies about living and dying that are then turned back into art. You take those feelings and you do something with it. So they sketch at will. And when they come back they take these sketches and make a new picture.

Illustration and Chapter 2 of Abstract Woman, "a novel in five chapters," by a student in David Bellantoni's fifth-grade classroom. Her inspiration derived from paintings seen on a class trip to the Brooklyn Museum.

The Villan at Large

One day when Abstract Woman was admiring the abstract paintings in the Brooklyn Muesium she noticed something. There was graffiti on the painting. She was so angry that she broke the painting in two. The next day she saw her excellent abstracts with dirty graffiti on them. So she said to herself; "this could only be one person who is doing this because the graffiti is identical. So she made a poster and put it in front of her house. It was very long. It alone had all kinds of beautiful abstracts down on it. It read, New Abstract Paintings at the Brooklyn Muesium. She knew that the person who ruin her pictures with graffiti might come. She was right. He did come. When she saw him she knew it was [him] right away. He was so funny looking. He had many different colored markers on his body. They were sticking out. His name was Graffiti Man. When she saw him she automatically turned the ugly graffiti on his body to pretty abstracts. He became furious, and ran out of the

Note: All spelling, grammar, punctuation, is as fifth-grader wrote it.
museum cursing and raving. Back in home he turned himself back to Graffiti Man. He also vowed he would take revenge on Abstract Woman for beautifying him. He would get to her by exhausting her. After that day [he began] putting graffiti all over the world however unprepared for the speed or the hard work of Abstract Woman. She was everywhere to change his ugly graffiti to nice clean abstracts.

Ira Bolterman

An idea that I got from Dave, a great way to take kids to museums, is to take them with sketch books. They sit down, they bring their lunch and they sketch whatever they see. I did that last year. We had trips to the park and around the neighborhood sponsored by the Forest Rangers in Prospect Park. And that’s when I learned about architecture, because they taught the kids. And we went around with sketch books, that’s the way we like to cut up the trip. We like to bring kids out in the field as much as possible. It’s a more dynamic experience to be able to actually sketch buildings than to show them pictures of buildings. Dave always has his class bringing pencils and pens wherever they go.

Judy Oates

I have three bulletin boards in the school, besides all the art that’s pouring out of my classroom that I have no room for. I’m hanging it from the ceiling.

Ira Bolterman

I keep looking around my room. I love this room, I really do. You notice there’s no “store-bought” decorations in our three rooms. We’re a little rigid that way. We don’t allow that. It has to be made by the kids.

Brooklyn schools are New York City urban schools—lofty, multi-storied dinosaurs: like an excerpt from the thesaurus under “grayness”—dull, dingy, somber, sober, sad, dreary. Coming upon these three rooms from the corridors of one of these schools was like a miracle. Not only was every bulletin board completely covered with brilliant artwork, but every space on every wall was filled to the ceiling. Wires were strung across the room so that figures and illustrated stories could be hung from the ceiling as well: Ira’s lesson on architecture, his large hanging superheroes, the narratives (one student had created countless episodes of the adventures of “The Wagg”), David’s students’ paintings done in the styles of artists, their “novels.”

Ira Bolterman

You see it’s enjoyable to produce in this atmosphere. We go home at the end of a day and I can tell you, we’re tired, but it’s fun to work hard and it’s even more rewarding when the students see what they can do.

The cluster art teacher is seen, in many situations, as merely another resource teacher who makes possible the mandated prep periods for the classroom teacher, and in others a means by which all of the art competitions and contests may be accommodated. Nevertheless, the autonomy that allows one principal to use a parent in place of a cluster to teach art allows another to use a cluster to teach art appreciation in addition to one who teaches art. Linda Hoyes, who has the charge of teaching students about their “painting of the month,” is capable and enthusiastic, although untrained in art, as are most art clusters in the elementary schools. She did take art history in college, however, and has worked very hard to make what she does
with the children interesting, informative, and meaningful, including bringing in a friend—an art history major—to teach students.

Linda meets each class “generally once a week” and students carry with them to the room their paintings of the month—a sign on the door says “Art Appreciation.” She teaches pretty much as Mr. Wasserman has prescribed—something about the artist, dates, art movement, etc. and feels there should be “more.” Linda now has students “get into” the painting—e.g., a Paul Klee: Pretend that you are the person in the painting. Describe the surroundings/where you are. How did you feel about being the person? What will happen next? At the end of the month, each class takes a test on the painting they have been studying. They answer questions about the artist: “Cezanne”; title: “Apples and Oranges”; the country: “France”; school: “Impressionist.” They also talk about what the Impressionists did with light; still life, etc.

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOMS AND TEACHING

In the junior high schools, the person responsible for teaching art is generally a trained art specialist, and supposedly more able than the elementary cluster to determine not only what will be taught, but how. And although this is to all intents and purposes the case, the principals or assistant principals (or both), the arts supervisor, the demands of competitions and contests, as well as special programs imposed from the outside all seem to stand in the way of a comprehensive art program. In some cases, the art specialist uses all of these diverse distractions to his or her advantage, while others continue to “swim against the tide.”

THE FACE

Lon Gileski wants to run a classroom with “a tremendous amount of freedom that at first may seem chaotic.” In fact, a visit to his artroom will reveal a multiplicity of projects going on at the same time, and if chaotic, it is also an atmosphere charged with excitement in which each group is totally involved in its own project.

Lon Gileski

If we take it just a little bit before Romeo and Juliet [the District Art Show project] we were juggling—on a long range basis—two murals; a large replica of the Globe Theatre; four of those huge figures in costume; all of the illustrations that were going on; dioramas. That was pretty much it on Romeo and Juliet. At the same time, though, we were working on finishing up the projects for the Salute to the Brooklyn Bridge and we had three-dimensional work, some of which has now gone to Lever House. We have a trolley and we have the building, a fire wagon, a small scale carousel horse, flat work going to the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Union Gas, so we’re getting that ready. And also looking forward to the show at the Grand Army Plaza Art Center where some of these pieces wound up going. We were also doing the yearbook and finishing the pieces for the yearbook at that time. Plus my own involvement. I had to redo the layout of the entire yearbook because the man from the company who was supposed to do the layout never would have known where to cut. It had to be cut back from 79 pages to 64. We had no real photographer this year, some people were taking shots and whatever. So all of that had to be pulled together, plus we were doing a project with the music department and that was hand-made instruments the kids had made. You saw those, I think at the district office. Those things were going on at one time plus those great big figures that the kids carried in this morning, being revamped and readied for the spring shows at the district and here, and at the park. All of that going on plus regular classwork. Now those are just the things that are going on while regular classwork is going on. Some of it, as with the art talent class, was their involvement. Other classes had their own particular project that they were working on. So we had a lot of stuff around the room, things hanging all over the place.
Fig. 3—A Selection of Writings About Their “Painting of the Month” by Students at P.S. 131.

The painting Woman with Mango is a beautiful portrait. It is a full portrait. This lovely lady's full body can be seen. Gauguin used very bright colors in this painting. These colors give us a warm feeling. The woman in the painting looks like she is having a baby. We are not sure if this is so. We like this painting because of the colors.

—Grade 2

Fruit and a Jug was painted by Paul Cezanne. He was a French painter. It is a “still life,” a picture of some things that are still or not moving. He used different colors. He drew apples, oranges, pears and lemons. Most of the shapes in the painting are rounded or curved. When I look at the picture, the real-looking fruits make me hungry!

—Grade 3

I think that Paul Klee's picture Head of Man, looks like it took a long time to paint. It looks to me like a bubble gum machine. His eyes could be two round gums. His crooked nose could be where you put your dime in. The picture is unusual because it makes us look at a lot of shapes and lines. It is neat and carefully done. Klee used different colors, such as pink, red, yellow, black and orange. The artist who did Blue Boy seems more serious than Paul Klee.

—Grade 3

Joseph Pickett, who painted Manchester Valley, was born in 1848 and died in 1918. He was born in New Hope, Pennsylvania and owned a general store there. He did his painting behind the store. He was also a carpenter and shipbuilder. He had no training in art and painted only as a hobby. Three of his paintings are known to exist. In this scene, I see trees, a river, houses, bells, hills, a flag, a building and gates along the grass. I see rough textures in this painting, like rough bricks. The hills are rough. The wood and land are rough. The trees are leafy and there is a metal train. The painting has a peaceful, almost sad mood. I see many colors repeated in this picture. They are red, green, brown and yellow. They are beautifully arranged in the painting. The perspective is wrong but I like the picture because it is quiet and beautiful. The houses are nice to look at and the whole painting is interesting.

—Grade 4

Guernica was painted by Pablo Picasso in protest against the bombing of his town in Spain. The painting shows the horrible things that can happen anywhere in war. It shows many people crushed and just lying dead. Guernica is a large wall painting, a mural, and its main colors are white, gray and black. In the middle of the painting is a huge triangle. Also painted is a horse which seems to be stepping on dead bodies. Arms, legs and heads are lying about. When Picasso made this painting, he was certainly a visionary; he used all the potential of a new style of painting we now call "cubism." But I dislike Guernica because it shows too much violence and disaster.

—Grade 6

Winter Scene with Bird Trap was created by Peter Breughel. This painting is very good because once you think you’ve seen everything, you find something else. In the back you see houses that look like hills, and right above that you see some birds. In the bottom right hand corner of this winter scene is the bird trap mentioned in the title. The trees have no leaves and the houses are all covered with snow. In this painting, you see some people playing, but you look at them as if you were on top of a hill.

—Grade 6

* The first won the Writer-of-the-Week award at P.S. 131; the remainder have been reprinted from Wordarama P.S. 131, June, 1983.
THE OBVERSE

Notes: M. Wilson

Bob [Stake] and I are seated at the back of the class—this is not one of the "talent" classes, more like a 5 or a 6 class—watching Troy present the material to the students dealing with dreams, showing them some interesting paintings in progress by another class. Paintings by Dali and other relevant works are displayed on the walls. Most go directly to work after the presentation, with only mild curiosity about the two White visitors. (During an earlier visit, I had been spotted—unescorted—in the hall by a student who audibly remarked, "Oh, look! A White woman.") Bob is impressed with the way the students attend to their work, comparing them with the more frivolous junior high school students in the "work-ethnic" bound Midwest. We are unaware of some ruckus in the halls between classes—there are calls to the teacher to make sure she is all right—but the class continues to attend to their work. When I watched Laura's class, I was also impressed with the way she handled the students, but with a great deal of strain on one's normal good nature; it can't be easy to maintain such a stern demeanor—and yet, under the circumstances, each teacher must find his or her own way to deal with these firecrackers. Lon G. says that being 6' 4-1/2" tall helps. Troy and Laura tell the story of the White male English teacher who, each morning, stepped into the coat closet, closed the door and yelled and banged on the walls; then emerged, straight-faced. "He never had any discipline problems; you have to be a little crazy." And yet it is their own sense of self-discipline, of art, that comes through in their teaching and the paintings in the district show were outstanding... the kids are involved, quiet, and work hard in Troy's class, but Lon G.'s methods seem to elicit more excitement.

Lon Gileski

You can have [freedom] in the art room, and you can use it to your best advantage. And the excitement of that stuff—the excitement that goes on—sparks them to other things. There is a vitality that takes place, a tremendous amount of interaction. There is probably less for me to do in that "teacherly" sense of being up there, but there is more for me to do in terms of involvement, because I am constantly on. There is no point where I am not on; there is almost no point in the day where I am not at the beck and call of somebody. I am working with a small group or I am getting something going or pulling somebody into something. It allows me much more time to be involved with the kids themselves, and I find that in a group project like that, you keep the group in focus, keep them looking toward what you are doing. [If I were to say], "This is the technique we are doing this week; look at the figure this way; do this," it would really set kind of a distance. This approach doesn't. It has you right in the middle of it. Something is going on, you pull somebody up and you get them physically involved with it.
5. SUMMARY

The Brooklyn site was chosen because of what was seen as a program, established at each school year's beginning, developed about and unified by a common theme, very often incorporating the study of art history and the museum. This was the face that one could see.

The obverse is a district:

- where autonomy is king—sought, nurtured, and revered—where principals, teachers, and even students are encouraged to "do your own thing";
- where the context frequently determines the content, with emphasis on the unusual, the innovative, the creative, so that there may be a new theme for art every year, and what is taught one year need have no apparent relationship to what may be taught the next;
- where "culture" is the brass ring on the merry-go-round—grabbed for at every turn, in every arts program offered in the vast cultural resource that is New York City;
- where there is no mandate to teach art, and teachers who do so at the elementary level are generally untrained in art. Their function is to allow classroom teachers the mandated number of preparation periods a week (five for Chapter I schools; two for non-Chapter I schools) won by the teachers' union;
- where contests, displays, and competitions could constitute, as one administrator put it, a curriculum by themselves;
- where the realities of the life of the children of the district include poverty, drugs, language barriers, rats, garbage, street gangs, vandalism and violence; where discipline is a major issue;
- where funds and funding for special subjects in particular are low so that new programs, grants, and other funded projects are assiduously pursued;
- where the accountability to perform in reading and math is passed down from superintendent to teacher to student; scores are published in the paper and teachers are judged on them; principals are evaluated by them; and superintendents' reputations rise and fall with them.

The questions that are raised by the vagaries of an autonomous and bureaucratic system are these:

- If every principal is free to create his or her own program, to use a cluster for art, or not art; where there is a continual search for new programs; where, in any case, no single written curriculum exists; where the demands of contests and competitions are seen as a separate curriculum, can there be a program?
- Can an art program survive in a system where the emphasis is on math and reading scores, particularly where there are obvious language barriers and, consequently, children who cannot read?
- What are the realities of teaching art history and criticism in such a setting as this?
- Without the support of the superintendent and the superhuman efforts of the arts coordinator, can there be a program?
In Brooklyn District 15 for the past eight years there has been a program where teachers have worked with the arts coordinator toward a common goal; where the study of art and artists and museums is frequently specified by the designated theme; and where each perceived obstacle is turned about and used to the advantage of the program:

- where because the autonomy stops at one level or another, it allows the arts coordinator to play upon the competition among principals to strengthen the art program, allowing each one to exercise his or her autonomy in participating in Aileen Golden's program.
- where the search for the new and different makes possible a new theme each year, which becomes, in essence, a new curriculum each year. And if there is no written guide for the yearly thematic program, the pedagogy derives from state and city curricula;
- where the use of the many cultural resources of Brooklyn and of New York City not only introduces students to art and artists, but also actively engages students with the arts;
- where, in a single elementary school, not only those teachers designated to be art clusters, but classroom teachers are all teaching art, whereas in the elementary school in more traditional programs there are only one or sometimes two art teachers;
- where the contests and competitions and the need for more and more work to be submitted to the various shows all further supply a need for students' artwork and ultimately for all art classes in all schools working toward the same end;
- where, although math and reading scores are published in the paper, Aileen Golden's bulletins appear to have been nearly as effective in inciting the competition among principals;
- where the world of street gangs, rats, murder, drugs, and violence frequently becomes obscured by a different reality, where children from diverse ethnic backgrounds become engaged in the world of art and artists and works of art. Kids come to know that there is a Picasso.

Notes: M. Wilson

Picture, if you will, a typical Brooklyn school playground with steps leading to a street that has been torn up, the yawning crevices of stone and concrete lying like open wounds, the grey dust permeating the air and covering in a fine layer the endless rows of black plastic garbage bags that line the street. In contrast, on the steps of the playground, children with bright, eager faces crowd about two strangers, anxious to join in the conversation. The sounds of other children playing games sometimes drowns out the excited chatter, and sometimes the adults have almost to shout to be heard, but the children strain to hear and the animated conversation goes on for most of the recess period.

The talk centers about things that the children have learned about and talked about in school and are anxious to share with Brent and me, because we are interested in hearing about Guernica, "it shows the horrors of the Spanish civil war" and "Picasso painted it in black and grey to show the horrors"; Van Gogh's Sunflowers; The Mona Lisa, "Oh! You've been to France?"; the Milkmaid by Vermeer; Breezing Up by Winslow Homer, "It's like real"; Degas' Dancing Class; Arrangement in Grey and Black [from a third-grader] — "He was James Whistler"; and more: Rembrandt and Wyeth and Blue Boy—they couldn't remember Gainsborough—and two more Van Goghs, Starry Night and the Potato Eaters. These were all paintings that they knew and could talk about and describe when they were unsure of the title of the work or the artist.
Like Moriana and Brooklyn and District 15, autonomy, too, has a face and an obverse. On the one hand it allows individuals to innovate, enrich, and extend curricula, to energize and revitalize a program each year, and to unify and mobilize an entire school district about a theme, year in and year out. On the other hand, it allows individuals to participate to a greater or lesser degree in the district program, or to reject it; to devise rich and innovative programs of their own, to otherwise follow their own cultural agendas, or to follow none. Indeed, thematic mobilization may be seen as the one unifying factor, and, given the autonomous face of District 15, conceivably the only one possible. The theme offered a focus for all of the diverse activities, and often even those detractors who were most averse to participation became obliged to take part. Contests and competitions, the ritual of the District Show, and the pageantry of the festivals are surrounded by an aura of symbolic magic that converts the obligatory into the desirable. Within the context of the ritual, no single school failed to be involved and represented in the District office on the second week of May.

One of the principals speculated about the possibilities of a mandated written curriculum in art. He said:

You can put anything you want on paper, but if you don’t have Aileen Goldens, Bonnie Bakers, and Lon Gileskis....

At the end of the 1982–1983 school year, Aileen Golden accepted the position of director of curriculum and instruction for another Brooklyn school district and she has not been replaced; Lon Gileski joined his wife in the Peace Corps in Thailand; and Bonnie Baker also left District 15 in January 1984.

What of the art program?

The superintendent, Dr. Glassman, will remain a strong proponent of the arts and of the idea of a theme and a districtwide art show (and surely, without his commitment and support there may have been no art program at all), but a queen bee without drones means a hive without honey.

The principals admired Aileen Golden for her ability to work, to organize, and to carry through, and they were pleased with the results. They were not willing, however, to put in the same energy to achieve those results; their priorities lie with math and reading for which they are publicly accountable.

Judy Oates took the art position at P.S. 154 where she and the fifth and sixth grade teachers had been working so closely together, and surely the enthusiasm that pervaded those classrooms will continue. It will also continue in many other elementary classrooms in which the teachers who were working with and incorporating art in all facets of the curriculum gained impetus for their activities from Aileen Golden. And we can assume that the art cluster positions for which the arts coordinator fought are, at least for a while, extant in the other 23 schools. But with her departure, nobody remains to urge that teachers submit works to shows or even contests, to establish a theme, to coordinate for a culminating art show; teachers I spoke to, who had worked closely with Aileen Golden, said they were “doing their own thing.”

The assistant principal at the junior high school where Lon G. reigned had said that without that dynamo, they would continue to endorse the arts, but on a different level.

The teachers who found the necessity to participate in contests and shows an imposition may now be more able to carry on their own programs.

The program at P.S. 131, I understand, is alive and well.