

North Carolina Blumenthal Performing Arts Center: Education Institute

Charlotte, North Carolina

Category: Partnerships; Teacher Training; Arts Integration; Evaluation

What a difference a preposition makes! When GAINS talks about “education in the arts,” it means something different from “education through the arts.” But never let it be said that the folks who created GAINS (Gaston Arts Integration Nourishes Success) think small. Kindergartners through fifth graders at Ida Rankin Elementary School are meeting the North Carolina Standard Course of Study requirements both “in” and “through” the arts.

In the arts, Ida Rankin students and teachers have learned about Creole music and culture from a renowned zydeco musician, not to mention how to audition for a school musical (or a Broadway show!) from the casts of Broadway shows. Through the arts, they’ve discovered Native American culture with a Native American artist whose lessons and artifacts bring history alive. They’ve used drama and movement to reinforce language arts skills through *Anansi the Spider*; and storytellers have brought February alive through stories of heroic African Americans.

This long-term project is a collaboration among four organizations that have the well-being of children in mind: the North Carolina Blumenthal Performing Arts Center, The United Arts Council of Gaston County, Gaston County Schools and Gaston County Public Library. They all agree that children learn more deeply and widely through the arts, and that any future citizen of any country we want to live in needs to be well versed in the arts. To ensure this, the Blumenthal Education Institute and Gaston County Schools have not only selected artists who are highly proficient in their art forms, they have also provided extensive training for the artists and teachers in how to plan and deliver arts-integrated curriculum lessons before even beginning the school year at Ida Rankin.

For several years, GAINS has focused on professional development for teachers and teaching artists. The Blumenthal has provided professional development for Ida Rankin’s teachers, arts teachers and teaching artists, to help them develop the skills to co-create powerful curriculum-based arts integration lessons. The classroom teachers, arts specialists, and visiting artists have worked together to build arts-integrated lesson plans for the students. Together, they have put these lesson plans into action, and the effectiveness of the project has been evaluated by Elda Franklin, Ph.D., an arts integration specialist, who also collaborated with Ray Doughty, first Executive Director of South Carolina’s ABCs Arts Integrated Education Project.

North Carolina Blumenthal Performing Arts Center and Ida Rankin are one of three North Carolina sites for the Kennedy Center: Partners in Education program. (The other two are the United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County/ Wake County Public Schools and the Asheville Area Arts Council/ Buncombe County and Asheville City Schools). They receive extensive support from the Kennedy Center as well as the North Carolina Arts Council, which allows them to teach in and through the arts in ways that have matured from “innovative” to “time-tested.” Discussions are now underway about replicating the GAINS model into other schools.

GAINS is all about actual gains, how to create and strengthen a program to offer students the best possible learning experience. Funding goes toward providing professional development for teachers and teaching artists; creating arts-integrated lesson plans aligned with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study; engaging teachers, in-school arts specialists and visiting artists in co-planning and co-teaching these lessons; evaluating their successes with the help of specialists in education evaluation; and strengthening the partnership. In 2002-03 the GAINS partner school achieved the distinction of having the highest test scores of all elementary schools in their school system, and was recognized by the NC Dept. of Public Instruction this year as a "North Carolina School of Excellence."

It’s an ongoing process that involves constant learning on the part of everyone. Teachers are learning how to incorporate the arts and how to be artists themselves; and artists are learning how to create a productive classroom environment that will encourage children to grow. And parents and administrators are learning how much better children learn when they are actively learning “in” and “through” the arts.

NC Blumenthal Performing Arts Center: www.performingartsctr.org/education

Kennedy Center: Partners in Education Program: www.kennedy-center.org/education/partners/

NC Standard Course of Study at NC Public Schools: www.ncpublicschools.org