Program has ‘impact’ on arts  

By Harry Garber

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Through a program called arts IMPACT and the efforts of some concerned Ohio State professors, the arts are being made a more relevant part of the lives of many Columbus elementary school students.

In the spring of 1970, $1 million in federal funds was allocated to the arts for a special two-year project. Through the combined efforts of the National Art Education Association, the Music Educators National Conference, the American Theater Association and the Dance Division of the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, five demonstration projects were developed in the arts.

These projects served as Interdisciplinary Model Programs in the Arts for Children and Teachers (IMPACT).

The objectives of the project as set down by the four professional associations were:

- To achieve parity between the arts and other instructional areas.
- To develop educational programs of high artistic quality in each art area.
- To conduct workshops for training teachers and administrators in implementing such artistic quality into the school program.
- To develop a way to infuse the arts into all aspects of the school curriculum.
- To use professional artists and educators outside of the school to enhance the quality of the arts.

Columbus was one of five project sites chosen to receive funds from the federal government.

The Columbus school board was interested in involving University people in a consulting capacity.

It recruited Jeannine Orr, associate professor of early and middle childhood education; Wayne Ramsey, chairman of music education; Mary Tolbert, professor of music; Helen Alkire, chairman of the Department of Dance; and George Lewis, professor of humanities education, to plan a summer institute before the first year of the project to expose public school teachers to the various areas of the arts.

This joint effort by the Ohio State professors resulted in close to 100 percent commitment on the part of the teachers and the principals of the public schools to attend the institute.

The two schools chosen for this project were Cranbrook Elementary School, 906 Bricker Blvd., and Eastgate Elementary School, 1939 Stratford Way. It was decided that a team of four teachers, each specialized in a various area of the arts, would be put into the schools. These teachers were primarily a resource team involved in the planning.

Orr said, “Our major plan was to influence the lives of the teachers, who attended the summer arts IMPACT session, during the first year, the idea being that unless the arts become a part of the lives of the teachers, it was not going to become a part of the lives of the students.”

The emphasis was not on how they could teach the arts, but rather for the teachers to have encounters with each of the four art areas and then to have a depth experience with at least one art area.

For Orr, the exciting part of starting this project was the way the professors, teachers and principals worked so well together.

At the end of the first year, the officials of the Columbus school system were so excited about the project that without any further aid from the federal government, two new schools were added to the project.

At the end of the two years, as was stipulated in the original plan, the federal funding was discontinued and the Columbus school board picked up the entire tab. It has now expanded the project: to 12 schools.

Since that time, the University consultants have worked on a slightly different basis. On occasion they have been brought in on an in-service project, but now that the project has lost federal funding and expanded to 12 schools, the kind of involvement that they have wanted from the University has varied.

There has never been a time when the professors at the University have assumed that the public schools now owe them a place for their student teachers. As the project started to move ahead, however, both the school board and the professors saw that it could be mutually beneficial to put students in the schools in a variety of capacities.

Students from the University have been used in the IMPACT schools in some cases as artists in residence.

The Ohio Arts Council sent a resident artist to the schools for the first two years. When federal funding was halted, it was difficult for the Columbus school board to pay for these artists. The professors thought that perhaps their students could go into the schools on a quarterly basis.

Rex Fuller, an IMPACT teacher at Westmount and Indianola elementary schools, says, “Probably the most rewarding change in student behavior that has come about since the inception of arts IMPACT is that the kids really like going to school.”