

# Stephen F. Austin State University

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## SFA, NISD bring art to public elementary school

**Emily Taravella - May 3, 2007**

Bloom's Taxonomy -- "Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation" - refers to a hierarchy of learning that has been embraced by educators since it was developed in the 1950s.

In the 1990s, the taxonomy was revised by a group of educators in an effort led by one of Bloom's former students. Now creating tops the list, and creativity is identified as the highest level of thinking.

"This is why art should be the bedrock of learning," according to Anita Powell, assistant professor in the School of Art at Stephen F. Austin State University. "Funding should be made available for art before anything else."

Delinda Neal, principal at Thomas J. Rusk Elementary School in Nacogdoches, is making funding for art a priority.

In January Neal hired Alisa Ripley, who has a bachelor's and master's of fine arts, to begin teaching art classes. Funding for Ripley's salary was provided through Texas Tides (<http://tides.sfasu.edu/home.html>), a program funded in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services and administered by the Ralph W. Steen Library at SFA.

Ripley teaches fourth graders weekly art lessons that are linked to their curriculum, and their work will be exhibited from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday night in the TJR auditorium. A presentation is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m.

"The effort has been successful," Neal said. "The children and teachers tell me they've been exposed to things they would not have been exposed to, had it not been for this."

TJR students are talented, Neal said, and introducing them to art provides them one more outlet to realize their talents.

"We're going to conduct a survey at the end of the year to see how the art classes affected their behavior and performance," she said. Studies of art programs in other schools have proven to have a positive effect on discipline and test scores.

"School superintendent Dr. Rodney Hutto and I have worked closely on this," Neal said, of the effort to bring art to the elementary school. "We renovated a room upstairs in the gym (for studio space). It's not perfect, but it's a start."

Powell said art education isn't just about making art. It instills creativity, she said.

"If creating is the apex of learning, we need to give children the skills they need to be able to create,"

she said. "Every innovation, every new idea, every unique problem that needs to be solved is dependent on creative thinking. Creativity is needed in every line of work, in every aspect of life. Look at everything that is good in the world, and you can tie it back to creative, original thought."

Powell is a ceramist who teaches ceramics at SFA and prepares art specialists to work with students in grades Pre-K through 12.

"We also have a fleet of art classes for elementary education majors," she said. "These students are not art majors, but they take one class to prepare them to teach art for children."

Texas public schools require art for children, and most middle schools and high schools offer art classes, but Powell said there are rarely specialized, certified art teachers working in elementary schools.

"There is a huge difference between someone who has had one art class in college and someone who been trained to make art themselves and to teach children of all ages," she said.

Gary Parker, another instructor in the SFA School of Art and director of the summer Art Academy for children, said teaching children art at a young age helps coordinate and sustain their creativity.

"Children are not afraid to mark and explore," he said. "But as they grow older, they're terrified of making a mistake. Creativity should not be stifled. It must be nurtured."

In 15 years of directing the Art Academy, Parker said he has observed that kindergarten, first and second graders are interested in exploring and experimenting. But by the time they reach upper elementary grades, "they've shut down."

Parker said art is tied to curiosity of the unknown, which can fuel an interest in reading and studying other subjects.

When art education is lost for a generation, there is danger of it being lost forever, according to Powell.

"Generally people want their children to have what they had," she said. "If they didn't have art in elementary school, it's not important to them that their children have it."

Powell, like other artists, does not want to see art become extinct in public elementary schools.

Powell said her students provide free lessons for public school children, and she hopes to see the community take advantage of the Art Center @ The Old Opera House, in downtown Nacogdoches.

"We turn out well-prepared art educators, and it would be great to keep more of them in this community," she said.

Parker said he hopes the community will recognize that art is not only valid -- but that it adds value to the quality of life.

One of the best ways to help people realize the value is through children, he said.

Until art is offered in all public elementary schools, Powell said SFA will continue to do it's best to contribute to the community through innovative programming wherever possible.

The Art Academy is scheduled for a two-week period beginning July 9, with classes from 9 a.m. to noon. The cost of the course covers supplies.

Classes are arranged by approximate age and include bookmaking, drawing, painting, photography and sculpture.

Information is available at [http://www.art.sfasu.edu/special/art\\_academy.htm](http://www.art.sfasu.edu/special/art_academy.htm).