



Museum of Children's Art



Spotlight

Envisioning the Future at Reach Academy

MOCHA Turns Construction (and a Lost Playground) into an Opportunity for Arts Learning



My favorite part was seeing my work up on the wall because I feel like a star.

—Neo, 3rd grade student

Construction of a new school is an exciting event. When groundbreaking began for a new building for East Oakland's Reach Academy, however, anticipation of a shiny, modern facility was tempered by the fact that the students lost much of their playground to gravel, mud, concrete and steel. The students had little idea that this temporary sacrifice of space would later turn into more space and a healthier, better place to learn. So MOCHA Teaching Artist Julia Storrs decided she would use art to help them see the positive side of the new development—and help them learn about the process they were watching unfold.

Julia first worked with Ms. Salzfass' fourth grade class, in Spring 2008. She spoke with the students about architecture, construction, equipment, site jobs and building materials. The students learned what an architect does and what an engineer does, and they interviewed the project manager. Julia and Ms. Salzfass took the students out to do gesture drawings of the workers and draw things that they would learn the names of later: "No, that's not a crane, it's a boom lift." "That's rebar in the concrete to support the foundation."

Questions Julia explored with the students included:

- Who is involved in the construction of a building project?
- When did they start the project?



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- How is this construction affecting you?
- What is done with waste from the project?
- Who is involved in the construction of a building project?
- How much is the building going to cost?
- Is this building being documented from another source?
- Any problems with excavation—did they find anything?
- What used to be at the site?

The construction of a new school takes time, and the project has continued into the 2009-10 academic year. So, too, has Julia's lesson. This year, using cameras and printing donated from Kids Paint the Town, Ms. Clarke's third-grade class conducted photo-documentation of the construction, enthusiastically addressing many of the questions Ms. Salzfass' students pondered the year before. Like the architects, engineers and construction workers they observed, the students learned to adeptly use the tools of their craft. "I used a camera when I was six years old, and I thought I was going to break it. When I used the one with Ms. Julia, I knew how to use it," remarked Neo. Students displayed their photos at Network Café on 98th Avenue near the school, inviting the community to engage with their work. Photos on display included "The Big Vertical Building," "Metal, Red and Silver," "The Upside Down School" and "Crazy Studs." The photos now proudly hang in the office at Reach. "I liked seeing my picture up in the exhibition because I could see the good job I did," remarked Jaimar. Neo concurred: "My favorite part was seeing my work up on the wall because I feel like a star."

Another critical aspect of the project, as with any project that inspires students to imagine and create, was helping students see new possibilities for themselves. "It gave the kids an opportunity to envision their future," Julia observed. "They began to see they can be an architect or an engineer or anything else they want to be." Said 3rd-grader Carlos: "I will be a builder because I like to use my hands." And Isis: "The job that interests me the most is being an architect. I love art and making plans and watching my plans go into action." And, again, Neo: "I would like to do the construction, because I could say, 'I built that.'"

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For more information on MOCHA's programs in the schools, contact Kelly Doyle at (510) 465-8770 x311.