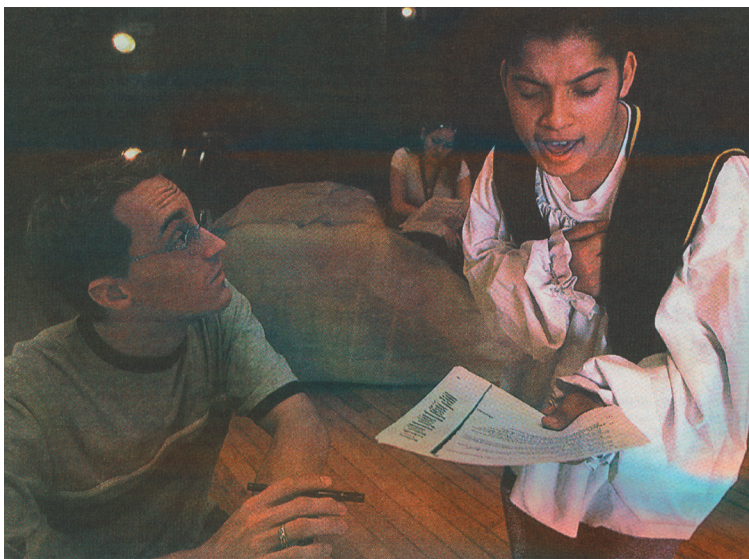




At an elementary school in Santa Ana, California, Jennifer Landa (center) an ArtsBridge Scholar from the U. of California at Irvine, works with students on a photography project.



Sean Livingston (left), also from Irvine, conducts a rehearsal for a production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at Santa Ana High School.

How Colleges Can Work With Schools

By Liane Brouillette

PUBLIC EDUCATION in the United States is at a crossroads. Not since the end of the 19th century has there been such a widespread consensus that "something must be done" about the public elementary and secondary schools.

Most recently, the rhetoric has centered on two contrasting remedies. The first is put forward by advocates of tighter state control of what goes on in the classroom. Central to this approach is the idea that accountability must be enforced through high-stakes tests. The second approach is market-based, proposing the use of tuition vouchers to allow parents to send their child to the school of their choice, whether public or private.

In either case, effective control of the public schools would be taken out of the hands of local school boards. Such a shift could have far-reaching social import. For, despite their many failings, school boards have provided one arena within the nation's public life where local people can come together to discuss what kind of education ought to be provided for their community's children. Neither annexing the public schools to a state bureaucracy nor using market-style competition to winnow out the worst schools would provide a similar level of involvement by citizens.

The irony is that, during the 1990's, the most influential reform efforts have made use of

another approach, one that respects the unique nature of the educational enterprise. Drawing on the resources of civil society, these reform initiatives have brought new ideas, new energies, and new perspectives into the nation's public schools. Fundamental to all such initiatives is a recognition that public schools are part of a larger universe. By allowing a wide range of citizens to make their own contributions to improving the nation's public schools, the new wave of school reform has begun to make education, once again, a community affair.

Most noticeable has been the explosive growth of the charter-school movement. More than 2,000 charter schools have been created,

many in partnership with existing community organizations. Other recent reform efforts have included a nonprofit National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (originally recommended in 1986 by the Carnegie Corporation's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession), created to certify master teachers, and the foundation-supported networks of schools set up to tackle specific educational challenges.

An equally important, but often unheralded, role is being played by universities. Over the past few years, school-university partnerships have provided many advantages to the schools and the universities themselves. The growth of such successful partnerships should serve to remind legislators that increased government control is not synonymous with increased academic achievement.

THE MUTUAL BENEFITS that can be derived from such initiatives are demonstrated by a partnership forged between the University of California and the state's elementary and secondary schools. The ArtsBridge program was begun in 1996 by Jill Beck, dean of the School of the Arts at the University of California at Irvine. The impetus came from a long-term crisis in arts education in California, a crisis brought on, in part, by shortages in financing that resulted from the passage of Proposition 13, in 1978.

ArtsBridge provides scholarships to advanced arts students on the university's campuses, who, in return, work with schoolchildren. Teachers write short proposals, describing an arts project with which they would like assistance. The projects have included organizing a school chorus, directing school plays, helping students design and paint murals, teaching instrumental music, and demonstrating the folk dances of Mexico, Israel, and Vietnam to students studying the history and culture of those countries. The advanced arts students at U.C. submit applications to work as ArtsBridge Scholars; those chosen are matched with project descriptions submitted by teachers.

In 1998 the program received \$1.5-million in state money to replicate the model throughout the university system; each campus (except the medical campus, in San Francisco) now runs its own ArtsBridge program. Preference is given to schools with the greatest need, and there is no cost to the schools. During the 2001 academic year, more than 932 ArtsBridge Scholars will have worked in California's public schools. Although a program like this is by no means sufficient, in itself, to meet the need for more arts education, ArtsBridge does provide a vivid example of the synergy that can result from collaborative efforts.

Through the program, the University of California is able to reach out to students who, if they go on to college, will be the first in their

families to do so. The public schools benefit from an infusion of high quality arts instruction; highly motivated and creative university students are introduced to the satisfactions of a career in teaching. A high-school teacher spoke of the contagious enthusiasm of the arts student who worked with her class:

"He is so passionate about making music! Just having a college student there at the high school, it was a great relationship. I think the kids really got a sense about how to go about making music and really feel it."

Learning in and through the arts not only helps "level the playing field" for children from disadvantaged circumstances— it also levels the field for arts programs at the university. The scholarships awarded to u.c. students bring additional resources to university departments that hitherto had limited opportunity to attract external financing. That helps correct the imbalance that exists on many campuses between the amount of money available for the arts and the amount available for the sciences.

The financial support given for the ArtsBridge scholarships assists university art departments in recruiting students capable of making strong contributions to their programs. Enhanced resources and recruitment help arts departments remain vibrant contributors, both to campus life and to our national culture.

Whether university-based partnerships like ArtsBridge will become increasingly common in the coming years depends, in large part, on whether universities are willing to consider broadening their definition of "creative work" to go beyond a single-minded focus on producing publishable research. Until now, faculty members in the arts and humanities have been slow to form partnerships with outside agencies, because the criteria for promotion and tenure have not encouraged it.

Recent debates over affirmative action have made it clear that state universities cannot entirely insulate themselves from the effects of shifts in public attitudes. Should public opinion come down on the side of allowing market forces to determine which elementary and secondary schools stay open, public-university departments might find themselves facing similar pressures. Conversely, should the educational-reform debate resolve itself in favor of increased state control over the public-school classroom, it is entirely possible that the university lecture hall could become the target of similar mandates.

That would only move problems further up the educational ladder. Freedom from direct government control has allowed American universities to win international respect for the excellence of their academic programs. Why should the universities have excelled, even

as achievement levels in the nation's public schools have fallen behind those of other major industrialized nations? The explanation may lie in human nature. A "drafftee attitude" is a natural human response to externally mandated tests, regulations, and requirements. When young people see school requirements as an exercise in jumping through hoops, many students give up striving to learn, and instead use their ingenuity to get around the system.

CONCERTED ACTION, taken at the university level, can have a strong impact on the culture of the public schools. Many of the institutional arrangements that have now become an accepted part of American secondary education were originally introduced almost a century ago as a result of the coordinated intervention of influential university presidents, brought together through the efforts of Henry S. Pritchett, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Now, at the turn of another century, there is again an urgent need for university-level participation in the national dialogue regarding school reform.

Given the strong research commitment of many university faculty members, the number willing to throw their energies into outreach efforts will probably remain small, even if the rewards system is broadened so that those who become involved in partnerships with schools are able to do so without sacrificing other important career goals. Yet even a few professors, assisted by experienced staff members and highly motivated graduate students, could have an important impact.

Universities are in a unique position to remind legislative leaders that educators at all levels, from kindergarten through graduate school, must be free to focus on awakening the unique human potential within each student. Healthy human development requires that public schools continue to be places where the young are able to explore their capacities as individuals and to encounter a wide range of peers in their full dignity as equals. Neither increased state control nor market-style competition is likely to achieve those important goals. Only by making school reform an effort in which the whole community can become involved will the challenge be met.

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