

Outreach Programs Bring the Arts to Children and Local Residents — The Possibility for Social Service Through the Arts

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On a snowbound December day in Onsencho, Hyogo prefecture, violinist Kazuhiro Takagi arrived to visit the local elementary school. The children were gathered in the music room of the wooden school building, their eyes gleaming with curiosity. They had never seen a violinist, much less a professional violinist. Mr. Takagi enthralled his young audience with his performance, interspersed with comments in his Kyoto accent.

In cooperation with the neighboring town of Wadayamacho, a violin was also brought in for the children to play. Cautioned by their teacher to be careful, the children at first handled it nervously. But after Mr. Takagi showed how to hold the instrument, a mischievous looking boy made a screeching sound on the violin, drawing cheers from the other children. Mr. Takagi also played his violin accompanied by children on recorders. When the 45-minute class ended, he was presented with a bouquet in appreciation.

Photo 1 Music Workshop at Onsencho Elementary School



1. Outreach Activities

The visit was part of a program to bring music to public places organized by the Japan Foundation for Regional Art-Activities (JFRA). In the program, prominent young musicians are sent to perform in local halls, and community activities are also arranged. Funding is provided by the JFRA.

The case described above was an activity at the local elementary school carried out by the town's Dream Hall. Prior to this, the violinist had visited two elementary schools, a junior high school, and a special nursing home for the elderly. In March, he performed a recital together with pianist Takako Takahashi at Dream Hall. Children brought their parents, who would normally have little contact with the hall or with classical music, and the concert was a success.

Activities in which theaters and halls, as well as artists and arts groups make the arts accessible to local residents and communities in a form different from their usual functioning have collectively come to be called outreach activities. Such endeavors to make the arts more accessible to society are gaining attention.

The word "outreach" has two meanings: (1) reaching out with one's hand, and the distance of this reach, and (2) services or welfare activities provided to the local community, as well as local visit services by a public or service organization. Borrowing on these meanings, outreach activities have come to refer to the efforts of cultural facilities and arts organizations to provide local residents and communities more opportunities for contact with the arts.

Several factors have generated interest in outreach activities among cultural organizations such as theaters and museums, as well as arts groups such as orchestras. First, by targeting new markets, they aim to expand their present as well as future customer base. Ordinarily, people who attend art exhibitions, concerts and performances are a small minority with an avid interest in the arts. Thus the objective is to expand the customer base by exposing more people and communities to the arts and culture. In particular, outreach activities aimed at children are intended to cultivate patrons one or two decades in the future.

Second, public art organizations are aiming to expand access to their services. Aside from expanding the customer base of the general public, the aim is to fulfill a public duty by providing cultural services to the public, including physically impaired and elderly persons. In limited cases, visually impaired persons have become able to attend art exhibits or stage performances in Japan. By comparison, theaters operated by nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in the U.S. provide a wide range of services based on the belief that all persons are entitled to enjoy the arts, while public theaters sense a duty to make the arts accessible to everyone (Figure 1).

In addition, a major objective of outreach activities is for people to gain a fuller understanding and experience of the arts. Gallery talks, wherein curators provide commentaries on art works, have become well established in Japan's art museums. There has also been a gradual increase in post-performance talks that allow interaction between audience members and directors, actors or dancers, and lectures accompanying musical concerts. These activities can be particularly useful to attract audiences to unfamiliar genres such as contemporary art and contemporary music. Explanations help deepen understanding and enjoyment of artistic works, and are an important element of outreach activities.

Participatory programs such as theater or music workshops that are conducted by artists provide an artistic experience beyond that provided by public performances or exhibitions, and have become a particularly active form of outreach activity in recent years.

Underlying all these diverse outreach activities is the objective of strengthening the ties to the local community and residents. In doing so, cultural organizations and arts groups are exploring new ways to provide social services through the arts.

Among the outreach activities underway, perhaps the most prominent are programs conducted in collaboration with schools and those directed at children.

Figure 1 Access Service for the Physically Impaired at Guthrie Theater (Minneapolis, Minnesota)

Name of service	Description
Audio Described Performance (earphone guide)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sight impaired persons can enjoy performances by listening to an audio describer (narrator) through earphones. Set up in 1992. • The audio describer is a trained specialist who can describe actors' facial expressions, gestures, costumes, and movements on stage without interfering with the dialogue. • The service is provided at least twice for all productions, and earphones are also available to the general public.
Sensory Tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to the performance, participants of the audio described performance can feel with their own hands the stage props and costumes to gain more sensory information about the performance. • Along with sensory knowledge of the stage props and costumes, participants are also told when these will appear in the performance.
ASL Interpreted Performance (sign language)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hearing impaired persons can enjoy performances through a sign language interpreter. Set up in 1976. • The Guthrie Artistic Interpreter is specially trained to convey artistic expressions accurately in sign language. • Since conventional sign language cannot adequately convey the full range of artistic expressions, the performance is translated into ASL (American Sign Language) several weeks in advance and carefully rehearsed.
Access Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A booth in the theater's main lobby provides the following services and tools free of charge. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> –Earphone guide receivers –Programs printed in large print or braille –Theater guide in large print or cassette recordings –Reading glasses and hearing aides –Braille guide of the Guthrie Theater, etc.

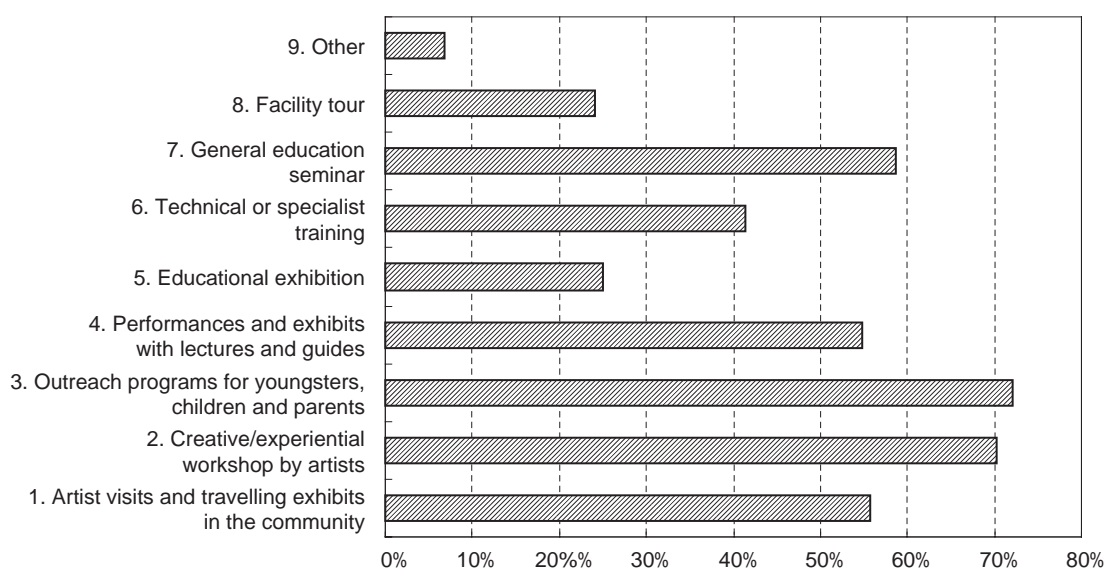
Notes: Outreach activities of the Guthrie Theater also include appreciation classes in schools (attended by 90,000 students each year), pre-performance symposiums, backstage tours, play study guides, workshops for teachers, and drama classes.

Source: Guthrie Theater

2. From Appreciation Classes to Outreach Activities

In a nationwide survey conducted last year of public music or concert halls/theaters and art museums with outreach activities, the most common types of activities were those aimed at youngsters and children accompanied by parents (Figure 2). While arts appreciation classes of plays or recitals performed in the school gym are not new, the number of appreciation classes being held in public music or concert halls/theaters has been increasing.

Figure 2 Outreach Activities Conducted in Public Music or Concert Halls/Theaters and Art Museums



Note: Shows results of a nationwide survey of outreach activities conducted by public halls/theaters and art museums (104 valid responses, multiple response).

Source: Japan Foundation for Regional Art-Activities, "Suggestions for Outreach Activities — Survey of Art Education/Outreach Programs by Local Cultural Organizations," March 2001.

However, recent outreach activities aimed at schools and children differ from these conventional appreciation classes. Instead of providing a finished product such as a performance or exhibition, programs are designed to give children a more direct experience of the arts, and to let them interact with performers.

For example, an "Arts Appreciation Program for Boys and Girls" has been held at the Atsugi City Culture Hall since 1985. Held in cooperation with the Board of Education and children's association, the program invites children to high quality performing arts and music events at the public hall.

In addition, the hall began a program in fiscal 1999 called the "Atsugi Theater Project." Conducted in cooperation with local playwright and artistic director of the Tobiraza theater group, Mr. Kensuke Yokouchi, the program consists of theatrical performances at the hall, theater talk sessions, drama sem-

inars, and visiting drama workshops. The workshops, which are held at elementary schools, are a particularly unique type of outreach activity.

In the workshop, Mr. Yokouchi, along with five to six theater group members and a sound operator, visit a school to work with fifth and sixth graders. The workshop is held in the school gym, where the preparation consists of setting out chairs for the students and putting two speakers in place. In the first half, the children are told to set their imagination free as they listen to sound effects from the speakers such as galloping horses and a jet roaring by overhead. One can only marvel at the realism and volume of the sounds emanating from the two rather small speakers. Gradually, the children start to eye the sound operator with admiration. For the finale, Godzilla stomps toward the gym, his footsteps growing louder and louder, until he finally crushes the gym in a thunderous roar. Some of the children, who have been separated into groups of ten, react spontaneously by sprawling themselves on the gym floor as if crushed.

In the second half, students are instructed to perform a short scenario entitled “Goodbye, Teacher.” The setting is a farewell scene with their favorite teacher, who is quitting his job over a dispute on school policies. A theater group member is assigned to each student group to give acting advice and suggest lines. After a brief rehearsal period, each group performs in front of the others. Surprisingly, some of the students give compelling performances, even bursting into tears.

The program encourages students to exercise their imagination, and allows them to experience the thrill of acting. As such, it provides a far richer experience of the dramatic arts compared to simply attending a performance. While schools were doubtful of the program in the initial stage, teachers became convinced of its effectiveness after looking at the students’ excited faces. From this year, the Board of Education is sponsoring the program, and providing a similar workshop for teachers as well.

Photo 2 Drama Workshop at an Atsugi City Elementary School



3. Artists at Schools and the Revised Government Guidelines for Teaching

The Atsugi Culture Hall example is but one of a growing number of cases in which cultural organizations and arts groups are tying up with schools. Other examples include the New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra, whose home is the Sumida Triphony Hall (members visit schools 60 days during the year), and the public hall music vitalization program run by the JFRA.

Another growing movement linked with the above activity is one of discovering the implications of and possibilities for school visits by artists. This is occurring against the backdrop of the revised government guidelines for teaching that will be implemented in the next fiscal year. With the full introduction of a 5-day school week, schools are focusing on making their education unique amid the relaxed guidelines. At elementary schools, the number of classes will be reduced not only for music and art classes but for Japanese and mathematics, while 105 to 110 class hours per year will be allocated to general education starting in the third grade.

The government guidelines call for so-called "general education" class time as follows: taking into account conditions of the community, school and children, each school is to conduct innovative educational activities such as interdisciplinary or general education, or those that arouse the interest and curiosity of children. This guideline, which was introduced last fiscal year as a transitional measure, has already caused confusion among some schools as to the specific type of classes to implement.

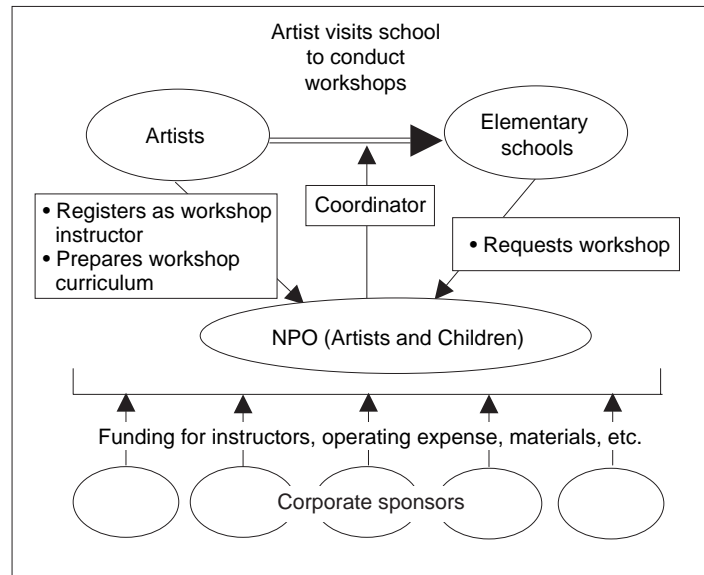
One solution being implemented by some schools in Tokyo is to invite artists to hold workshop-type classes for children. The workshops are arranged by a designated nonprofit organization called Artists and Children. In anticipation of the full-fledged introduction of general education classes, the NPO states that its objective is to send professional artists to elementary schools to conduct classes on arts subjects (music, fine arts, physical expression, multimedia, etc.) that relate to general themes, using their artistic skills as well as ability to draw out the individuality and self-expression of the children in interactive, participatory type classes that school teachers generally find difficult to conduct.

The NPO was created by its chairman, Yasuhiko Tsutumi, in 1999 as a project of the Arts Promotion Association (APA) called the Artist's Studio in a School (ASIAS). In fiscal 2000, seven artists from the NPO conducted 25 classes at seven elementary schools, reaching 350 students. The artists included some of Japan's leading contemporary artists, such as composer Makoto Nomura, choreographer Shigehiro Ide, choreographer Kuniko Kisanuki, and contemporary artist Tatsuo Miyajima. In the present fiscal year, workshops are planned at 15 schools (13 schools in Tokyo, one in Chiba City, and one in Uji City, Kyoto pref.), and even more schools are expected to participate next year.

The artists, who are leaders in their respective genres, do not conduct a conventional style of music or art class. Using artistic expression and interactive communication, the emphasis is on drawing out the

creativity and imagination of the children, nurturing children’s ability for expression and communication, and encouraging mutual understanding for individual differences in values and personality.

Figure 3 Program Structure of ASIAs



Source:Artists and Children

In the U.S., artists began actively visiting schools from around 1990. In the 1970s, a fiscal crisis caused art classes to be dropped from school curriculums. This in turn led to the realization of the importance of the arts in education. Due partly to the shortage of art and music teachers, arts groups and cultural organizations stepped in and cooperated with schools to develop and implement a variety of programs. Some of these programs have tried to use drama and music as a medium for teaching English, mathematics, science and social studies.

In most states, a state government office exists to arrange school visits by artists, and the visits are subsidized. State officials say that the greatest significance of school visits by artists is that unlike the school’s art or music teacher, artists do not grade the children.

In Japan, there has been a strong tendency to view the arts and culture as something of interest only to a limited minority. However, as the outreach activities described in this paper show, the arts hold great possibilities in transcending the realms of leisure and entertainment and contributing to education and welfare. By engaging in outreach activities, artists can expand their domain of influence beyond theaters and museums and into schools and communities, giving artistic activities a growing social and public significance.

The arts have a profound effect on our spirit and mind, with the power to vitalize us from within. In

this sense, the possibility represented by artistic outreach activities is to expand the social role of the arts into education, welfare, and community activities, thereby creating vital communities in mind and spirit.