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The art of learning

Gina Macris

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AS220

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AS220, by the way, combines the numbers because it was one of the original art forums at 220 Weybosset St. with the initials for “art space” or “alternative space.” It’s a small arts center that the children learned in their reading assignment.

And after all their hard work, the entire fifth grade — about 60 children, including special education students — got a chance to work at AS220 themselves.

Mileend Esgala, who signed up for drawing with illustrator Kim Muntov, said, “I like to draw. You have to be creative and use a lot of your imagination.”

Muntov asked whether being creative is also a lot of work.

She nodded, describing how she closed her eyes and thought hard about what she wanted to draw before she actually set to work.

“Everybody has a different imagination,” she said, as she showed off her “moogle,” a cinnamon-colored creature that she had drawn at a boy with a cat-like grin and a fin growing out of his side.

“You get to draw cool stuff,” said Andy Pote, who got tips from Muntov about ways to bring movement to his drawing of a “moogle.”

The five-day Youth Arts Conference, sponsored by the R.I. Foundation and the very special art, was AS220’s first plunge into art education.

“It’s important for people to realize that arts are an important part of the community,” said Laura Travis, who as both an art teacher at the Sackett Street School and a member of the board of directors of AS220.

“It’s important to people about it, but not everyone is going to come through the door,” said Travis.

“If we get kids in here to have this experience, hopefully they’ll take ideas away,” she said.

Travis engineered the multi-faced art education project with the help of all the school’s fifth-grade teachers.

AS220 made a video recording of the day’s events that the organization hopes to put into round-the-clock viewing for a community art education program.

It cost about $3,000 to put on the event, or about $50 a child, according to Linda Crenca, AS220’s artistic director.

As practicing artists, the fifth graders were asked to tell which workshops they preferred and were given packets of material about AS220 that included biographies of their workshop leaders.

They also received T-shirts that commemorated the day with a logo that played on the title of the Youth Arts Conference with the initials YAC and drawings of three yaks, touch of humor designed by illustrator Kim Muntov.

At first, it was hard to find the children, except for six or seven, who were working at the exterior of the building, but others were working on the stage. Several versions of Crenca’s taped pieces for the mystery box were passed around.

One artist put Crenca in a dress.

“I would have picked a different dress,” Crenca said with a laugh when he was asked what he thought of the image.

The other children had spread out to six other workshops instead of three. Some of them took pictures of each other and developed the negative in a basement darkroom, a mixed media workshop which interested the children to become aware of their bodies and how they move.

Down in the lobby, producer Joseph Auger taught students what it takes to work in a real recording studio — including attention to technical detail and cooperation.

“Teachers don’t make enough noise,” said a枢纽 Auger after spending a morning with the children.

When he listened carefully to the music and words the children had recorded, he heard a rare piece that poignant reflected a story of the streets and the individual’s voice that emanated from the drug trade.

“I see it as being a body, somebody going smoke me . . . I’m saying to God, please forgive me . . . I thought I’d get my family killed . . . Auger said he was shocked.

“It’s a tragedy, they have to deal with adult issues,” he said.

He said he was thinking about cutting the rap piece out of the tape, but he quickly decided against it.

“It’s a unique statement,” he said.

When it comes to self-expression, it can be done with computers. That’s vital, especially for kids,” he said.