

Artists Teaching Through The Arts:  
The HeArt Of Education At LFCSA  
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Plus:  
Penguin Power: Math Scores That Soar  
Mrs. Nelson's Book Fair  
Kinder's Culinary Cruise...



## Q & A with Michael P. Bishop, Sr., CBO

Michael Bishop is the current President of the LFCSA Board of Directors. In addition to his role here at LFCSA, Mr. Bishop also serves as the Associate Superintendent/Chief Business Official (CBO) of the Santa Ana Unified School District. He recently took the time to answer some questions and share his thoughts about money, education, and LFCSA.

***You recently spoke to parents at an evening Town Hall meeting at LFCSA. What was the message that you conveyed at that meeting that you would like to reiterate now to parents who could not attend?***

**MB:** Public education is under financial assault due to the effect that the slumping economy has had on state funding. Regardless of the state of the economy, charter schools are funded at a lesser rate than that of conventional public schools. So with the current slump in the economy, LFCSA's need to raise funds is even greater than before. Everyone can help in their own unique way to help support the mission of the school and the expectations of parents.

***What are the major budgetary sources of concern you see facing LFCSA right now?***

**MB:** The major sources of concern facing LFCSA today is maintaining financial viability and keeping the unique edge that attracted each and every parent to enroll their child in our school.

***Are there any bright spots you see now or in the future concerning school finances?***

**MB:** The economy of this state and thus funding for public education are tied together and will improve

sometime in the future. I see a level of commitment at LFCSA among its staff, parents, students and volunteers that gives me comfort that no matter how bad things appear to be, the school will overcome.

***If LFCSA parents could do one thing that would most help out the school, what would have the most impact?***

**MB:** LFCSA parents should give freely of their available time and money to support the mission of LFCSA and their child's education. This commitment I speak of will not be the same for every parent, but it will represent the diversity that exists in this school.



## JiJi

### A Bug-Eyed, Waddling Way to Learn Math

by Rob Schweber and Greg Fields.  
photos by Darcy Mellinger

“Math homework.” A phrase typically greeted with a level of enthusiasm reserved for “plate of peas” or “dentist’s chair” by children and adults alike. Numbers plus unfamiliar calculations minus the fun equals the precocious pipsqueak query, “Why do we need to know this stuff anyway?!” The solution? Give math instruction the look and feel of a game. LFCSA’s “ST Math” eschews traditional drab drills and worksheets for a computer program called “JiJi”—eponymous for the animated penguin character who guides kids through math exercises that are interactive, exciting, and (dare we say it) fun.

Using visual cues, JiJi the penguin leads students through a series of puzzles (i.e., lessons) that are easy at entry level but become incrementally more challenging at higher levels. The gradual, game level-like architecture of the program reduces kids’ initial frustrations and doubts about math concepts and replaces them with enthusiasm and confidence. But the ultimate lesson of all this science and technology is to instill a love of math.

And a fresh approach to the subject is desperately needed. California students’ test scores in math proficiency are currently at rock bottom, irrespective of income or ethnicity. In the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress tests, California fourth graders scored lower in math proficiency than every other state in the country, save two.

The problem is that math has traditionally been taught with a heavy reliance on language. That was the finding of The MIND Research Institute, the Santa Ana-based neuroscience and education research nonprofit organization that designed the JiJi ST Math program. According to Andrew Coulson, President of MIND’s education division, “ST,” or spatial-temporal math, seeks to eliminate the language requirement, so math is presented in a “visual, language-independent way.” Spatial-temporal is a specific type of reasoning used in chess and music and requires “thinking one step ahead.”

It appears now that Coulson and his

colleagues were one step ahead—the JiJi program has been adopted in twenty-two states and is now being enjoyed by over 100,000 students. But the proof, as they say, is in the (math) proof. According to MIND’s research, schools with math proficiency scores below 50% can expect a fifteen to twenty point gain within just two years.

Janene Chan, one of LFCSA’s third-grade teachers and enthusiastic proponent of ST Math and JiJi since it was first introduced at LFCSA, is most impressed with the continuous improvements MIND has made to successive versions of JiJi. The company is very supportive, offering teacher training and regular progress reports. By placing more control in teachers’ hands, MIND has made JiJi more meaningful and compatible with what is actually being taught in the classroom. The current version of the program now even includes an activation code that makes JiJi available for home study (not home “work”). So don’t be surprised if your children want to go online for a playdate with JiJi.

Beyond the enjoyment and fun that students have with JiJi, Ms. Chan points out that the program levels the playing field for everyone in her classroom. “We have students from all types of different backgrounds and learning situations. Everyone can connect to visual cues, regardless of the language they speak. [Some] students can connect better with JiJi than they can with words on a blackboard. And giving them ways to feel comfortable with their learning is what this school is about.” Because of the interactive nature of the program, it’s the students themselves who eventually become the best JiJi experts. In fact, Ms. Chan claims her students end up explaining the JiJi directions better than she does.

JiJi also encourages students to use different processes to successfully solve their math problems. “We have some students here that get frustrated because they are so used to having instruction from a teacher,” Ms. Chan explains. “We tell them, ‘Make it up and then share it with me.’” “There are so many different strategies and ways to get to the answer, we want to celebrate [the diversity] of how students think and make sense of the process. We don’t want to say to them, ‘Don’t think that way.’ If that way is what makes sense to them, we say, ‘Great!’ and ‘Why don’t we share it so the others can learn from you?!’” Meanwhile, MIND is hard at work on its next project, code named EMTIKTEV: “Employing Math to Induce Kids to Eat Veggies.” Not so much.



## Making Art – and Artists LFCSA’s Artist-teachers Put Creativity at the Heart of Learning

by James Ricci | photos by Lisa  
Franchot, Jeanne Parkhurst, and David  
Poznanter

When LFCSA music teacher Nick Kello found that the school’s kindergarteners were learning about food and where it comes from, he got to thinking about how he might integrate that into his own teaching.

“I immediately thought – sure, the Banana Boat Song! Harry Belafonte!”

And so, when the kindergarteners came to their weekly music class, Mr. Kello showed them a video that depicted a banana split, then cut to a banana plantation, then cut to images of bananas being transported to market. He strummed his guitar and sang the verses of the song and taught the kids to sing the response, “Daylight come, and me want to go home,” while clapping its beat.

Thus did the students get a particularly resonant understanding of where bananas are grown, how they get to stores, and how people consume them. “So, they learned a whole lesson about food, and they did it all by learning a song,” Mr. Kello says.

Mr. Kello’s teaching cuts to the core of LFCSA’s unique philosophy, which holds that the arts are not separate academic subjects, but vital ways of learning and of experiencing life. Putting that philosophy into practice at the school is everyday work for Mr. Kello and his artist colleagues, dance teacher David Poznanter and visual arts teacher Evelyn Serrano.

For example, on learning that fifth-graders were studying magnetism in science, Mr. Poznanter incorporated that idea into his own class. “I created a group warm-up exercise based on magnetism,” Mr. Poznanter says. “The goal was for the students to continuously move through the studio to music, keeping the space as balanced as possible. At random, I would call out ‘attract’ or ‘repel.’ If I called ‘attract,’ they had to instantly move into clumps based on whomever they were closest to – that is, whoever had the strongest ‘magnetic pull’ on them. If I called ‘repel,’ they had to instantly move as

far away from each other as possible. Doing it physically themselves made the concept of magnetism much more real.”

Ms. Serrano, meanwhile, augmented the mathematical concept of addition being taught in the early grades by having the students create secondary and tertiary colors – that is, by adding color A to color B and ending up with color C, and so on. As fifth-graders learn geometry, she plans to teach them origami, the art of creating three-dimensional shapes from a flat plane. To second-graders studying Native American family life, she will teach the art of basketry.

And Mr. Kello’s lesson about bananas didn’t end with that one song. It ramified out to a discussion with the children about work songs in general, where they came from, and how people use music to ease their chores (what five-year-old isn’t familiar with “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad”?).

Among LFCSA’s teachers, Mr. Kello, Mr. Poznanter, and Ms. Serrano are unique for their non-traditional backgrounds. Mr. Kello is a singer-songwriter and guitarist, Mr. Poznanter, a circus performer, and Ms. Serrano, an artist who sees art as a means to make society better (she has established an extensive arts program in a gang-infested neighborhood in north Los Angeles). Each has considerable experience working with children.

The three bring a global aspect to the school’s art instruction. Mr. Kello, 33, a native of Argentina, has taught literature and philosophy, and lived in the U.S., Canada, Argentina, and Brazil. Ms. Serrano, who was born in Cuba and is 35, has taught and curated art exhibits on three continents. Mr. Poznanter, 31, native of Illinois, has danced, choreographed and performed in circuses literally around the world; he spent the past winter break producing and performing in a “Hip-Hop Bollywood Dance Circus” in Mumbai, India.

Each of them was astonished to learn of LFCSA, and each knew immediately this was the school for them. They were selected from a rigorously screened pool of more than a score of artist-applicants.

Mr. Kello had long been interested in Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences, which holds that people can be intelligent in many different ways – not just intellectually, but

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*“The arts have space for everyone. It’s the great equalizer. We all have eyes. We all have ears. We all have hands.”*

*Ms. Serrano*



visually, say, or interpersonally, or musically. LFCSA's commitment to that principle, plus its devotion to arts integration, "just seemed so right on point and balanced," Mr. Kello says. "I didn't believe a school like that actually existed."

Mr. Poznanter finds a certain irony in the fact that he's teaching in an elementary school and loving it. His own experience in school, he says, was "pretty negative. I was hyper-energetic and bored to death in all my classes. But I absolutely love it here. I love the facility, and I'm blown away by how much the people here try to think outside the box."

For Ms. Serrano, the opportunity to join LFCSA dovetailed with her sense of herself not only as an artist but "a very active citizen. I have always advocated a lot of things that the school is in the avant-garde of," she says. "This school will prove to a lot of people that this is the way to go, that art is the way to change the world for the better, and I wanted to be part of that."

Central to the artists' educational approach – and directly reflective of LFCSA's central philosophy – is encouraging children to see themselves as artists, not just as witnesses to or consumers of art.

Mr. Poznanter, for example, rejects the notion that only "dancers" dance. "I truly believe that we should all dance," he says, "and that kids should have fun dancing, and should learn they can make dance about anything."

In a recent class, he had one boy cover his eyes and select from a list of qualities posted on the wall of the dance studio. The boy blindly pointed to "broken-hearted." With that, each student had to move rhythmically in a way that, wordlessly, expressed deep sadness.

Such an approach often helps other teachers see their students in a new light; the child who struggles with reading or math can be revealed as remarkably talented in, say, drawing or absorbing musical notation.

"The point is," Ms. Serrano says, "the arts have space for everyone. It's the great equalizer. We all have eyes. We all have ears. We all have hands."

Uniqueness aside, the artists are keenly aware that their teaching must meet the standards mandated for their subjects by the State of California. "The curriculum in the arts is not written in stone, but it has to

be standards-based and capable of providing continuity," says LFCSA curriculum and instructional coach Karolynne Gee. "You can't just come in and do your whimsy, and leave. What appealed to them was the opportunity to lay something down that others can continue or build on."

To facilitate that, Ms. Gee meets with the artists on a regular basis to review their lesson plans and keep them apprised of what's being taught in other classes.

Key to the artists' success are their professional relationships with LFCSA's other teachers. Because teachers accompany their students to music class, Mr. Kello has found it easy to maintain a two-way street of helpfulness. The teachers "help me understand the dynamics of each group," he says, while their being present makes it easier for them to grasp what he's conveying to students.

The goal, Ms. Gee says, is "to have the artists work with teachers to make connections with the classroom, and have the teachers work with the artists to expand their teaching skills."

"As a group, when we have staff meetings, the artists change the conversation. They pose ideas that teachers in their everyday work may not come to. They add another, rich dimension to the conversation. They've also been pretty perceptive in assessing kids, and providing teachers with another lens for understanding them."

Although their teaching and planning tends to encroach upon a full week's worth of work, they were hired, deliberately, on a part-time basis.

"They are really not standard-issue arts teachers," says Ms. Gee. "Given the choice, I don't think any of them would want to be here one hundred percent of the time. They each have to attend to their own art. Nick has to make his music. David has to perform. Evelyn has to do her art-activism. They are a rare breed, indeed, and we are really, really fortunate to have them."







## The 2nd Annual LFCSA PTA Mrs. Nelson's Book Fair

"The 2nd Annual Mrs. Nelson's Book Fair sponsored by the PTA was a great success last December raising over \$1500 in cash and \$1200 in book credits that directly benefit LFCSA's classrooms. Each class visited the Fair with teachers to create 'wish-lists' and make 'just right' purchases. The Fair was open during recess, lunch, and after school, thereby providing a perfect waiting area for Parent-Teacher conferences. It was the first year to feature our gifted Community Authors and Illustrators from the LFCSA parent body and, ultimately, it was the greatest venue to showcase our students' love for reading! The 3rd Annual Book Fair is scheduled for the same time next December."

*Amy Conroy, Book Fair Co-Chair*  
*photos by Stacey Zarcoff, Book Fair Co-Chair*





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**Mr. Dmytriw's Kindergarten walking fieldtrip to Super King Market!**

*photos by Deborah Glickman, Keith Hamm, and Michael Kidder*

