



FSU graduate student Brie Medina, left, and seventh-grader Chanel Thomas explore book-making techniques. AMANDA THOMPSON

Transformative TOOL

STUDENTS LEARN FROM EACH OTHER IN 'ART FOR LIFE'

Amanda Karioth Thompson Council on Culture & Arts

Brie Medina has a passion for art and education and after earning undergraduate degrees in visual art and women's studies, she is now seeking a master's degree in art education from Florida State University. "I'm interested in the transformative aspect of art education, the impact art can have on a kid's life, and how they can use art to change their communities and their world."

Medina's introduction to the graduate program is a class called "Art for Life," taught by assistant professor Rachel Fendler. "We try and center art education as a tool for social justice and as a way to make a difference. We use the term 'art for life' to reference that," explained Fendler.

Graduate students in FSU's art education program are focused on becoming effective art teachers and they've recently been given a new opportunity to put what they're learning into practice.

Raa Middle School houses an arts magnet program and five years ago they developed a specialized arts mentoring program in partnership with the Council on Culture & Arts. Local visual artists, musicians, dancers, and theater professionals serve as mentors to Raa's arts magnet students, providing them with a deeper exploration of the arts.

Traditionally, FSU's "Art for Life" class did not have a field component and Fendler was seeking a way to increase her graduate students' contact hours with school-aged students. "When I heard about the arts mentoring program, I thought this would be a good low-stakes environment to start making art with kids."

She collaborated with Sam Thompson, Raa's dean and magnet and mentor coordinator, who gave her space for her own class to meet in every week, prior to mentoring. "It was very generous," shared Fendler.



Raa's arts mentoring program provides a low-stakes environment to start making art with kids. SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

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“And the art teacher, Katie Aylward has given us her classroom for the time that we’re mentoring because she’s teaching a digital media class elsewhere at the same time.”

Medina appreciates the opportunity to work one-on-one with Raa students at the earliest stage of her graduate work. “This is the age I want to teach. I love middle school students. They’re moving from that confidence of elementary school, feeling like they can do anything, and by eighth grade they’re confronting larger issues and growing in a different way.”

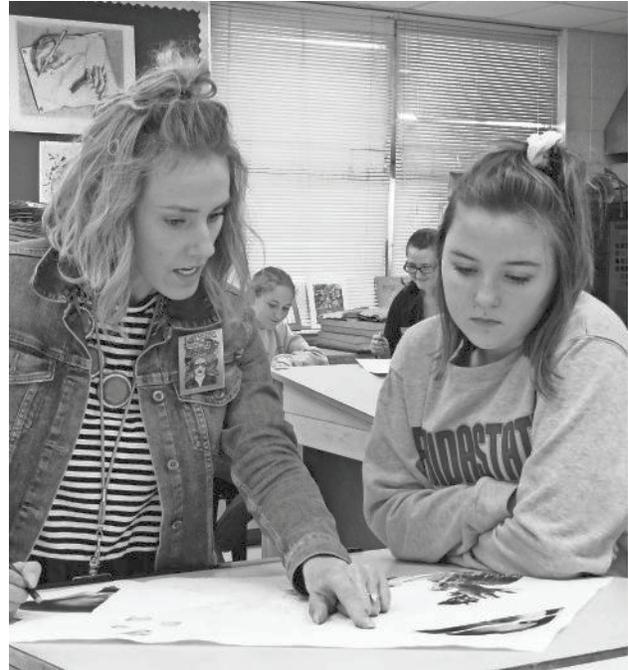
In just five weeks, Medina has developed a strong relationship with her mentee. “She’s so cool. I feel like I’m learning from her just as much as she’s learning anything from me. The way she makes art, the way she works and the way she thinks about different things has been personally affecting to me.”

Chanel Thomas is Medina’s mentee and the feeling is mutual. “After we first met and talked a while, she made a PowerPoint presentation based on the things I’m interested in. That felt so special, like she was really seeing me for who I was.” Chanel is a seventh-grader interested in using the visual arts as a storytelling tool.

Together, Chanel and Medina have explored a variety of book-making techniques and Chanel appreciates this unique opportunity. “Having an arts mentor is a privilege that I want to take full advantage of,” she said.

Seventh-grader Jackson Dupree feels similarly about his own mentor. They are working on drawing in a realistic style which Jackson feels will strengthen his abilities and get him closer to his goal of becoming a professional artist. “I’m excited to have someone critique my drawings and help me better myself,” he said.

The arts mentoring program will also make Medina and her FSU classmates better art teachers. Though a mentor/mentee relationship is different from a traditional teacher/student relationship, this experience has already given them insights into their own practice. “I recognize that I’m here for a reason but I must remember that she’s here for a reason too,” said Medi-



Through Raa's arts mentoring program, the “Art for Life” students gain contact hours with middle school students. AMANDA THOMPSON

na. “I need to be focused on what she’s getting out of our time together.”

Reflecting on her own art experiences in school, Medina confessed “I wish I had something like the arts mentoring program when I was growing up. Something like this can give these kids an extra push. They may not do it for a career but it’s something that’s important to them and they may want to continue. With working artists coming in to help them, treating kids like artists, it encourages them to assume ownership of their creativity in a different way.”

Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Interim Executive Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area’s umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).