

# Super

## The Arts for Everyone

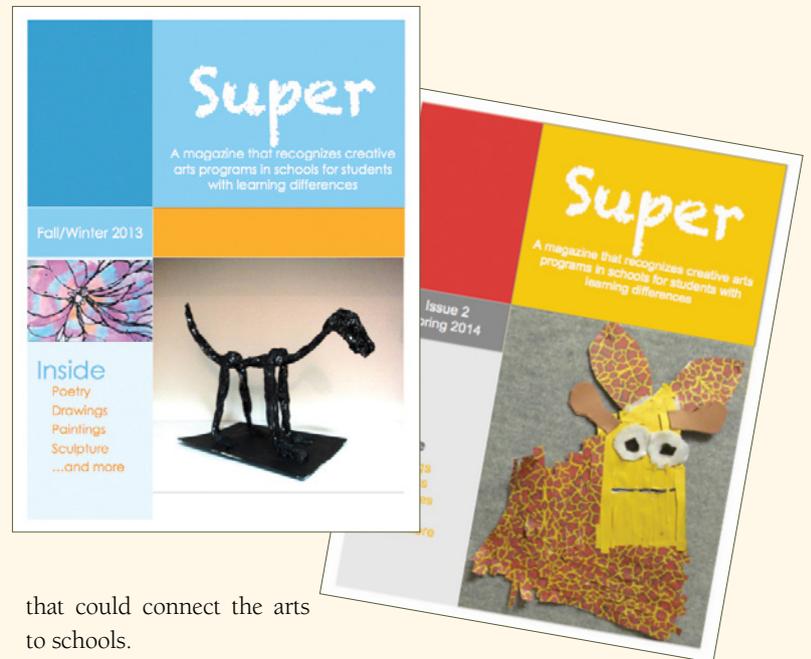
by Jenna Karp

I was mesmerized. Striking works of art covered the walls around me: detailed figure drawings, maroon and yellow collages assembled from online images, handmade maps of Manhattan, and Jackson Pollock-style paintings pulled my attention in every direction. I knew that the students at this school where I was volunteering, the McCarton School for children with autism, regularly received recognition in the classroom for their artwork and creative writing. In fact, part of the reason I was volunteering at this school was to contribute to its supportive environment. However, while later scanning publications and blogs for ways in which these students could be recognized more widely, I was surprised to find not a single publication highlighting creative arts programs in schools for students with learning differences. To me, that seemed a missed opportunity for both students and an audience of people who would appreciate their art.

### Unlocking Imaginations

I thought back to my own experiences in the arts. I had attended two summer arts camps and remembered how I'd returned from them much more attuned to detail. I thought about the year I had volunteered in a citywide arts-in-the-schools program and how much students there benefited from photography class; for instance, one elementary student had trouble sitting still but was fully engaged when expressing himself creatively. In that same program, other students who had trouble working together bonded over a shared photography project and celebrated together when their images turned out well.

After volunteering at the McCarton School and other schools, taking a university summer psychology course, and conducting online research, I realized just how essential arts programs are to cultivating students' imaginative capacities. Students with autism who are non-verbal especially benefit from this alternative means of self-expression. Additionally, the arts aid the development of motor and decision-making skills. By holding crayons and paintbrushes, children develop the motor control needed for handwriting. After thinking about the wide-ranging benefits of the arts to education, I saw even more value in a magazine



that could connect the arts to schools.

As I laid the groundwork for the magazine, I thought about the significance of encouragement and recognition to the learning process and to other aspects of child development. When children are encouraged while immersed in an activity and are recognized afterward, they are more likely to think positively about the activity and do it again. I hoped that recognizing young artists through a magazine could promote positive behaviors and self-confidence.

### Making Creative Connections

To help bring this encouragement to life in the form of a magazine, I contacted a child psychiatrist at a local medical center, as well as a neighborhood social worker. I also enlisted the support of my brother, who has volunteered in two summer programs for children with special needs as well as in the New York public school system, and an artist-friend who attends a school for those with learning dif-

ferences. We began by discussing the format and direction of the magazine, including how we could present the art most aesthetically. After we came up with some ideas, the social worker and psychiatrist on staff helped to foster connections with local schools that served students with autism and learning differences.

In August 2013, two months after we decided to publish a magazine, I contacted the heads of 10 such local schools. I asked for drawings, paintings, photography, and works of creative writing. When I heard back from administrators and teachers at these schools, I realized how much work they had put into cultivating strong arts programs. They were passionate about the intricate curricula they had developed, and they reflected upon the projects their students enjoyed most. I decided at that point that the magazine, *Super*, should acknowledge not only the work of students, but also the efforts of school leaders. In each issue, *Super* would include a section designed to honor schools with outstanding programs in the arts.

About a week after sending my messages to schools, I received an email from a teacher at an elementary school for students with learning challenges—and I was thrilled to see that the email attachment contained carefully scanned drawings and watercolors, made by students. Shortly afterward, I received poetry from students at a high school, plus photographs of students' sculptures from other schools. The quality of the work I received was superb. The poems were filled with powerful detail, and the sculptures that were photographed were intricately carved and glazed. Soon, even more schools contacted me about wanting to participate in the magazine, and within weeks, there was enough material to make a colorful first issue.

### Letting It Shine

As a writer for and an editor of my high school science magazine, I had been exposed to the nuts and bolts of publication, and I used this journalistic experience to write a piece for *Super's* first issue that introduced the publication to readers. Also, thanks to a digital publishing class I took at my high school, I had the skills to lay out and produce

### Why it's Super

I came up with title *Super* early in the magazine's development because I liked the word's usage as a playful expression of encouragement, similar to "great." I also liked the association with superheroes, which seemed appropriate for a magazine with young artists' work: Not only are children often drawn to fictional superheroes, but every student-artist I had met while volunteering was a superhero in that they excelled in the creative arts despite challenges. The word "super" fit the bill all around and became the magazine's official title.

the magazine online, at no cost. I resized photos, formatted text, and ultimately published the magazine on Issuu, a free digital publishing platform that allows viewers to interact with magazines and zoom in closely on pages.

Assembling the first issue was not without challenges. Although the technical process went seamlessly, it was difficult to decide the order in which the works would appear. What would be on the cover? Which pieces should be displayed together? Ultimately, we decided to place works in the order in which they worked most meaningfully with one another. For example, three unique renditions of a horse were placed side by side, as were drawings all made with the same medium and color palette. This manner of display used the contrast among related pieces to emphasize the self-expression inherent in each individual work.

The whole staff was delighted with the final product. More important, the student-artists who received the magazine via an emailed link were thrilled to have their works published. Teacher after teacher from the schools

included in the magazine contacted me to relay how encouraged their students, whether or not they had contributed to *Super*, were upon reading the magazine. I heard from leaders at the schools honored in *Super's* first issue who wrote to express their pride, and from staff at schools not featured who wanted to submit work for future issues. Before long, *Super* had about 400 online readers. A few months later, *Super's* second issue was released. I look forward to producing future issues that provide both the featured artists and readers with the opportunity to appreciate the arts. ■



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Browse *Super* magazine at <http://issuu.com/supermagazine>.