



HIGHER ORDER THINKING SCHOOLS NETWORK  
strong arts arts integration democratic practice

## I Opened My Heart to HOT

—Suzy Jorsey Balay, Parent, John Lyman Elementary School

HOT Schools encourage students to take chances and embrace areas outside of their comfort zone. As a fiber artist with a creative mind that weaves all over the road, I usually avoid expressing my thoughts in writing. But here I go, because in the HOT School rubric, parents matter. As the link between our children's education and the community, we have an important voice.

My introduction to the HOT Schools Summer Institute came in 2008, the summer before my youngest child, Hanna, entered kindergarten at John Lyman Elementary. When I was asked to co-chair John Lyman's cultural arts committee, along with Cindy Satton, I was excited about the idea of the Summer Institute. A week away from the house without my kids? Please, I love my home and family but this would be five stimulating days with adults. Sign me up!

I arrived at the Institute knowing only the John Lyman staff and Cindy. Every moment, from 7:15am to 10:30pm, was filled with activity and emotion. By the end of each evening my brain and body were exhausted—in a good way. By the end of the week I left with hugs, tears of

fulfillment, at least a hundred new friends, and a better understanding of the mission and components of HOT Schools.

I was placed in a morning track that was perfect for me. David Rau, from the Florence Griswold Museum, led a group of teaching artists with enthusiasm and dedication. We created books, played theater games, documented, acted out,



Hanna, Suzy and Chris Balay at John Lyman Elementary School

and reviewed our efforts. We experimented with all the elements of a teaching artist residency, both giving and receiving. It was such a thrill to see talented people working together to better our schools' futures. We emerged with many new skills in our artistic toolboxes.

Each afternoon featured a different workshop. We made masks and transformed our selves into animals. We painted self-portraits by the Connecticut River and our diverse portraits were combined to form a massive mural of our HOT community. I mixed in a little science and made a pinhole camera. The experience of creating art and capturing a moment of our collective history was awesome. We saw the fantastic ELLA, a new musical based on Ella Fitzgerald's life.

Fascinating keynote speakers had me on the edge of my chair. I was a sponge soaking up everything the Institute had to offer. Oh, and as an added joy, we seemed to be eating all the time. Creativity is hungry work!

At the end of the week the Town Meeting took me by surprise. "Oh, you want me to get up on the stage at Hartford Stage and perform in front of everyone, with a group of people that I just met on Monday? No, no that's not me." Contrary to most people's impressions, I'm a bit shy. Well, I thought about Hanna, my five year old. At John Lyman she would be expected to be willing to try this. If Hanna was going to be speaking on a stage, then I could do it too.

Using all that I learned that week, I stood tall on center stage, raised my arms up high and sang out a chant to a drum. In doing so I opened my heart to what truly is a Higher Order Thinking way of life. Just imagine where we would be if all the world thought HOT!



Department of Economic and  
Community Development  
Office of the Arts

