

All children should learn a few words from the language of art

By ROBERT JESSELSON

Amid all the bad news from around the world, we sometimes fail to take note of successes in our immediate area. One has remained all but unnoticed: Columbia has come from being a cultural educational backwater to being a leader in providing music opportunities to young people.

This area now offers young people the opportunity to sing in the Greater Columbia Children's Choir, to play in the Columbia Youth Orchestras, to participate in the University of South Carolina's pre-school music program and to study through the Columbia College pre-college program.

The growth in quality and quantity has been particularly evident in the string programs of the region's schools. Fifteen years ago, there was just one small string program in the schools, reaching very few students. Now Richland districts One and Two and Lexington districts One, Two and Five all have large and impressive string programs, and students as young as third-graders can study through the USC String Project.

Here's evidence of this local success:

- ✓ Ten years ago, only eight students from Columbia were accepted by competitive auditions for the Senior All-State Orchestra, while 41 came from Greenville. In 1993, 39 students came from Columbia, while 25 came from Greenville.

- ✓ The winner of the competition to play a solo with the All-State Orchestra was a violinist from Lexington District Five, Jane Ko of Columbia.

- ✓ The Columbia Youth Orchestra

has doubled in number in the last four years, and the number of concerts has doubled to four per year.

- ✓ Enrollment in string classes in Richland District One has tripled since 1987.

- ✓ In 1982, there were no students studying strings in Richland District Two. This year there are 400.

- ✓ The Richland District Two Orchestra has been invited for the second time to play in prestigious Carnegie Hall in New York City.

- ✓ Lexington District One currently has more than 500 students studying string instruments; approximately 93 percent of the students in the orchestra go on to college.

- ✓ Lexington District Two's string program, which started in 1985, now reaches all elementary and middle schools beginning in the third grade.
- ✓ Lexington District Five began its program with 33 students in 1987; now there are 419 students playing string instruments in the program.

- ✓ The USC String Project has gone from 97 students to 300 during the past 10 years.

Why should the schools bother with the arts? Research during the past few years has revealed that the study of music can actually influence a child's overall learning potential and educational development.

There is a direct relationship be-

tween Scholastic Aptitude Test scores and arts study. According to a study in 1990, SAT scores tend to increase with more years of arts study.

Students who learn to play a musical instrument receive higher marks in school than their classmates who don't.

Approximately 90 percent of the brain's motor control capabilities are devoted to the hands, mouth and throat. According to experts, the fine dexterity involved in playing a violin can exercise the entire brain and stimulate general intelligence.

One other fact should be kept in mind as we become increasingly conscious of competition with other countries: In Japan today every school child between fourth and ninth grades is required to play a musical instrument. The Japanese have recognized a direct relationship between high technology and economic development and brain bilateralism and music.

But even more than all this research shows, by training our young people we are passing on our cultural heritage — a universal language of music that can cross boundaries and facilitate understanding. As Charleston sculptor Willard Hirsch said when he addressed the cadets of The Citadel in 1948, "Art is a language and a powerful one. All of us should know at least a few words in it."

Dr. Jesselson, a cellist of international reputation, is professor of music at the University of South Carolina. As director of the USC String Project, he was the recipient of the 1992 Verner Award for Arts in Education.



Jesselson