

Triage: Developing A Profile Of Arts Partnership Projects

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Abstract

Arts education partnerships offer a new approach to supporting teaching and learning of the arts in schools. This model features artists collaborating with teachers with the support of the school and community to implement lessons in and through the arts. This inquiry developed a profile of arts projects across Canada involved in ArtsSmarts, a national arts education partnership. Findings indicate that the projects focused on curricular themes and arts integration occurred predominately in language arts and social studies. Classes were often combined to increase the number of students exposed to artistic experiences but this form of delivery hampered learning effectiveness. The largest number of projects occurred in school settings (rather than the community), urban areas (rather than rural or suburban), visual arts (rather than creative writing, dance, drama, film/video or music), Grade 4 (rather than other grades), and in time frames of less than a month (rather than from 2 to 10 months).

Arts education partnerships offer a new approach to supporting the teaching and learning of the arts in elementary and secondary schools. Partnerships feature artists collaborating with teachers with the support of the school and community to implement lessons in and through the arts (Dreeszen, Aprill, & Deasy, 1999; Wilkinson, 2000). This study describes the broad implementation parameters of ArtsSmarts, a national arts

education partnership.¹ This unique initiative brings together artists, arts educators and arts organizations together to integrate the arts into the school curriculum across Canada. Artists and teachers collaborate in the design and delivery of the arts disciplines within the school curriculum in accordance with provincial education guidelines. The disciplines include creative writing, dance, drama, film/video, music and the visual arts. The program offers the possibility of addressing the need across the country for arts stakeholders to develop partnerships involving young people that lead to meaningful long relationships and impact significantly on learning.

In effective arts education partnerships, partners share a common vision that focuses on student learning. Leadership alternates among the stakeholders as different expertise is required to undertake partnership tasks. This fosters a strong sense of ownership among the participants—artists, teachers, parents, administrators and the students themselves. Participants problem-solve and create opportunities from obstacles, and they learn and change. A variety of arts disciplines are promoted to increase opportunities for meeting the needs of learners who exhibit a diverse range of learning styles. To support such a multi-faceted and collegial environment, the partnership structure must be flexible and adaptable, and change as the need arises (Dreeszen et al., 1999).

Strong arts education programs can be distinguished from those that are less successful by the level of administrative support. Schools with thriving arts partnerships are characterized by the presence of administrators who support the arts and ensure adequate resources to sustain the programs and ensure their continued growth. Teachers are encouraged to learn new skills, take risks, and try new ideas and teaching strategies

¹ ArtsSmarts is funded by the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation and administered by the Canadian Conference of the Arts.

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(Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 1999). Successful partnerships support a participatory-based approach to making decisions, establish a process for resolving conflicts, and maintain ongoing communications with partners (Arts Education Partnership, 2000). Professional development is available for all participants, including parents and volunteers, and program evaluation is undertaken to improve the partnership and to generate sustained funding (Arts Education Partnership, 2002).

Profiling Implementation

In the literature, there is a lack of information profiling the implementation of arts education partnerships. To address this lack of knowledge, artists, teachers and project co-ordinators (e.g., artist, teacher, parent, arts consultant or principal) involved in a national arts education partnership submitted a project information questionnaire providing data profiling their projects.² The primary question was:

“What is the nature of the arts partnership project? [project description]

Secondary questions, including values (in brackets) employed in the questionnaire, were:

“Who completed the project information questionnaire? [artist, teacher, project coordinator, small group]

“What was the time frame of the project? [less than 1 month, 1-10 months]

² The project information form represents one source of data gathered for the partners that was designed to examine aspects of the national arts education partnership.

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“Which arts disciplines were involved in the project? [creative writing, dance, drama, music, visual arts, film/video]

“What Grade levels were involved? [JK, SK, Grades 1-12, OAC]

“How many students participated in the project? [less than 500, more than 500]

“What was the setting for the project? [school or community]

“What was the locale of the project? [urban, suburban, rural]

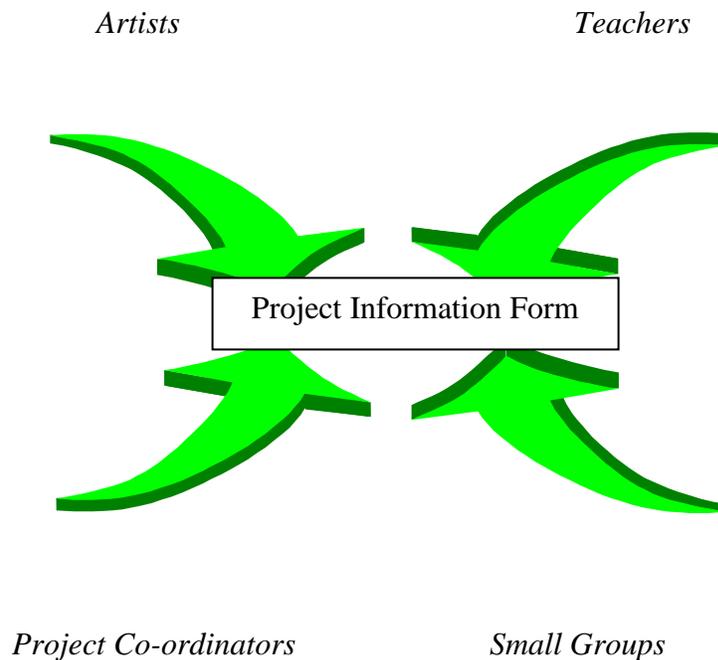
“Who is the project affiliated with? [community foundation, non-profit arts organization or arts council]

This study adopted Integrated Inquiry, a mixed methodology that combines multiple measures and/or perspectives (Andrews, 2006).³ In collaboration with the partner organizations, the author developed the project information questionnaire to gather descriptive and statistical data from artists, teachers and project co-ordinators (refer to Figure 1). The questionnaire was pilot-tested with the participation of individuals from 23 of 120 projects (19.2%) to ensure construct validity. From across Canada, 109 questionnaires (90.8%) were submitted for the study from July through to September, 2000. Data analysis was undertaken using the quantitative/qualitative computer software entitled Sphinx Survey/Lexica. The author previously had undertaken similar studies integrating both quantitative and qualitative data (e.g., Andrews, 1995, 1999, 2000).

³ This study was funded by the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation and the University of Ottawa. Andrews, B. W. & Harris, E. O. (2007). Triage: Developing a profile of arts partnership projects. In K. Veblen & C. Beynon (Eds. with S. Horsley, U. DeAlwiss, & A. Heywood), *From sea to sea: Perspectives on music education in Canada*. Retrieved from <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/musiceducationE-books/1/>

Figure 1

Integrated Inquiry



Examining the Data

Analysis of the project descriptions (primary question) was undertaken using Sphinx Lexica to determine the nature of the arts partnership projects. From 109 descriptions, the software identified recurring patterns in the descriptions. A cluster analysis of these responses revealed that project titles focused on curricular themes; the artist-in-residency was a common type of approach to the partnership initiated in schools; and the arts, most notably visual arts, were predominately integrated into social studies and language arts.

Using Sphinx Survey, analysis of the secondary questions was undertaken. This process indicated that responses were submitted from artists, teachers, project co-ordinators (i.e., artist, teacher, parent, arts consultant or principal), or small groups (e.g.,

artist/teacher/parent). The project co-ordinators (44%) were the largest group of individuals submitting responses followed by teachers (22%), artists (14.7%), and then those partners (11.9%) who completed the form as a group. The smallest category was those who did not identify themselves (7.3%).

The largest percentage of partnership projects was implemented within less than a one-month time frame (38.5%). Alternately, the next largest percentage was implemented throughout the ten months of the school year (13.8%). Otherwise, the projects were distributed over one (0.9%) to nine (8.0%) months (refer to Table 1).

Table 1

Time Frame

Time frame	N°. ans.	Percent.
Non -response	1	0.9%
Non-response	4	3.7%
Less than one month	42	38.5%
One month	1	0.9%
Two months	8	7.3%
Three months	5	4.6%
Four months	6	5.5%
Five months	5	4.6%
Six months	6	5.5%
Seven months	3	2.8%
Eight months	5	4.6%
Nine months	8	7.3%
Ten months	15	13.8%
TOTAL RESPONSES	109	100%

Within projects, it was usual to have one or more arts disciplines represented.

Consequently, the number of instances of multiple disciplines being reported within

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projects (235 observations) is greater than the number of questionnaires submitted (109 responses). For example, a project could involve music and dance, which would elicit two observations within one response. This resulted in the coding of one entry in the music column and one in the drama column. The maximum number of disciplines reported within a project was six; that is, dance, drama, music, visual arts, creative writing and film/video. Visual arts/crafts dominated (33.2%) in the projects. Dance (13.6%), drama (15.8%), music (18.3%) and creative writing (13.2%) were distributed similarly (within 6%) with the least involvement in film/video (5.5%) (refer to Table 2).

Table 2

Disciplines Represented

Arts Disciplines	N°. ans.	Percent.
Non-response	1	0.4%
Dance	32	13.6%
Drama	37	15.8%
Music	43	18.3%
Visual arts/crafts	78	33.2%
Creative writing	31	13.2%
Film/video	13	5.5%
TOTAL OBS.	235	100%

A similar situation to the disciplines exists for the data submitted for grade levels. The number of observations is greater than the number of responses due to multiple grade levels reported within projects. For example, a project could involve Grades 5 and 6, or 1, 2 and 3, or any such combination of grades. A maximum of 15 levels could be reported in a project; that is, JK, SK, Grades 1-12, and Ontario Academic Credit (OAC—formerly Grade 13). Analysis indicated that projects pre-dominated in the elementary grades,

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increasing in frequency from kindergarten (8%) to Grade 4 (14%), and decreasing thereafter from Grades 5 (13.6%) through to 12 (1.2%) (refer to Table 3).

Table 3

Grades Represented

Grade Levels	N°. ans.	Percent.
Non-response	3	0.6%
Junior kindergarten	0	0.0%
Kindergarten	41	8.0%
Grade 1	54	10.5%
Grade 2	58	11.3%
Grade 3	60	11.7%
Grade 4	72	14.0%
Grade 5	70	13.6%
Grade 6	62	12.1%
Grade 7	34	6.6%
Grade 8	29	5.6%
Grade 9	9	1.8%
Grade 10	8	1.5%
Grade 11	8	1.5%
Grade 12	6	1.2%
Ontario Academic Credit (OAC)	0	0.0%
TOTAL OBSERVATIONS	514	100%

The range of students participating in the partnership projects ranged from 5 to 3,000 with a mean of 150. However, it would be inaccurate to state that the average number of students in a project was 150. Most projects occurred in general elementary classrooms with class sizes ranging from 17 to 40. Several had combined groups of two, three or more classes, especially where large-scale performances occurred (refer to Table 4).

Most projects (89.9%) occurred in school settings with a smaller number in the community (10.1%). Most of the projects (45.9%) were implemented in urban areas, followed closely by rural settings (41.3%), with limited involvement in suburban areas

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(12.8%). Of the 109 responses, 19 projects were partnered with provincial arts councils (26.6%), 45 were partnered with community foundations (41.3%), and 35 were partnered with non-profit arts organizations (32.1%).

Table 4

Students Involved

Student numbers	N°. ans.	Percent.
Non-response	6	5.5%
Less than 500	101	92.7%
From 500 to 999	0	0.0%
From 1000 to 1499	1	0.9%
From 1500 to 1999	0	0.0%
from 2000 to 2499	0	0.0%
2500 and above	1	0.9%
TOTAL RESPONSES	109	100%

Reflections on the Data Analysis

The use of curricular themes in the project titles indicates a connection to the content of the school curriculum. Curriculum congruence is essential if artist/teacher collaboration is to be supported by the educational community (Arts Education Partnership, 2001; Stoloff, 1989). Several projects initiated artist-in-residencies, an early approach to bringing artists into schools (Dorn & Jones, 1988). This approach allowed the artist to be viewed as an integral member of the school community. The arts (notably visual arts) were integrated predominately into social studies and language arts - two curricular areas that are particularly amenable to integrative arts activities. Most of the project co-ordinators were elementary school principals who decided on the feasibility and acceptability of the projects. Their involvement was crucial to obtaining accessibility

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to the schools, and is an important factor for the success of arts partnerships (Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 1999; Seidel & Eppel, 2001). Several questionnaires were also completed by partners together (e.g., artist/teacher/project coordinator), highlighting the participatory-based nature of the partnership (after Cousins & Earl, 1992, 1995).

For arts educators, it is easier to convince school administrators to support short projects as they are more cost-effective, reach more students, and cause less disruptions to the school. However, most short projects are usually criticised for having limited impact and lacking long-term artistic development. Successful partnerships require relationships and projects be developed, supported and refined over an extended period of time (ARTS, Inc. & Performing Tree, 2000). The reporting of school-year projects over 10 months (13.8%) indicates that extended projects are feasible and could be implemented more widely.

The presence of projects in multiple arts disciplines strengthens partnerships and offers a broader range of learning opportunities for young people (Dreezen et al., 1999). The predominance of visual arts is not surprising as the discipline offers a wide range of hands-on activities, such as line drawing, painting and pottery, which are amenable to children in the elementary grades. The involvement in dance represents an important contribution by the partnership projects as this subject is generally the weakest area in the school curriculum (Pitman, 1998). Although Canadian culture is dominated by the popular media, the relatively low involvement of projects in film/video could be attributed to one or more factors, such as the limited number of media artists working in small communities, the lack of current equipment in the schools, the teachers' lack of familiarity with various media, and the focus on computer technology in the elementary

arts curriculum, for example *The Arts: Grades 1 – 8* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1998), rather than on media in general.

Many of the projects were well suited to the elementary grades as the skills developed were foundational, and most projects were implemented within a month. Consequently, the amount of artistic skill and cross-curricular learning that could be achieved by the students was limited. The selection of Grade 4 as the level of choice is perhaps not surprising. Students in this grade have generally developed their reading and writing skills, and one does not experience the classroom management challenges that tend to occur at higher levels (Personal communication with partners, May, 2000).

The participants' responses to identifying the number of students involved in a project reveals the lack of a common understanding of what constitutes a "project," and the problem of reporting on different organizational frameworks across a country as large as Canada. Essentially, there are three variables - artist, activity and site. In many cases, partners initiated several small projects with different grant applicants, and each one of these completed a questionnaire. In these cases, there was one artist working on one activity in one site; and the numbers of students were small, generally in one or two classes (separately or combined). In other regions, however, a project was defined quite differently and could involve any number of artists, activities and sites. Similarly, the term 'community' was employed ambiguously. It appeared several times throughout the data, either in a generic sense without identifying specific entities (e.g., community support, committee including the community, etc.), or alternately linked to the arts (e.g., theatre community, community arts group, artistic community, etc.).

In several sites, classes were combined to increase exposure to the artists, for example to participate in an interactive drama presentation.⁴ This practice resulted in the reporting of large numbers of students in some projects. Unfortunately, such an approach hampers learning effectiveness and can undermine the success of the partnership (Arts Education Partnership, 2001). The exposure of the maximum number of student in a school to the arts is a laudable goal. However, it is essential to ensure that student learning, not exposure (i.e., spectatorship), is the focus of the partnership (Seidel & Eppel, 2001).

Several partners indicated an interest in involving the students out in the community, for example visiting arts galleries, museums and artists' studios. This offers the benefit of real-life experiences to students and involving them in the community (Bailey, 1998). However, there are logistical problems that must be carefully considered, including time tabling, bussing, and above-all parental consent. Generally, suburban school boards are more aggressive at obtaining additional programs for their schools so that the low percentage of involvement (12.8%) is somewhat surprising. However, this could also be attributed to the meaning attached to the term. The term suburban has more significance in large centres, such as Toronto, Montreal, Calgary and Vancouver. In smaller communities, such as St. John's or Saskatoon, the lines are blurred between urban and suburban designations. Also, the provincial mandate of the some of the partner organizations (i.e., arts councils) and the community focus of the others (foundations, non-profit organizations) tended to encourage a broad distribution of projects across different locales, which is a positive influence (Arts Education Partnership, 2000).

Overall, the projects effectively involved artists/teacher collaboration and the support of

⁴ Personally observed by the principal investigator during a site visitation in May, 1999.

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schools and community organizations, which is a hallmark of a successful partnership (Arts Education Partnership, 2002; Stoloff, 1989).

Concluding Comments

Organizational data from projects renders valuable information which can be used by artists and arts administrators to more effectively design and implement similar partnership projects in collaboration with teachers and schools. The current findings provide policy-makers with the profile of projects within a national arts education partnership where decisions concerning delivery were undertaken at the site level. These findings can be used to improve partnership practices. For example, more artists could be encouraged to provide input to balance the voices of teachers and project coordinators. Partners could fund longer term projects, thereby promoting in-depth artistic learning, and also those that emphasize learning through the arts, thereby promoting non-arts learning across the curriculum. Film and video learning could be encouraged by providing the requisite technical equipment. Projects in secondary schools would broaden the appeal of the arts education partnership, particularly if projects were extended into suburban areas where strong public support may be solicited.

A key dimension finding of this study is that partnerships need to define terms so that there is consistency across several sites by answering such questions as “Who are the partners?”; “What is a project?”; “What are the roles of artist, teacher and project coordinator?” Further, partners could raise the profile of the projects by implementing more of them in the local community. Finally, the notion of ‘partner’ could to be extended and include those organizations in the community that could make a substantial

contribution to arts education, such as small businesses, corporations, not-for-profit organizations and churches.

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