

**When Artists Go to School:
Effective Teacher-Artist Partnerships in K-12 Schools**

A Discussion Paper with Recommendations
Commissioned by the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance
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Introduction

Increasingly, artists and the cultural community are participating in the formal arts education of students through programs or agreements such as Creative Partnerships in the UK, Artists in Schools in Malaysia, Artists in Education in New Zealand, the Arts and Education Charter in Ireland, The Cultural Rucksack in Norway, Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education, and Artists in Schools (formerly ArtsSmarts) in Saskatchewan. There are a range of ways for artists to work with school students and teachers, including artist visits, workshops, performances and field trips to spaces such as professional galleries, but the focus of this paper is on co-designed teacher-artist partnership projects that take place primarily in the classroom over a period of time. The working relationship between teachers and artists has been identified as a key factor in achieving long-term impact, but questions remain about what an effective partnership entails, and what can be built into such programs to encourage effective working partnerships.

Saskatchewan Stories

The Biology Lounge, Watson School

Through an effective partnership, the artist has the benefit of the teacher's knowledge about the school, community, curriculum and pedagogy, and the teacher has the benefit of the artist's knowledge about technique and ways of knowing in the arts. Teacher and artist are two professionals working at the top of their game and when they work well together, what they are able to achieve often surprises them both. Teacher Marea Olafson describes effective projects as "bigger than the artist and teacher separately."¹ She has worked with visual artist Jay Kimball on three different ArtsSmarts projects, and she states that as artist and teacher work together over a long period of time, their knowledge of each other's skill sets "factors into new ideas, and into the imagining of new and bigger projects." She says, "[Artist and teacher] can go big because of their relationship, history and knowledge of each other's skills and abilities." She states that even her grant applications improved because she could write with understanding of what the two of them together could bring to a new project, and how ambitious they could be because of the working relationship already in place. When she found herself in a new school (Watson School) teaching biology rather than the art and history she was used to teaching, she and Kimball developed for their third project together a "biology lounge" out of an unused space in the school. The students drew on their own stories and learning in biology to create objects for the lounge including a ceramic "lung mural" (one



pair of lungs for each of the students), a rib cage made from a drive shaft, and a model illustrating the eye disease experienced by one of the students. Olafson said it was her most ambitious project and would not have been possible without the already established working partnership with an artist.

“Rib Cage”
Biology Lounge, Watson School
Photo: Jay Kimball

Truth or Dare, Broadview School

Broadview teacher Debbie Pearson says that an effective partnership is not just the teacher mediating between the artist and students and is “more than simply role delineation.”² She was the recipient of six ArtsSmarts grants beginning in 2006 when she approached a Regina theatre artist, the now-late Michele Sereda, to work with her on a drama project. Pearson went into the process of applying for a grant not knowing Sereda personally and with little knowledge of how they would work together, but with a commitment to the idea that she and Sereda would develop a collaborative project relevant to students from the town of Broadview, the First Nations nearby, and the surrounding rural community. They decided that Sereda should stay at her house instead of a motel, and it was this decision that had an unexpected and lasting effect on the project’s direction. The two of them inadvertently spent many hours together, discussing the project, planning and getting to know one another’s thoughts about both teaching and the arts. The respectful relationship that developed transferred to the working environment in the classroom. As a result, Sereda was able to encourage the students to develop their own ideas openly and honestly, while Pearson was able to navigate the system of “school”, model respectful interactions with the artist, contribute her knowledge of the community, and tie the learning to curriculum expectations. The resulting collective creation, Truth or Dare, was hugely successful in the community in spite of tackling difficult ideas such as racism and community relations. Pearson went on to even more ambitious partnership projects with Sereda and other artists. She says that working so closely with artists changed her teaching practice, and that coming to know their way of working taught her “to trust the kids more to do the thinking” and that “anything is possible.” Sereda also continued to work on

such projects in other communities. Chief Ira Lavallee of Piapot First Nation, where she worked with educator Nicole Crowe over several years, stated that Sereda opened a door³ and gave students the confidence to talk about their own stories, which mirrors Pearson’s experience in Broadview and speaks again to the profound effects of a successful partnership between artist and teacher.

Deaf Crows, Thom Collegiate, Regina

The synergy that guides an effective partnership is often hard to describe. Teacher Joanne Weber says that her ongoing partnership with interdisciplinary artists Chrystene Ells and Berny Hi is “not very focused on roles.”⁴ Rather, the relationship is characterized as having “mutual respect, appreciation and support for diverse ability, talents and gifts we brought to the partnership.” The word “gifts” is interesting because it alludes to the uniqueness of the partners’ strengths, and suggests that there is no one generic way to describe what a teacher offers and what an artist offers. Weber estimates that about 25% of the project time is spent outside the classroom, with teacher and artists planning and talking about the project. She uses the word “flow” to describe how things often progress, and makes the point that trust and respect are key. She says, “There just can’t be any power struggles, insecurity or jealousy in these partnerships.” Weber teaches in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing program at Thom Collegiate in Regina and began working with the artists in 2015. The partnership has resulted in an animated puppet film, a visual art installation, a poetry slam and a drama production called Deaf Crows. The partners are currently working on a new performance piece with the students. Working in partnership with the artists taught Weber to trust a different way of working from what she was used to. She states that over time she “learned to get out of the way.... I stopped worrying about [the students’] language acquisition when they began to exhibit

increased motivation and engagement because of [Ells’s] work. I began to see that I didn’t have all the answers, and that people outside the classroom had skills and talents that would benefit my students.” Weber says that the Deaf Crows projects “tops everything [she] has ever done in her professional life.”



**“Deaf Crows Rehearsal”
Thom Collegiate**

Photo: Don Healy courtesy of the Regina Leader Post

The Importance of Co-Planning

What all three of the teachers stress is that the ability to work and imagine together is key to a project going toward what educators refer to as “deep understanding”.⁵ They make the point that mutual trust and respect are necessary to an effective working partnership, and that these develop over time, and not simply by defining roles, objectives and schedules. There is an affective component to the partnership that allows the teacher and artist to be co-creators in the classroom. Researcher Kathryn Ricketts talks about teachers’ adoption of “artful practices”⁶ in the classroom, and this makes sense in light of the comments of the three teachers above. Teachers gain new knowledge into artists’ ways of working and not just the technical aspects of an art form. The way of working is what leads to the expression of new meaning through the arts.

Norway’s Cultural Rucksack⁷ program offers some insights into why an effective partnership with a teacher is also important for artists who work in schools. Although many teachers in Norway have had extensive experience with The Cultural Rucksack’s programs, teachers were not often partners in the delivery of the programs that were coming into their schools. As a result, they were not empowered to feel responsible and sometimes abdicated responsibility to whoever had taken over their classroom. Extensive program research determined that there is in general often a tense relationship between the school sector and the cultural sector: “Some cultural sector actors define their artistic activities as being opposed to the school’s activities, a definition which results in an unsettled relationship with the school.” The Cultural Rucksack research asks whether, when an artist takes charge of tasks in the schools that have traditionally been the teachers’ responsibility, is it really an outsourcing of arts instruction, and will this eventually weaken rather than strengthen arts subjects in schools?

This is precisely why the practice of enabling authentic partnerships between teachers and artists is so important, especially in a province such as Saskatchewan where the curriculum policy is in place to see all Kindergarten to grade 9 students receiving high quality arts education in their classrooms before they encounter specialized courses in high school. It has been a huge undertaking requiring policy change, an investment in staff, a massive change effort in schools around the province, and new expectations placed on classroom teachers regarding their responsibilities. Any program that might take away that responsibility only reinforces notions that it can’t be done.

Part of the problem with the limited reach of visiting artist programs as opposed to working partnerships might be due to the school's well-intentioned desire to spread arts experiences as widely as possible, but Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) founder Arnold Aprill argues that "...this may not be the best strategy for deepening arts learning. It may be wiser to develop some deep-and-narrow curricular projects that 'catch fire' in a school."⁸ When projects catch fire, both students and teachers benefit in ways that change their confidence, or as Kathryn Ricketts says, change the creative capital in the school.

Value Added in the Classroom

CAPE has been working for over 20 years to pair artists and teachers in Chicago Public schools for the purposes of teaching, learning and research. Artists and teachers are paired for a minimum of one to two years and they spend 35 hours per year planning together in the classroom. The organization has placed a high value on research and is therefore a great source of knowledge on the educational value of artist-teacher partnerships and the factors that make such partnerships work. CAPE ensures through its planning component that artists and teachers are true partners in the classroom, and that teachers do not merely mediate between the artist and the students, but are full participants, guiding the learning program and co-creating with the artist and students.

On the subject of planning, program founder Arnold Aprill states, "The value of visiting artists is not in providing arts education on the cheap, but in opening up new roles and relationships between teachers, students, and artists, and in exploring innovative ways for reconnecting a fragmented public school curriculum.... A partnership is only valuable to a school to the extent that it builds the capacity of teachers, and develops innovative leadership inside schools.... Any visiting artists that participate in an arts integration initiative must be skilled at co-planning, at listening to both arts teachers and classroom teachers, and at collaborating."⁹ At CAPE, then, building capacity is key to achieving lasting impact for both teachers and students.

CAPE has a very specific approach to professional development that involves inquiry learning for the teacher through a process of action research. Researcher and teacher educator Gail Burnaford¹⁰ asserts that, "The central question for arts educators may be, how will engaging in a partnership really improve the learning of students? In other words, what is the value added for engaging in an arts partnership?" When teachers engage in a partnership with artists, they are continually reflecting

on their own practice and how it can change to the benefit of student learning. Burnaford states, “If teachers within school buildings embed the most effective practices of professional development, artistic inquiry, and generative expression into their teaching as a result of engagement with artists, museum curators, university students and faculty, or symphony orchestra members, they will be forever changed and so will their classrooms.” This is true, according to Arnold Aprill, for both specialist and classroom teachers. In both cases, the value is in the learning inquiry that develops from the artists’ and the teacher’s ideas, skills, knowledge, imaginings and creative ambitions.

The Creative Partnerships program in the UK¹¹ placed a high priority on teacher professional development as a program goal and found that the partnerships between artists and teachers did in fact result in a high degree of learning among the teachers. At the program’s conclusion, ninety-two percent of headteachers reported that their teachers were more willing to take a creative approach to teaching after having taken part in Creative Partnerships projects. Those who had taken part in five or more projects were the ones who reported the highest impact. “Successful partnerships were identified as those in which the [artists] and schools had a good idea of what they wanted to achieve and of their own skills and needs....The experience of case study schools showed that it was important to invest time in planning and to keep communication flowing between [artists] and teachers, both before and during the project work.”

A co-planning initiative currently underway in Saskatchewan offers an example of how artists can positively influence teacher practice. Kathryn Ricketts’s current research focuses on the creation of arts education “hubs” or forums that cut across organizations and include teachers, artists and arts agents or brokers (art gallery educators, for example, or community arts volunteers). The hubs function by combining experiential artist workshops and robust conversation, through which teachers learn principles and “artful practices” that they can then apply creatively in their classrooms. It is possible to imagine that such hubs could support teachers and artists who wish to work together in project-based partnerships by providing a sustainable professional development structure not unlike that employed by CAPE to such success.

Authentic artist-teacher partnerships offer exceptional learning experiences to students, meaningful professional development to teachers, and unique creative experiences to artists. It is clear from talking to Saskatchewan teachers who have had successful and ambitious projects that they are not aiming only for the attainment of content-specific learning objectives when they imagine an artist

project for their students. They are talking about deep engagement, profound learning and lasting change in their own practice. Teachers Debbie Pearson, Marea Olafson and Joanne Weber all talked about the amount of time needed to develop an effective partnership, and Kathryn Ricketts states that when teachers enter into partnerships with artists, it is important to understand that they are not commissioning a product, but are rather entering into a reciprocal arrangement “whereby activity emerges through a respectful discourse.”¹² The question becomes, how can we support teachers and artists who wish to work this way? How can grant programs and professional development opportunities reflect both best practices when it comes to partnerships and the learning expectations set out by the Ministry of Education?

Policy and Funding Partners

In Ireland in 2013, The Arts and Education Charter was signed by the Ministers of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and the Department of Education and Skills. The Charter recognizes the contribution of arts education to the goal of developing creativity in society and the economy. It also recognizes the need for “joined-up, integrated collaboration across government departments, education agencies and arts organizations....”¹³ The Charter was based on previous research and reports, and distinguishes between curriculum-based arts education in schools and arts experiences or interventions by artists in schools or on field trips to public arts spaces. A number of initiatives followed, focusing on the nature of collaborations and partnerships among the sectors.

This Charter recognizes:

- the role of arts education in developing skills relevant beyond the arts themselves and to the future of a creative economy
- that artists and arts organizations have a role to play in education by assisting teachers with professional development and curriculum-based projects
- that policy (i.e., the Charter) is important for formalizing the need for collaboration across departments and sectors
- that the nature of the partnership between education and arts professionals is key and worthy of further study.

Saskatchewan does have agreements, especially between the Saskatchewan Arts Board and SaskCulture Inc., related to grant programs that provide funding to schools for partnership projects

and artist residencies. However, there is currently no formal agreement that includes the Ministries of Education and Culture and other potential partners such as the Universities and First Nations, Métis and francophone education leaders to co-develop, fund and support programs and ensure that they are fully accessible to all schools. Ireland's Arts and Education Charter offers a model for a policy and funding partnership that might work for Saskatchewan.

One More Story: Treaty 4 Project



Treaty 4 Mural Project
Hosted by Campbell Collegiate
Photo: Don Healy courtesy of the Regina Leader Post

In recent years, a number of Saskatchewan teachers have discovered artist-teacher partnerships as an authentic means of participating in reconciliation processes in their classrooms, schools and communities. In 2015, Regina teachers Leia Laing and Naomi Forter-Fréçon conceived the idea of an arts and history project in which students could explore their generation's relationship with Treaty 4. Their hugely ambitious project, supported by an ArtsSmarts grant, included elders, artists, professors and other knowledge experts, and included workshops and discussions on treaty history and relationships.¹⁴ After the students (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) had explored this complex issue with the guidance of the knowledge experts, they worked with First Nations artist Ray Keighley to create a collaborative mural expressing their understanding of Treaty 4. The project has grown since 2015, and in 2017 Laing and Forter-Fréçon became the recipients of the Governor General's History Award for Excellence in teaching. The prestigious award acknowledges the value of the arts as a means of furthering the reconciliation process in schools and communities, and the role of artist-teacher partnerships in achieving deep understanding of contemporary issues of importance to students and their families.

Recommendations

That arts, culture and education partners:

- 1) Recognize teacher-artist partnerships as a means of increasing the “creative capital” in schools.
- 2) Reinforce through grant program materials and K-12 curricula that effective artist-teacher partnerships offer students profound learning experiences and a means of achieving “deep understanding”.
- 3) Enable longer-term partnerships, perhaps over a period of three years, by positioning a teacher-artist team’s first project as a starting point with the potential to grow.
- 4) Provide funding for artists and release time for teachers for the portion of the project (minimum 20%) spent out of the classroom during planning and development.
- 5) Promote artist-teacher-knowledge keeper partnerships as a means of authentic engagement in reconciliation processes.
- 6) Engage in qualitative research on the effects of artist-teacher partnerships on student learning, teacher practice, school climate and reconciliation initiatives, paying special attention to reporting processes as one means of collecting data and stories.
- 7) Formalize their cross-sectorial partnership at the provincial level for the purpose of collaborative policy development and program planning around teacher-artist partnerships in schools.

Notes

1. Telephone interview with Marea Olafson, Nov. 10, 2017.
2. In person interview with Debbie Pearson, Oct. 20, 2017.
3. Global News article, “Piapot First Nation mourns local women killed in highway crash,” February 12, 2015.
4. Email interview with Joanne Weber, Oct. 21, 2017. The last quote is from the Deaf Crows wixsite (deafcrows.wixsite.com).
5. Saskatchewan’s Grade 9 Arts Education curricula, for example, refers to learning experiences that encourage connection-making among the arts and other disciplines as a way to achieve learning that is deep, authentic, meaningful and motivational. All three teachers interviewed for this paper referred to that kind of profound learning for themselves and their students.
6. In person interview with Kathryn Ricketts, Nov. 10, 2107. Ricketts is an Assistant Professor of Arts Education and is currently a research partner in a national three-year project aimed at raising the creative capital of K-12 teachers in the field.
7. The Cultural Rucksack in Norway was established in 2001 as a means for school students to encounter the work of Norway’s professional artists. “The Cultural Rucksack” (C. Christophersen et al, 2015) is a report on a three-year research project. The quote is from p. 53 and the question of outsourcing is discussed on p. 55.
8. Arnold Aprill is the founder of CAPE. The quote is from p. 11 in the article “Direct Instruction vs. Arts Integration: A False Dichotomy”, A. Aprill, *Teaching Artist Journal* 8 (1) 6-15, 2010.
9. Arnold Aprill, *ibid*, p. 8.
10. Gail Burnaford teaches at Florida Atlantic University and has been an advisor and evaluator for CAPE for many years. The quotes are from “Rethinking Professional Development: ‘Action Research’ to Build Collaborative Planning,” 2001 Fowler Colloquium on Innovation in Arts Education, University of Maryland.
11. The Creative Partnerships program worked intensively between 2002 and 2011 with over 2,700 schools across England, 90,000 teachers and over 1 million young people to develop creativity, skills and achievement using an inquiry approach. The quote is from p. 45 in the report, “National Evaluation of Creative Partnerships.”
12. The quote is from “Teaching Stories: A Reflection on Teaching Residencies,” K. Ricketts, *Journal of Artistic and Creative Education* 2 (1), 2008 (to be reprinted in an upcoming anniversary issue).
13. The quote is from “Exploring Teacher-Artist Partnership as a Model of CPD for Supporting & Enhancing Arts Education in Ireland: A Research Report,” A Kenny & D. Morrissey, p. 9, 2016.
14. The Treaty 4 Project and teachers’ win of the Governor General’s Award were reported in *The Leader Post*, Regina, Nov. 15, 2017.