



INSTITUTE for EDUCATION and the ARTS

Education Alive!

A DISCUSSION OF BEST PRACTICES IN ARTS EDUCATION

Roundtable Report from the National Overture of Education and the Arts

learning . academe
artistic experience
creative processes
connections
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during the week of April 6-13, 2003, the Institute for Education and the Arts held its first National Overture of Education and the Arts in the Grand Traverse Region of Michigan. In partnership with the community, the IEA developed a week-long series of presentations, workshops, and symposia by visiting guests from IEA's national partner organizations and by local individuals, organizations and schools. The Institute's focus is use of the arts to teach core academic subjects and educators are a primary audience. As effective education depends on support from the entire community, many Overture programs are for everyone.

This report is a summary of a two-hour roundtable discussion of Best Practices in Arts Education, conducted on April 9, 2003, at the Interlochen Arts Academy. Moderated by Kristin Fontichiaro of the University Musical Society at the University of Michigan, participants included area teachers and visiting experts from IEA's national partner arts and cultural organizations.

The roundtable was a stimulating conversation about the assumptions, challenges, and current issues of effective practices in arts education. As basic assumptions were challenged, new ideas were explored. It was a powerful beginning to a conversation that the Institute intends to continue, in on-line exchanges and at similar roundtables at future National Overtures in other communities around the country. Until the arts become a mainstream aspect of quality education for all, continuing this discussion about how the arts can enhance every child's education and life will be central to the Institute's mission.

This is the first of a series of reports about effective practices in arts education to be published by the Institute. As you read this report, think about what is useful to you and what ideas you would like to explore further.

For more information or to share your ideas, thoughts, and new perspectives with the Institute contact us at info@edartsinstitute.org.

A DISCUSSION OF BEST PRACTICES
IN ARTS EDUCATION

MODERATOR

Kristin Fontichiaro Youth Education Manager of the University Musical Society, University of Michigan

PANELISTS

Chad Andrews Director, Interlochen Visual Arts Department

Mark Borchelt Dance Instructor at Interlochen

Tina Curran Director, Language of Dance Center of the United States and guest artist at Interlochen

Dawn McAndrews Director of Education at the Shakespeare Theatre

Celeste Miller Co-Artistic Director, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange

Vicky Risner Dance Specialist, Library of Congress

Jeff Wescott English Instructor at Interlochen

Joan Zaretti Manager, Secondary School and World Music Programs at Carnegie Hall



“Arts Education” means different things to different people. What does it mean to you?

Mark ■ I see it as a way to get back to a more integrated, holistic approach to teaching young people so that they not only understand process, but also who they are, where they stand in the world, and what they have to offer to society.

Tina ■ I see it as a continuum—learning in the arts, learning through the arts, and learning the arts as a specific domain of study.

Celeste ■ I see it as a spectrum...from training the artist to the integration of arts as a way to learn. We need to understand how each piece feeds the others, how we can relate to each other rather than stepping on each other's turf.

What about the difference between “arts education” and “arts integration in education”? I get frustrated with teachers who say, “so we read Harry Potter and then we drew pictures and then we acted it out,” and call that arts integrated education. That approach not only catapults students straight into performance without understanding process, it's also not teaching them to be artistic in the way they think. How can we honor both the art form and the academic subject, giving them equal weight in learning?

Tina ■ What you describe is what a friend of mine calls “drive-by art.” Ideally, arts integrated education is rather a constellation of experiences—literature tying into math or science, great artists working with students in class or on a field trip, experiencing life in the community. Arts are the way that we make meaning in the world.

Chad ■ In my studio course in printmaking, we spend three-quarters of the year learning the processes, not just the how, but the why—all of the concepts in the print making process. Then, in the last quarter, I sit back and the students have to develop their own processes. They

have access to all the other studios. They spend a lot of time in chemistry class, in physics, all with great freedom. In the last month, the light bulbs come on and they really get it. Then they begin to prepare their own portfolios to present to art galleries. It's very exciting stuff.

Jeff ■ In my course here at Interlochen we read Tobias Wolfe's wonderful memoir, *This Boy's Life*, followed by Howard Gardner's *Creative Minds*—Stravinsky, Graham, and Picasso, which gets us into creativity as an intellectual pursuit—how you talk about creativity. What is a field? How are judgments made? Students are struggling with how the mind can give some foundation to this quite nebulous stuff.

How do we know a “best practice” when we see one?

Vicky ■ It's really linked to what is good artistic experience. First, you have to look at the best—the best printmakers, the best dancers, the best actors, the best plays. Whether you're going to be a dancer or a mathematician, knowing what a musician has done to create a great work will enrich your experience.

Celeste ■ If you can give me the key to my [artistic] ancestors, I will feel more infused with their courage behind me to work with my students. If I can thus understand better my own creative process, I can give my students an understanding of why I do what I do, a grounding.

Vicky ■ Our history can help us generate in children a sense of fearlessness. If you have no sense of history or of community, it's scary. We have to be fearless ourselves in taking the lead on things that are important. When you combine knowledge with spirit you give courage to your students, and that goes beyond academics into the broader community.

Joan ■ Everyone links together. It happens between performances, in academics, it becomes part of your life...our students in the Global Encounters unit on The Silk Road suddenly saw the Chinese fiddle player in the New York subway differently. They could relate to him as well as to Yo-Yo Ma on the stage of Carnegie Hall.

Mark ■ Diversity! What a concept!! The hard part is that if you're trying to teach from an arts based curriculum, the learning takes longer to do. You have to



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create a foundation so that it can build, and then you've really got something. But the immediate pay-off is not so discernible. If you're dealing with bureaucrats who want a quick bottom line, it's more difficult.

Caller ■ We're looking for models that can show the community that we're not just interested in arts or in performance, but in using arts to build relevancy and motivation to increase academic performance.

Mark ■ It was wonderful the other day in Celeste's workshop when she said how much better the kids she's working with understand the scientific concepts she explains by creating dances. The other students do slightly better on facts, but do you want to teach concepts or facts?

Celeste ■ Well, I hope it's helping the part of the country that wants to cut arts integration and says those things are fruitless. For me, it brings up deeper questions about whether we in the U.S. are really working to maintain ourselves as a democracy, or are we not? What does it mean for us at this table to say we want citizens to think for themselves, to be creative, to be strong individuals who think conceptually, beyond facts? I think there are people who would argue with us on that.

How do you deal with qualitative vs. quantitative assessment of what you do?

Dawn ■ At the Shakespeare Theatre we have in the past year looked at all of our education programs with a set of essential questions and have aligned them through a backward design process, as if we were developing a curriculum or lesson plan. We looked at actual outcomes of our programs against the outcomes we had intended to reach. Then we put together learning materials that really lead to those intended outcomes. Too many teaching artists or arts educators say, "This is the time I have and the art I want to teach, now what am I going to do to get students connected?," rather than asking, "What are the implicit and explicit outcomes that I want?"

Mark ■ When I moved from professional performing into an academic career teaching dance, I groused with all the other faculty about having to justify what we did to school administrators. Why did the arts have to be

justified? But then I realized that, instead of just asking students to do what I do, I had to go back and do more research to understand anatomy and kinesthesia, how movement works. This made me a better educator because I understood what I was presenting. If you can't justify what you do it probably means that you haven't really explored inside of it to see how and why you do it.

Dawn ■ If we have to be based on standards, how can we bring different pieces of different standards together to expand the notion of what we're actually testing for? We don't want to just measure facts learned, we want to see how it all overlaps, if we're actually creating aesthetic human beings who can take what they've learned and apply it some place else.

Mark ■ If you're dealing with bureaucrats who want a quick bottom line, how can you build a K-12 curriculum that will allow students to know who they are, to identify their passion in life, who have a process/skill set they want to pursue, and who want to give back to the community in a meaningful way?

How do we know what has changed as a result of our work?

Dawn ■ Clayworks in Baltimore actually used the measurement of joy as an assessment! We've also developed measures based on skills acquisition in the arts, affective behavior modification, and attitude changes, which suggest that we have affected academic performance, too.

Joan ■ We all feel that time is of the essence when we're designing a curriculum. How do we teach students, not as artists, but so that they know how to do something, they know the skills, what they want to ask, a little more about what they want to learn. It doesn't matter where they live, you hope they're learning how to apply what they learn to many other situations in their lives.

Jeff ■ One of my students was a voice major questioning how she could fit into the world of voice. At a panel discussion on the life of Stravinsky with five of our music instructors she became a very vocal questioner. She carried the conversation beyond that moment to other music faculty, and then decided that composition, rather than voice, was where she belonged.

What do you say to the teacher who says you're either teaching the mind or you're teaching art, but you can't teach the mind through art?

Chad ■ I would say that art is about life—what's going on in society and everything around us.

Jeff ■ I think that teacher needs to acknowledge the process that goes into just choosing a subject to make into art. You can't act in a vacuum. What is it in your life, your history, your mind that makes that still life your own?

Mark ■ You need to understand how and why a process works in your life—whether you're going to run a bank or a major corporation or be on a basketball team. I'd been dancing for several years, and was proud of my technical proficiency, before I had a choreographer come in to look at me. I was just going to blow him away and he looked at me and said, "What are you doing? We've got a lot of work to do, don't we!" I had to go back through an entire piece to understand what every gesture meant and its purpose and how one step evolved into the next. I hadn't even thought about who I was or why I wanted to take this forward.

My whole life changed. I hadn't thought about teaching before, but now I wanted to go to students and say, "Hey, guess what...there's more!" You have to look at your life and see that it's this huge journey that's going to be horrendous and fabulous and amazing and mystifying all the time because of how you relate to the people around you, what you give to the people around you. That's what we do. Art is the entry point to that.

Do you think the trend is more toward bringing teaching artists into the classroom or encouraging more artistic teachers?

Tina ■ I think the question is what best serves the students being taught—but I wonder when the arts experience and the process of art and the thinking of art will become a more integrated component of teacher education so that teachers are using as much of their creative imaginations to teach as they are to meet academic standards.

Celeste ■ I don't want my daughter's math teacher to teach her dance...but I do want her to be taught

math by someone who thinks creatively, has been stimulated creatively in a hands on experience—perhaps with one of us, in print making or dancing or whatever—so that she is a better, more rounded human being. We need to figure out how to help each other to work together instead of, "Uh oh, here comes the visiting artist, everybody back away."

Vicky ■ As a content provider, I think teachers have much to bring to the artists. I don't have a clue what teachers need, but you know what you need and I know what I have and I can make that yours.

Kristin ■ Unless there's a sense of partnership, there's a risk with artists going into the classroom for the first time. The teacher has to be an equal partner, even while you're trying to raise her sense of artistry.

Tina ■ I think we should acknowledge that teaching is an art. A master teacher is very much an artist in how she goes about thinking, observing, revising, and constantly problem solving. As a parent, I don't think there's anything greater that you can do than be a teacher.

Chad ■ One of the interesting things that has happened in this National Overture is how the National Gallery of Art and the Library of Congress have just opened their doors to us. As educators, it's now our responsibility to go browse their websites (www.nga.gov and www.loc.gov) to find out what we can start incorporating in our classrooms.

Earlier this week the Library of Congress gave a presentation with a 16th century Spanish choir book. As we all were looking at it, everyone saw different things...and that's exactly what a classroom is like. You bring out one thing and everybody sees something different. Students ask questions and then want to go to the library and do research, find their own way in their education. As educators we need to find out more about these national treasures that we can incorporate in our classrooms.

As an arts presenter, how do you know what teachers want?

Joan ■ They're pretty vocal! Even though arts aren't usually what global studies teachers are taught, they want to integrate arts into their curricula because they know it works as a way to motivate their students...it enlivens what they already do.



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Kristin ■ At the University Musical Society, we have a Teacher Advisory Committee that meets once a year and tells us what they think our core program should be. If it doesn't correlate with their curricula—if it's not a natural fit—why do it?

Mark ■ One of the key components is how to train artists to be successful in an academic environment. A great artist who doesn't have the skills to work with students isn't going to be successful. You also have to train the teachers to work with the artists and to prepare their students. Artists and teachers working together also can present the idea of arts integration to people in the community so that they can see its value and provide the support to make it happen.

How about the replicability question...how do you feel about having your program evaluated based on whether or not someone else can do it?

Joan ■ Here in Traverse City, we're doing our LinkUp! program from Carnegie Hall and we're learning a lot about the process of moving from one community to another. By providing structure and some material, with each community bringing its own strengths to the process, it can be done in a way that is very powerful.

Mark ■ In any community you look around and identify who the best artists are. It might be someone who is rebuilding cars in a creative, fantastic way and would love to bring that into the schools. Then you need to find a teacher who's interested and connect them. Any community can do that.

Dawn ■ Why shouldn't teachers have the same opportunity to continue to grow and have the same discoveries as we want for our students? Why not create learning environments where teachers and administrators and communities can work together? Maybe if there's a best practice it has to do with being authentic—responsive and connected within communities.

I think that best practices and replicability in terms of models is somewhat limiting. National standards may not work because they can't fit all circumstances. It has to be responsive, not imposed from the outside.

Caller ■ We've tried to move away from the term "best practice" and use the term "effective practice" because that's limitless.

Dawn ■ Yes, and then it also can keep changing, in response to teachers and school administrators in any given community.

Where could you go if money were no object?

Mark ■ If teachers were celebrated as athletes instead of being so over worked, if the federal government were to really make education a top priority, if teachers were given time and training to do their magic, it would work.

Dawn ■ With more money and more time teachers could teach fewer classes, they could prepare better, they could create a better learning environment.

Kristin ■ People are frightened to dream a little because they think it can't possibly happen right now. But that vision is what drives us. When we lose it, we start giving up, we lose hope and the students feel it. Any other comments?

Caller ■ As a school health coordinator I can see arts and health education interwoven and hope we can work more on that. They may not be core subjects, but they are the core of who we are as human beings.

Jerzy Sapijevski from the audience ■ One thing many high school teachers are missing is the concept of non-verbal communication. I'm a musician, so to me, talking is second best; I'd rather play. As a university professor, I teach music appreciation to non-music students and when I ask them what they learned in music appreciation in high school all they know is birthdays and death dates of musicians. They have no understanding of the spirit of music. This is criminal!

I do an analysis of Mozart's *Requiem*, but not by talking about it. I don't even tell them it's Mozart because they're so prejudiced. Oh, god, not that old guy again. I tell them this was written by a person who was dying and I ask them to see what images come to their minds as they listen to the music. So I trick them for the emotion. They may think it was written last year, but they perceive it on a different level. That's what's relevant—the perception and emotion of art, not the facts about it.

Final word from the audience ■ You have given me hope that with people like you doing these sorts of things we really can help other generations coming up so that they can deal with the incredible problems of being cold and shut out from the rest of the world. Thank you.

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