

Providing creative arts programs for young people through successful partnerships with schools, sporting and community organizations

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Thankyou so much for having me all the way here to Australia. I have travelled far to speak about what we are doing in Seattle, but not this far! It's amazing to me that eight years ago, Kim was in Seattle and discovered Arts Corps just in its very first quarter. Oh the miles we have traveled since then, and here we are. Interestingly, I have just stepped down as Executive Director, so I truly have the benefit of hindsight in telling you about Arts Corps, its program model and the impact it has had in the community.

Arts Corps has become just a single example of how bringing together many different disparate pieces in Seattle created a more connected whole, with the arts and culture as its center. There are so many ways to imagine this work, and I look forward to hearing more about how it's happening here and in places throughout Victoria.

But first I will tell you a little bit of my story, how Arts Corps was woven into it. I also wanted to offer some different reflections on what was truly new about it, as well as how its original intentions differed from what its current realities are. Finally, I will look quickly into the future and make a prediction or two.

My story: I grew up in Baltimore Maryland, the daughter of a single mom, making her way as a photographer. I would sit for long hours in the darkroom with her when I wanted to talk. That was my only option. My Mom was my first experience with what we at Arts Corps call teaching artists, professional artists who can and must teach.

I went to a good primary and secondary school on scholarship, had no real relationship to the arts except through my mom. I kept at an arms length from the arts because my mom's life seemed so unstable and insecure, then I went on to college, started out with the intention of going into medicine, then majored in political science and economics. I had many stable jobs, my first one in the nation's capital. I was a policy wonk, (which in America means someone obsessed with the left brain's analysis of everything). Then I moved to Seattle, picked up where I left off, and my last job was for Mayor of Seattle, then I had a bout with breast cancer--an aggressive tumor--when I was 31. This was the catalyst for a major overhaul in my life.

The idea came to me for a project that combined kids and arts, which was a 'returning' for me to the arts, so I spent six months talking and listening and writing a business plan for a non-profit to be called Arts Corps. More information about the steps I took can be found on our website:

1. The overall concept: <http://www.artscorps.org/>
2. How we started: <http://www.artscorps.org/the-corps/history.html>
3. Where we got money: <http://www.artscorps.org/roster/donors.html>

What was new about Artscorps?

Artscorps was special because of the way more effectively brought previously unassociated groups together for powerful purposes and meaning making: the definition of community. For example:

1) Teaching artists:

Teaching artists don't affiliate, they like independence, they work alone often, and previously many of them had taken jobs in various organizations, piecing a living together. So we convened them as a faculty with mentoring roles and levels of teaching, leaving lots of freedom. This is powerful because they learn so much from each other, they do better work, they understand they are valued and supported for this life they are making that is not standard.

2) After-school centers and schools from different neighborhoods coming together. Cross pollination happening.

We held:

- b-boy battles,
- all city classes for self identified students,
- projects across classes to prepare for the Dalai Lama visit,
- student showcases with 300 kids and their parents at cultural centers throughout Seattle

These events had parents, community center staff, teachers and principals, and students coming together across class and race to make and exhibit and perform art together. Why was this so powerful? Living close to difference, witnessing others' perspectives, connecting communities to each other, This is especially important in the gang-driven neighborhoods where there are intense rivalries, but also with kids who never go to certain neighborhoods, so they can see their place in the whole.

This previous fragmentation is what breeds a lot of society's ills, so doing the opposite is a powerful antidote.

3) High art with community art:

These concepts 'high art versus community art' might intimate some judgment of one vs. the other, but that's not our idea. It's more like different genres influencing each other and making something new. From the start, we asked the city's museums, theatres and galleries to host our events with young people. Mimi Gates (Bill Gates' mother), the Director of the Seattle Art Museum, hosted our first showcase and was adamant the we got all our 300 kids into the galleries, to run wild essentially. People came in from off the streets to participate!

We had partnerships with:

- Frye Art Museum, a local museum, where we held spoken word classes for teens. This work was curated by museum staff.
- Western Bridge, a contemporary art space, where we held teacher workshops and performances.
- Triple Door, a supper club that host professionals from all over the world, where we held our annual fundraiser including student performances, and students performing with teaching artists and other professional artists.

These venues and institutions are always looking for ways to diversify audiences. They want to be community spaces, and not elitist institutions and as Arts Corps is the community, works in the community all year round, those affiliations make sense. But even more important is the influencing of the art making: students influencing professionals and teaching artists and vice versa.

What did we start out with as an intention and where did that end up? What was the learning or the new way of perceiving the value of the work?



Our earliest intention: We had an idea to bring together powerful meaning makers, artists, who can also teach, with young people whose access to resources is far less than others. Primarily young people whose families are living at or below the poverty line. In inner city Seattle schools this can be 80-90% of the population, as there is a fair amount of segregation.

Arts Corps is this, **AND** has become a powerful partner with the education community offering another very potent tool to stimulate intrinsic motivation and creative habits of mind.

Earliest intention: to fill a gap in what schools were not providing within the curriculum; consistent and varied arts education classes.

Arts Corps is this **AND** it has become a catalyst and advocate for school administrations to bring arts education back into the curriculum, using research and compelling communications (see website for list of collateral www.artscorps.org/news/publications.html)

Earliest intention: was a dream of ours to create a stronger financial base for teaching artists whose livelihoods were often so strained. Witness my mom's experience: if she had been able to supplement her earnings as a photographer with teaching, it would have had a significant positive effect on our day to day living.

Arts Corps is this **AND** we have created this roster of vetted teaching artists, more than 45 of them, who are featured prominently on our website, as Arts Corps Teaching Artists and as professional artists in their own right with links to their websites, etc. They are sought after by many other organizations for paid work to fill in where we leave off.



Earliest intention: to help communities with less access to resources to improve academically, in areas in which young people are falling behind. As well we thought this work might also reduce rates of juvenile crime because young people were engaged in something meaningful and creative.

Arts Corps is this **AND** it has become a celebration of the voices, truths, spirit, wisdom of many diverse communities who do not make the rules as the dominant culture does, and so are always playing by someone else's rules. Through celebration, we witness difference differently and can honor it more authentically. **But also** it has become a path for young people to know their own minds, giving them the freedom to choose a more self-determined path as opposed to falling into a path written by someone else.

On this note we look **forward**. In the last year, I have been doing a great deal of research into intrinsic motivation and the role it plays in defining powerful learning.

When there isn't intrinsic motivation within a learning experience, our learnings are not integrated as well. As the motivation to learn comes more and more from the outside (tests, winning, competition with others, etc, teacher demands, etc), learning for many young people is less potent.

Steve Seidel at Harvard University strongly asserts that we can make all kinds of changes to teaching practice to make an environment conducive to powerful learning, but it will have little impact unless we have the willing engagement of the learner.

The arts are perfectly designed to pull the learner into an engaged state like very few disciplines, because it is about YOU. Not something outside you. When you are intrinsically motivated and deeply engaged, you have the cognitive and non-cognitive support to exercise specific muscles or skills that will help you master the content regardless of what it is. **Skills such as** persistence, courage and risk taking, critical thinking, reflection and imagining possibilities, and then everything else scaffolded around that.



The potency of arts learning for increased engagement in education has been shown time and time again through rigorous research (www.artscorps.org/the-corps/resources.html), yet still we do not make it a priority in public schools in the US. Policy makers still need to prove that arts learning will contribute to success in other academic subjects instead of acknowledging its intrinsic value in the evolution of the learner.

I believe this is because we actually don't prioritize truly powerful learning. Instead we prioritize mastering basic skills and preordained content. We make content 'King', and this practice is increasing exponentially every day. Because the levels of external achievement for all levels of content are the priority, we undermine intrinsic motivation.

It is only when we decide that education's goal should be to inspire learners to become intrinsically motivated to learn both content and skills, for the students' own purposes, that we may see arts education return as a true partner.

See also our video for more information about the work of Artscorps:
VIDEO www.artscorps.org/video.html

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