



LEARNINGS FROM RESEARCH:  
HOW DO OUR COMMUNITIES BENEFIT THROUGH  
DEVELOPING CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Maureen Ryan  
Professor, School of Education, Victoria University  
Director, Gallery Sunshine Everywhere

Presentation to 'Connecting Schools and Communities'  
Conference  
Monday 23 June 2008.  
Williamstown Town Hall  
Melbourne



## **Community Partnerships and me:**

I was teaching Grade 4 in primary school the day the Westgate Bridge collapsed. The students and I left the classroom to watch the weekly health broadcast on television and found, instead, news reports on the horror of the bridge's fall. From that point in October, we constructed every part of the curriculum around that incident and so it has continued....

## **Community and Creative Partnerships are about**

- relevance and meaningfulness
- thinking, feeling and doing
- practice and people
- blurring the boundaries between the disciplines
- risk taking
- learning and teaching



## **Effective Partnerships are**

- two way and
- transformative

in their

- initiation
- planning
- implementation
- outcomes and
- evaluation



I'm going to focus on the arts today but I'm sure you can replace the word arts with a whole range of sporting, recreational and community activities.

Try that as we look at some of the research results:

A brochure released by Americans for the Arts describes a range of youth arts programs concluding that they are **powerful crime prevention tools** offering

- safe and engaging positive risk taking experiences
- constructive environments for young people who lack adult supervision
- long hours of practice, focus and perseverance

and as such

- enhance self-discipline
- afford the thrill of creative and artistic expression
- facilitate community recognition through performances and exhibitions
- develop job skills and
- provide effective ways of communicating difficult thoughts and emotions



### **The arts are as serious and rigorous as traditionally academic subjects:**

“Like language and mathematics, the arts involve the use of creative symbols to communicate. To attain competence in the arts, it is necessary to gain literacy with these symbol systems. Some, like music and poetry, use non-verbal symbols: others, like poetry and song, use language in particular ways” (Hamblen, 1993, p.2)

### **Enhanced social understandings can result from arts programs:**

“Because dance, music, photography and other visual arts transcend language, they can bridge barriers among cultural, racial and ethnic groups. The arts can promote a deeper understanding of similarities and differences among religions, races and cultural traditions” (Coming Up Taller)

### **Job and life skills:**

“These young people get a strong dose of reality when they start earning the money that makes the group possible. Public speaking, being on time, coming up with ideas and following through get to be everyday expectations when they are linked to money coming in” (Brice-Heath and Smyth, 1999, p.35)

### **A Public Face to Learning:**

Paintings can be seen , music heard and dance and drama experienced by everyone. Learning in the arts inevitably involves some measure of willingness to perform or display publicly, to reveal accomplishments, to garner appreciation and to learn from the critiques of others



## What does Gallery Sunshine do?

- **Engages** schools, families, business and the broader community with the art of pre-primary, primary and secondary school students
- **Exhibits** the art of pre-primary, primary and secondary school students
- **Values** the art of pre-primary, primary and secondary school students
- **Celebrates** the talents of young people
- **Extends** involvement of families, schools, business and the broader community with youth oriented arts activities
- **Enables** access to the art of pre-primary, primary and secondary school students
- **Increases** understanding of the art of pre-primary, primary and secondary school students
- **Develops** partnerships with schools and other organizations
- **Mentors** young and emerging artists

[www.gallerysunshine.com](http://www.gallerysunshine.com)



## **Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE)**

“The CAPE model is not a franchise of specific deliverable curriculum units or program widgets. The entire approach is predicated on local education assets and local arts resources that are already present in the community entering into new collaborations to serve the needs of schools and young people.....If you are trying to start a new initiative in your own community, identify innovative leaders in your local arts community, your local school system, your local business community and your local university and convene them again and with very good food to forge a vision of collective change. The good ideas are more important than money. Good ideas will find financial resources. Good ideas attract resources. Money without vision is worthless” (Arnie Aprill)

CAPE is built on two core concepts:

- arts integrated teaching and learning
- co-planning and co-teaching partnerships between teachers and artists

<http://www.capeweb.org/>



### Some CAPE Projects:

- Building Community, Curriculum and Leadership through the Arts (BCCLA) focuses on strengthening schools in curriculum, community involvement and teacher leadership
- CAPE Veteran Partnerships: Valuing CAPE's long standing partnerships, teachers and artists come together with CAPE throughout the year to form a network of professional colleagues. This network provides mutual support and professional development in action research methods. CAPE teachers and artists propose inquiry questions regarding their arts integration work. Their documentation of the work in the classroom is then focussed on collecting evidence to answer these questions.
- CAPE Delta Project: Results of the three year The DELTA (Developing Early Literacies Through the Arts) Project demonstrate how arts learning promotes multiple literacy learning processes that depend on creative response, imagination, experimentation and aesthetic experience than do methods of learning that emphasise formulaic responses to rule based literacy instruction.
- Partnerships for Arts Integration Research (PAIR): schools work in two school paired teams eg. one with a literature and writing focus and another with an arts focus; one with a maths and science focus and an arts focussed partner To create cross school partnerships, to create models of high quality arts integrated curriculum, to improve teachers' instructional practices, to improve student achievement and to disseminate effective arts integration practices to other schools





Project Zero's mission is to understand and enhance learning, thinking and creativity in the arts as well as humanistic and scientific disciplines, at the individual and institutional levels.

Artful Thinking is one of Project Zero's programs aimed at integrating art into regular classroom instruction. The purpose is to help teachers regularly use works of visual art and music in their curriculum in ways that strengthen student thinking and learning.

The program takes the image of an artist's palette as its central metaphor. The artful thinking palette is comprised of 6 thinking dispositions which emphasise intellectual behaviours such as

- asking provocative questions
- making careful observations
- exploring multiple viewpoints
- reasoning with evidence
- finding complexity

<http://www.pz.harvard.edu>



The Executive Summary in *Champions of Change: The impact of Arts on Learning* (1998) still provides probably the most succinct summary of ways in which involvement in the arts can change the learning experience for young people:

- the arts reach students who are not otherwise reached
- 
- the arts reach students in ways that are not otherwise being reached
- 
- the arts connect students to themselves and to each other
- 
- the arts transform the environment for learning
- 
- the arts provide learning opportunities for the adults in the lives of young people
- 
- the arts provide new challenges for those students already considered successful
- 
- the arts connect learning experiences to the real world of work
- 
- the arts encourage self directed learning
- 
- the arts promote complexity in the learning experience



**Critical Evidence: How the ARTS Benefit Student Achievement** provides a detailed report of a range of investigations around this topic.

Some conclusions include:

- students with high arts involvement performed better on standardised achievement tests than students with low arts involvement
- high arts involvement students watched fewer hours of TV and participated in more community service and reported less boredom
- the benefits of student learning experiences in the arts are A (reading and language and mathematics skills), B (thinking and social skills and motivation to learn) and C positive school environment)
- that schools are not the only place where young people grow, learn and achieve: students involved in after school sports/academic, community involvement and arts program were found to be doing better in school and in their personal lives than students from comparable socioeconomic categories who were not involved



- that “roles, risks and rules” offered in arts programs have a positive impact on participants
- well taught, the arts provide authentic learning experiences, engaging the minds, hearts and bodies of the participants
- group versus individual learning generated through a collaborative arts experience can have a powerful impact
- students who report consistent high levels of involvement in instrumental music over the middle and high school years show significantly higher levels of mathematics proficiency by grade 12.
- sustained student involvement in acting in plays and musicals, participating in drama clubs and taking acting lessons associates with a variety of developments including gains in reading proficiency, gains in self concept and motivation and higher levels of empathy and tolerance for others
- high arts involved children were far more likely than their low arts counterparts to think of themselves as competent in academic work; they were also far more likely to believe that they did well in school in general, particularly in language and mathematics
- the self confidence the children described was supported by observations of them in classrooms and in conversations with their teachers



- children in arts rich schools were found to be more likely than children in low arts schools to have good rapport with their teachers; results showed that teachers in arts rich
- schools demonstrated more interest in their work and are more likely to become involved in professional development experiences: they work in schools that favour change and experimentation and are more likely to be innovative in their teaching
- positive changes in school climate resulted because of CAPE based on school community surveys: climate included qualities such as principal leadership, focus on instruction, positive collegueship and widespread participation in important decisions; significant progress was seen in getting the support of school principals for CAPE; CAPE succeeded in getting teachers and artists to collaborate with more success in co-planning than in truly co-teaching; teachers believe that an arts integrated curriculum has learning, attitudinal and social benefits for children



## Contemporary music and its lyrics?

- are reductionist in their treatment of current cultural assumptions and values
- 
- capture a point in history which is intricably linked with what has gone before and what will follow
- 
- are responsive to cutting edge, state of the art experimental technologies and
- 
- foster local and global links

As such, players and listeners are immersed without really knowing it in

- history
- 
- futurism
- 
- cultural critique and more



Brotherhood of St Laurence and Melbourne Grammar:

“As an English elective for Year 9 and 10 students, the program teamed students with a member of the Brotherhood’s Coolibah Centre, a drop-in centre for disadvantaged over-55s, in a kind of social and generational exchange conducted over tea and scones. Students spend a semester getting to know the elders and recording their stories for a digital archive. It culminated in a screening of all the histories at an event hosted by the school.

For the students it has taught compassion, understanding and technical skills of recording and editing...it has also helped many of the elderly involved regain a sense of pride...and has valued social awareness and understanding.....”



Western Edge Youth Arts and Kensington Primary School

“The Polar Bear Roars” enabled students to investigate global warming through an arts process and to express their views, discoveries and questions about this issue through a community performance.

It enabled students to, learn the basic science of global warming, research climate change, connect with a range of students and come to appreciate diverse skills, construct and write their own scripts, develop oracy skills, engage with and perform text written in complex language, analyse and reflect on the broad significance of the stories used in the play.





1. Partnerships enable a school as a major presence in the community to link effectively locally, nationally and internationally.
2. Partnerships provide a framework for student learning and for professional development for practitioners at all stages of development.
3. Partnerships reinforce practice-theory-practice links in learning and teaching.
4. Partnerships provide a basis for mentor relationships with all partners.
5. Partnerships model a collaborative orientation in learning and teaching.
6. Partnerships by their very nature are win-win relationships in which all partners benefit.
7. Partnerships in school set a pattern for future initiatives.
8. Partnerships encourage the development of broader (local, national and international) community understandings and reflection by learners and teachers.
9. Partnerships are dependent on diverse human relationships, which need to be mediated through standardised protocols and guidelines for practice and most importantly
10. Partnerships must be jointly negotiated, implemented and evaluated by all partners



## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR STUDENT WELLBEING

1. Involve community members other than teachers in schools to develop relationships with students which are more reflective of those existing outside the school environment, **eg. mentoring programs**
2. Meet students' needs for opportunities to experience life outside of the school community, especially before they proceed to tertiary education and to allow them to build bridges in the community that develop and grow positive life skills, **eg. Incorporation into school programs of partnerships with community sporting, arts, recreational organizations.**
3. Provide opportunities, programs, frameworks and models for youth participation which enable young people to use their potential to explore and challenge positive links with the community and to contribute in partnership to the effectiveness of their schools, **eg. Project based enterprise learning initiatives where students investigate community needs, explore and implement solutions.**



4. Think about the future we want for the human race and act accordingly, eg. **Involvement of students in community based discussions and debates around local and global issues.**

5. Enable students to understand real needs in society to help them gain/clarify values and develop a sense of community (as opposed to individual interests), eg. **Service learning opportunities, which include practical involvement with community organizations and reflection on individual and structural definitions of equity and justice.**

6. Involve students in doing something for the wider community rather than having something done for and to them, eg. **Identify the range of community and business organizations that contribute to individual learning and wellbeing and discuss the practice and potential for partnerships in those relationships.**

7. Consider the global nature of organizations within new vocational learning along with their impact on the environment and the ethical behaviour of company executives, eg. **Debate and discuss, listen and learn with and from a large number of guest speakers.**

8. Promote aspects of mutual responsibility and benefit in defining community, whether local or global, eg. **Engage with local and global philanthropic initiatives.**



9. Actively engage students in programs and projects that work to improve the physical environment, both in schools and in local communities, eg. **Survey needs, raise funds and implement projects.**

10. Strive to implement programs that focus on community connectiveness: wholistic, empowering, engaging, inclusive in their meaning and implementation, eg. **Consider the meanings of charity, philanthropy, noblesse oblige.**



“Life is more than work. If we give children the idea that they need high-level skills only for work, we have got it all wrong. They are going to need even higher-level skills to perform in a democratic society. We have got to get this absolutely right: the issue is not technology, but what it means to be human, what kind of future we want for the human race”

Abbott, J (1998) “Why good schools alone will never be enough” *The Journal: The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Initiative*, March, 1-5.



And the last word to Arnie Aprill:

“ In an information age, the skills that are needed for educational success are the abilities

- to synthesise information from diverse sources
- to represent knowledge in diverse forms
- to imagine options in the mind
- to understand multiple points of view
- to engage critical judgement and
- to work with diverse collaborator.

Arts education is essential to the development of all these skills. Critical thinking skills are developed through learners translating information from one medium to another. When we translate a picture into words, or a three dimensional object into a two dimensional representation, we are compelled to analyse the critical features being represented. The arts are one of the most powerful ways of developing critical thought. And because art making is a gratifying activity in itself, critical thinking developed through the arts engages learners much more effectively than worksheets asking students to “compare and contrast” two items for no apparent reason”.