

REFINING A PROFILE OF ARTS EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS CANADA

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Abstract

ArtsSmarts, a national arts education initiative, supports artists collaborating with teachers to implement arts instruction in partnership with school and community organizations. This study was undertaken after policy interventions were undertaken by the partners to refine 214 arts education projects across Canada. Findings indicate that the projects emphasized student exploration, creativity and arts integration across the curriculum, and teachers undertook an increased role in organizing and participating in the projects. Most projects were offered at single sites in urban settings, and projects were extended over the school term to increase their impact on learning. Visual arts was the most common arts discipline and grade five was the dominant grade level in which arts partnership projects occurred within the national arts program.

Key words: *arts education partnerships, artist/teacher collaboration, arts instruction.*

Introduction

ArtsSmarts, a national arts education initiative, features artists collaborating with teachers to implement arts instruction in partnership with school districts and community arts organizations.¹ Professional artists work with teachers in the delivery of arts instruction in elementary and secondary classrooms across Canada. This collaboration involves both disciplined-based lessons in dance, drama, film/video, music and visual arts, and arts integration, that is, teaching non-arts subjects through the arts. Initially, a program information survey was undertaken in the first-year of implementation to develop a profile of 109 arts education projects involved in the program. The survey found 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, urban areas, visual arts, grade four, and in time frames of less than a month (Andrews & Harris, 2007).

The ArtsSmarts partners² undertook meetings in Halifax and Vancouver to review interim and first-year findings from multiple data sources and to adjust their projects to improve their effectiveness.³ The partners focused on extending arts integration across the entire curriculum, encouraging artists and teachers to take a more active role in organizing the projects, lengthening the duration of the projects, involving all the arts disciplines within the projects,

and undertaking projects in the community, in addition to the classroom. These interventions were undertaken by the partner organizations on an individual basis and involved a variety of measures, such as re-writing guidelines for funding to include a broader range of arts disciplines and community groups, working closely with school administrators on the timetable, and encouraging teachers and artists to undertake joint planning.

Related Research

Effective arts partnerships in education require partners who share a common vision that focuses on student learning (Dreeszen, Aprill & Deasy, 1999; Wilkinson, 2000). The partnership must foster participatory-based decision-making and open communications (Arts Education Partnership, 2000; Doherty & Harland, 2001), and teachers and artists must be encouraged to learn new skills, take risks and try new ideas (Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 1999). Partnerships can stimulate interest and confidence in the arts and help students to develop their creativity (Meiners, Schiller & Orchard, 2004). Teachers have reported improved knowledge and skills through their involvement with artists (Patteson, 2002; Upitis, 2005; Wilkinson, 2000). Further, artists foster a new awareness for teachers of alternate teaching and management styles, and of the different capabilities of their students (Harland, Lord, Stott, Kinder, Lamont & Ashworth, 2005; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001). Ongoing study of a partnership is essential to develop an in-depth understanding of its program, improve the partnership, and generate sustained funding (Arts Education Partnership, 2002).

There is limited information in the research literature on the implementation and refinement of arts projects involving artist/teacher collaboration supported by school/community partnerships (Doherty & Harland, 2001; Rowe, Castaneda, Kaganoff & Robyn, 2004). Research is required to assist arts administrators and school personnel effectively plan, implement and evaluate such partnerships. This study was undertaken after the measures outlined in the Introduction were undertaken to improve the projects. The primary question was: "What is the impact of interventions by partners on arts projects across Canada?"⁴ There were two secondary questions: "What is the nature of the refined arts projects?" and "What changes occurred in the roles, time frames, arts disciplines, grade levels, student numbers, settings and locales?"

Methodology of Research

This study employed Integrated Inquiry which is a mixed method approach to research involving multiple perspectives (Andrews, 2008a). It is a methodology that the researcher has used previously (e.g., Andrews, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2008b). Initially, the project information survey was developed by this researcher using a participatory-based approach (after Cousins & Earl, 1992, 1995). It consisted of a description of the projects (up to one page of text) and a series of questions identifying the role of the respondent, the time frame of the project, the arts discipline(s) represented, grade level(s), number of students participating, the setting (school or community), and the locale (rural, urban, or suburban). In consultation with partner organizations, the survey was pilot-tested, and implemented in the initial year of the ArtsSmarts program (Andrews & Harris, 2007). Subsequently, the survey was refined again in consultation with the partners for this follow-up study. Artists, teachers, project co-ordinators (principals or arts consultants), and small groups (artists, teachers and/or project co-ordinator) responded to an invitation by the researcher to participate in this study. In addition, unlike the initial survey, respondents were asked to indicate if they were project co-ordinators and how the project was organized (e.g., single site with single project, single site with multiple projects, etc.). The respondents submitted 214 surveys – 65 in the French-language (30%) and 149 in the English-

language (70%).⁵ The data was analyzed using Sphinx Survey/Lexica, a quantitative/qualitative software program. Sphinx Survey was used for the statistical analysis of roles, time frames, arts disciplines, grade levels, student numbers, settings and locales. Sphinx Lexica, was used to undertake a lexical analysis of the descriptions of the projects (refer to Figure 1).

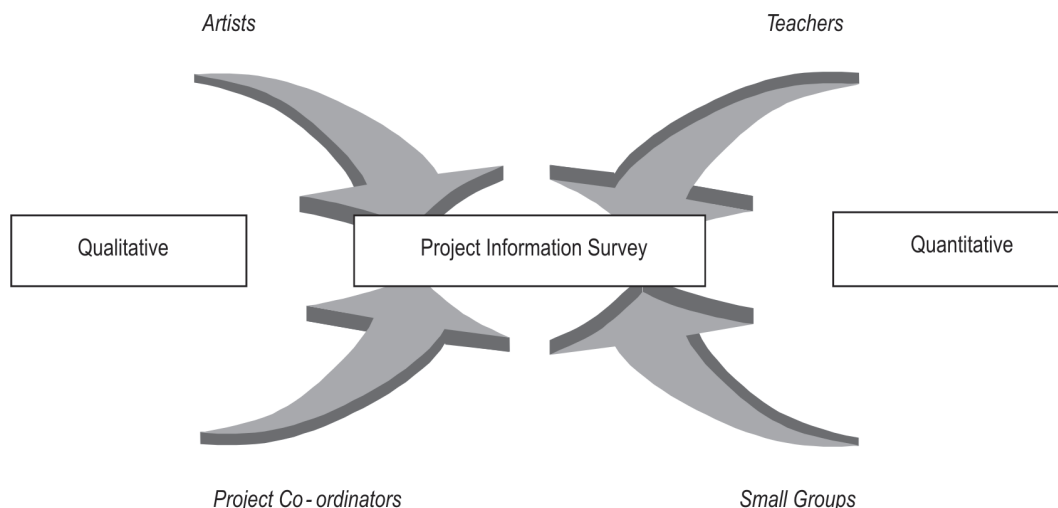


Figure 1. Integrated Inquiry Methodology – Multiple Perspectives.

Results of Research

Analysis of the nature of the project descriptions was undertaken using Sphinx Lexica. From the 214 project descriptions submitted, recurring word fragment patterns were identified. A cluster analysis of these fragments revealed that English-language (70%) and French-language responses (30%) emphasized the involvement of students in concrete creative activities, such as book-making, song writing and play production. Further, the arts were integrated in a variety of non-arts subject areas in a meaningful way, and projects reflected a wide range of diversity and a broad range of themes connected to both the curriculum and the broader community. For example, one respondent outlined the benefits of learning through the arts.

[ArtsSmarts projects] deepen students' understanding of science concepts/skills and extend their ability to concretize and communicate these with clarity, ability, creativity, confidence, and see connections between science and their own lives.

And another commented on the connections to the culture at large.

Valoriser l'apprentissage des arts; sensibiliser les élèves aux dimensions culturelles du monde; apprendre de la musique et de la danse folklorique ou internationale; réaliser une fête carnavalesque à l'école.

The roles of the participants were analysed using Sphinx Survey, the quantitative component of the Sphinx software program.⁶ Analysis indicated a broad range of individuals, that is, artists, parents, teachers, resource teachers, team leaders, consultants, curriculum co-ordinators, assistant principals, principals and producers, and small groups (e.g., artist/teacher/parent) participated in the study. By far, the largest group of respondents was teachers (62.1%), followed

by artists (12.6%), and then principals (7.5%).

Unlike the previous year, this follow-up survey gathered data on the organization of the projects. Single sites with single projects (63.1%) dominated the projects, although a number of respondents indicated multiple projects at their sites (21%). Although fewer in number, there were also single sites with a single project and multiple responses (9.8%), and single projects with multiple sites (6.1%) (refer to Table 1).

Table 1. Organization of projects.

Project sites	N	%
Single site with a single project	135	63.1
Single site with multiple projects	45	21.0
Single site with a single project and multiple responses	21	9.8
Single project with multiple sites	13	6.1
Total	214	100.0

Respondents, unlike the previous year, were also requested to identify their role as a project co-ordinator, in addition to their position within the system. Teachers (37.9%) dominated as project co-ordinators with principals (11.7%) and artists (7.5%) well behind (refer to Table 2).

Table 2. Role of project co-ordinators.

Project co-ordinator	N	%
Non-response	1	0.5
Not a project co-ordinator	73	34.0
Artist/project co-ordinator	16	7.5
Parent/project co-ordinator	0	0.0
Teacher/project co-ordinator	81	37.9
Resource teacher/project co-ordinator	2	0.9
Arts consultant/project co-ordinator	1	0.5
Team leader/project co-ordinator	3	1.4
Curriculum co-ordinator/project co-ordinator	3	1.4
Assistant principal/project co-ordinator	7	3.3
Principal/project co-ordinator	25	11.7
Producer/project co-ordinator	2	0.9
Total	214	100.0

The largest percentage of partnership projects was offered in less than a 1 month period (23.4%), gradually decreasing from within 2 months (10.7%) to within 7 months (3.7%). There is a noticeable spike at 8 (6.1%) and 9 (6.5%) months, decreasing once again at 10 months (1.4%) (refer to Table 3).

Table 3. Project timeframes.

Time frame	N	%
Non-response	48	22.4
Less than one month	50	23.4
Within two months	23	10.8
Within three months	18	8.4
Within four months	19	8.9
Within five months	12	5.6
Within six months	6	2.8
Within seven months	8	3.7
Within eight months	13	6.1
Within nine months	14	6.5
Within ten months	3	1.4
Redundant (multiple submissions for one project)	0	0.0
Total	214	100.0

In the projects, one or more arts disciplines were often reported. For this reason, the number of answers (435) is greater than the number of responses (214); that is, projects could involve more than one arts discipline (maximum 6). Visual arts (34%) dominated as the most prominent discipline within the projects with the balance shared somewhat equally among drama (15.9%), music (16.3%) and creative writing (18.9%) with dance (8.7%) and film/video (3.7%) well behind (refer to Table 4).

Table 4. Arts disciplines represented.

Arts Disciplines	N	%
Non-response	11	2.5
Dance	38	8.7
Drama	69	15.9
Music	71	16.3
Visual arts/crafts	148	34.0
Creative writing	82	18.9
Film/video	16	3.7
Total	435	100.0

The arts projects were offered from junior kindergarten through to grade 12. In the data, the number of answers (815) is greater than the number of responses (214) due to multiple grade level observations. For example, a project could involve grades 5 and 6, or 1, 2 and 3, etc. (maximum 15 levels). The projects clustered in the elementary grades increasing rapidly from JK to grade 5, and decreased gradually from grades 6 through to 12 (refer to Table 5).

Table 5. Grades represented.

Grade levels	N	%
Non-response	10	1.2
Junior kindergarten	4	0.5
Kindergarten	67	8.2
Grade 1	91	11.2
Grade 2	93	11.4
Grade 3	91	11.2
Grade 4	99	12.2
Grade 5	104	12.8
Grade 6	94	11.5
Grade 7	49	6.0
Grade 8	41	5.0
Grade 9	21	2.6
Grade 10	17	2.1
Grade 11	19	2.3
Grade 12	13	1.6
Ontario Academic Credit (OAC)	2	0.2
Redundant (multiple submissions to one project)	0	0.0
Total	815	100.0

It was difficult to ascertain how many students were involved in the projects at the different sites. Responses (open-ended numeric response) were grouped into 6 equal ranges. Most projects occurred in general elementary classrooms with class sizes ranging from 17 to 40 (refer to Table 6).

Table 6. Number of student participants.

Student numbers	N	%
Less than 750	210	98.1
From 750 to 1500	3	1.4
From 1500 to 2250	0	0.0
From 2250 to 3000	0	0.0
From 3000 to 3750	0	0.0
3750 and above	1	0.5
TOTAL RES.	214	100.0

Across Canada, most of the arts education projects (87.4%) occurred in school settings (elementary and secondary) with a much smaller number of projects implemented in the community (11.4%). Further, most of the arts projects were implemented in urban (43.9%), followed by rural (31.3%), with less involvement in suburban (18.7%) locales.

Discussion

There appears to be a subtle shift in the project descriptions from the initial first-year survey to this second-year follow-up study. In the initial survey, the project descriptions emphasized a connection to the content of the school curriculum with a focus on the visual arts integrated into social studies and language arts. Because of program interventions by the partners, an emphasis on arts integration across the curriculum and a focus on student exploration of personal creativity were more evident in the follow-up survey. This is reflected in the variety of projects, the number that emphasize creative rather than re-productive activities, and the expanded approach to learning through the arts adopted in the projects. These adjustments reflect a maturing of the partnership (Arts Education Partnership, 2002) and a broader vision of the arts within the curriculum (Burnaford, Aprill & Weiss, 2001).

In the initial survey, there was difficulty ascertaining the number of projects, sites and submissions by respondents. By selecting "site" as the foundational basis for analysing the data in this follow-up study, four types of submissions emerged from the data analysis: single site with a single project; single site with multiple projects; single site with a single project and multiple submissions; and a single project with multiple sites. Further, a broader range of individuals completed the project information survey than in the previous year. Although this is a positive development, it could reflect the larger number of surveys submitted – 109 in the first year of the study compared to 214 in the second year study. Unfortunately, the number of artists participating in the evaluation declined from 14.7% to 12.6%, which may be of concern as the projects focus on artist involvement in the school curriculum. In the initial year, the principals dominated as project co-ordinators. In the second year, teachers assumed more responsibility for undertaking the organization of projects within the school setting, although artists remain under-represented in this role. This shift towards the grass-roots places ownership with those most affected by the program and strengthens the partnership (Arts Education Partnership, 2001).

Previously, most projects were offered in a very short period, usually within a month. Although not always aligned with the school terms, many projects in the second year were offered over several months. This is more appropriate to the school setting (ARTS, Inc. & Performing Tree, 2000). It also allows students sufficient time to obtain in-depth understanding of the objective of the projects, which has been a concern for those offered within a month. The decline in dance (29.4% to 17.8%) and film/video (11.9 to 7.5%) projects from the previous year is perhaps unfortunate as these are weak links within the arts offerings in the school curriculum in Canada (Pitman, 1998) and in many other jurisdictions (Taggart, Whitley & Sharp, 2004). However, creative writing increased noticeably over the previous year (from 28.4% to 38.3%)

Given the time frames, many of the arts skills developed were foundational. Consequently, many of the projects were more appropriate to the elementary grades. The selection of grade 5 then as the level of choice is perhaps not surprising. (Previously, grade 4 was the level of choice.) Students in grade 5 have generally developed their reading and writing skills, and enjoy classroom discussion and peer learning contexts. Moreover, teachers do not experience the classroom management challenges that tend to occur at higher grade levels.

By far (98.1%), most projects involved numbers of students in the lowest range class, that is, less than 750. The project in the highest equal range (3,750) involved a single project in multiple sites. This is similar to the previous year. There was an incremental increase in the number of projects in the community from the previous year; that is, from 10.1% of the projects to 11.4%. The number of projects in suburban areas increased (from 12.8% to 18.7%). However, rural involvement declined (from 41.3% to 31.3%).

Concluding Comments

Artists, arts administrators and school district personnel in many countries can use the findings from this study to more effectively plan, deliver and evaluate similar arts partnership projects in their communities. The findings of this study reinforce and extend the profile of arts partnership projects developed from the initial survey (Andrews & Harris, 2007), and they can be used to improve partnership practices. For example, project descriptions focused on student exploration, creativity and arts integration across the curriculum. The partnership aspect of the projects could be highlighted if artist-teacher collaboration were included within the stated outcomes of the partnership. Single site projects dominated which created administrative concerns with the number of projects. This could be alleviated with one administrative centre either at the school level (i.e., one school administering several projects) or at the school district level (i.e., the district office administering several projects each in a different school). Teachers dominated in submitting surveys and acting as project co-ordinators from the previous year when principals dominated. Artists working outside their own context (e.g., a studio) may be somewhat disinclined to complete surveys and organize projects. For this reason, these individuals need to be supported and encouraged to participate in the research and administrative components of the projects which are essential to the success of arts education partnerships.

Although project timelines extended over several months, it is more pedagogically sound to align the projects with school terms which reflect the organization of the curriculum. These terms are generally from September to December (fall term), January to March (winter term), and April to June (spring term) for elementary schools, and September to January (first semester) and February to June (second semester) for secondary schools. Also, since the visual arts dominated from year to year, it could be helpful to develop a funding mechanism that encouraged a broader range of arts disciplines within the projects; for example, a percentage of funds allocated to each arts discipline. Similarly, secondary schools, community projects and suburban locales were under-represented and may require a similar mechanism to address the imbalance. Overall, however, artist/teacher collaboration and the support of schools and community organizations were strongly in evidence across the country. These factors are the benchmarks of successful arts education partnerships and they can improve the teaching and learning of the arts in elementary and secondary schools and in the community (Arts Education Partnership, 2002; Stoloff, 1989).

(Endnotes)

1. ArtsSmarts is a national arts education initiative involving artist/teacher collaboration and school/community partnerships, initially funded by the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation. The research in this paper was funded by this Foundation and the University of Ottawa and is part of a multi-year study which commenced in 2000. ArtSmarts evolved to become an independent non-profit organization. For further information visit, please refer to www.ArtsSmarts.ca.
2. At the outset of this inquiry, the partners consisted of 2 arts councils, 3 community foundations and 2 arts organizations from across Canada. Each of these organizations received funding from the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation to partner with school districts and community groups to administer ArtsSmarts.
3. Data was also available to the partners from a program evaluation questionnaire, applied dissemination questionnaire, and cross-country interviews.
4. A version of this paper was presented at the Pan-Canadian Think II, at Memorial University, St. John's, NL on June 27, 2007.

5. Interestingly, the survey response language division is similar to the percentage of English-language and French-language speakers in Canada which is a bilingual country.
6. Sphinx Survey was also used in the analysis throughout the remainder of the survey.

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