

NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE FOR TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE ARTS

MAY 25, 26, 2011

SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT COMMENTS IN SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

INTRODUCTION

The National Roundtable on Teacher Education in the Arts, held on May 25 and 26, 2011, at the National Arts Centre, in Ottawa, heralded the first time that an invited group of 53 experts consisting of education professors, teachers, artists, education students (both pre-service and graduate), arts administrators, government officials, and school board consultants and superintendents, met to discuss critical issues in the process of teacher education. The connecting question to arts advocacy in general was: - In order to have better quality arts programs in our schools, we need better educated teachers.

A unique feature of this event was the element of preparation by all participants that included the offering of a creatively decorated piece of material that might symbolize prior to the event, attitudes on teacher education in the arts. Each submitted piece at the beginning and during the progress of the Roundtable, was added to a kind of garden of ideas that stimulated metaphoric images throughout the experience. The interweaving of vocal dialogue, mixed with arts experiences continued throughout. In the 2 day dialogue, small group discussions of 8 participants each, met to consider 4 major themes of teacher education: a) pre-service or initial teacher education b) models of in-service education c) the role of partnerships d) the relationship of instructor and candidate. At each opportunity for reporting findings to the whole, narrative summary, dance response, improvisational sketch creation, soundscape atmospheres and visual renderings, were all employed by the reporting groups. The resulting findings and crystallization of ideas for all participants, included both logical idea suggestions and metaphoric images that continue to resonate in a kind of dynamic symmetry that has promoted alternative meanings for everyone.

As a concluding challenge for each participant, we asked all to conceive of an innovative theory, practice or event that resulted in some way from the experiences of this Roundtable, that could be offered to a public forum as part of the national Culture Days celebrations, scheduled for September 30 – Oct. 2, 2011.

The following represents a narrative summary of the small group discussions. This summary is based upon the 3 divisions of discussion (Observations, New Insights and Avenues of Further Exploration) that were employed by group reporters.

I. THE PLACE OF THE ARTS IN AN OVERALL PROGRAM OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

Participants in this discussion group were asked to comment on delivery

models, overall programs, the relative time for the arts in relation to the total program, the relationship to practica, degrees of integration, training for generalist candidates and pre-requisite issues for specialized candidates.

Observations:

A primary observation was that there is great variation in the provision of pre-service teacher education, between provinces and between different providers (mostly universities), in the same province. As there are very few regulations governing teacher education, let alone teacher education in the arts, factors that seem to determine the description of services provided, include local and regional pressure on particular institutions, overall research interests and expertise of a particular professoriate and individual institutional leadership focused toward arts education.

Most programs are exclusively taught by tenured professors or hired teachers. There are few programs that extensively involve artists, arts organizations or other community resources. The particular programs taught seem to be heavily influenced by the European concepts of dance, drama, music and visual arts, as separate disciplines, each with its own discrete theoretical and pedagogical assumptions. In many cases, this is out of step with the living reality of the arts in the visions of young people. There exists a continuation of the European hierarchy of the arts with music receiving the most exposure in pre-service programs, followed by visual arts with drama and dance trailing, both, often integrated into other subject fields, such as language arts or physical education. In Ontario, for instance, where Ministry of Education policy requires that all the arts be taught in elementary schools, only one (of 16) faculty of education provides any separate programming in dance.

Most ministries of education mandate the teaching of the arts to all elementary students. However, there are very few opportunities provided by any government agencies to support this implementation and no specific resources allocated to developing pre-service education in the arts. As a result, ministry mandated arts curriculum is very unevenly implemented across Canada. This reality is matched by weak and dis-organized public pressure on governments to support the arts in schools. The only exception is music where national, provincial and regional associations advocate for more public involvement in ensuring adequate instruction in music. This is mirrored by programs in faculties of education, where resources are as scarce as in any other public educational sector.

In most arts programs that do exist in faculties of education, there is a tension between what candidates view as their needs – a grab bag of suitable teaching strategies so that they can succeed in practice teaching; and instructors, who wish to provide more of a philosophical or psychological approach, to provide candidates with a better foundation understanding. This is made worse by candidate lack of experience or confidence in the arts, particularly among elementary candidates.

The practicum experience is cited as a common weakness of most arts programs. Often the programs in particular universities do not match the reality of teaching in local schools. So, candidates feel pressure to teach what is connected to the reality of classroom practice, while the faculty program may try to offer more of a vision about what could be a better reality. There seems little connection between the two.

New Insights:

Most participants concluded that any significant change in the provision of pre-service arts education, would entail a balance of steps forward, in all initiatives in arts education for everyone. All are inter-related. With particular reference to teacher education, this involves a closer connection between the classroom reality and the local faculty of education. The progression from university classroom to practice teaching must be more seamless and co-operative. Also, a significant improvement needs to be made in the provision of creative and aesthetic experiences for candidates so that they can experience the kind of power in the arts we suggest they provide for their students in schools.

In more general terms, participants suggested that faculties of education widen their own concepts of what constitutes the arts. In order to better integrate with the reality of young student lives, we need to perceive that the arts can be inter-woven in new ways and that there are new forms of artistic expression that have been invented by technological advances and the increasing cross-pollination of cultural awareness in contemporary Canadian society.

Finally, participants concluded that if we believe that it takes a community to truly enrich arts experience in schools, we must extend that to the experiences we provide for our candidates in faculties of education.

Avenues of Further Exploration:

Most participants suggested that we redress perceived inadequacies that have been articulated above. Among suggestions for strategies and objectives for the future, include provision of evidence that all the arts are equally important, that we articulate a wider view of what constitutes the arts, that we should search for more meaningful partnerships with others in making our programs more varied and rich. Many offered that the NRTEA should continue to keep alive all networking possibilities, should actively search out exemplary practice and articulate what might be instructive pre-requisites for admission into arts programs.

More specific suggestions included that the NRTEA meet again in May of 2012, to follow-up on all the initiatives of the 2011 roundtable and, in particular, to suggest both alternative delivery models (e.g. – shorter more intensive experiences in new settings vs, the standard weekly course schedules in faculty classrooms etc) and to attempting to design a national model of enlightened pre-service teacher education that could inform the development of relevant and effective programs everywhere.

2. MODELS OF IN-SERVICE ARTS EDUCATION

Participants were asked to make observations about the situation of in-service training from their perspective, comment on insights that might have been sparked by their observations and recommend solutions or avenues for exploration on possible policies, procedures or models that could better in-service training in the arts.

Observations:

Teacher in-service training in Quebec is not a pressing need in part because Quebec offers a four year program in arts education (usually only music and visual arts). Candidates are also required to have courses in the arts at the pre-university level. Graduates from this program usually teach at the secondary level (Grade 7 to Grade 11). As in every other province drama and dance are under served by pre-service training. Universities do not offer on-going in-service training because there is no need for it. Keeping abreast of new materials and offering some training workshops or programs is left to subject associations. Further accreditation in the arts does not lead to a higher salary scale or higher job positions. At the elementary level, the music lobby is such that there is almost a specialist in every school.

In most other provinces there is no specialist four year programs offered by Faculties of Education which necessitates a greater need to provide on-going in-service training. Very often, some pre-service candidates do arrive with an under-graduate degree in one of the arts.

Very few school boards or ministries of Education offer in-service sessions or programs in the arts and these courses/sessions are often provided by subject associations. Types of courses available today are Additional Qualifying (AQ in Ontario) courses, workshops, presentations, conferences, mentoring with artists or other teachers, self directed, a masters level program, summer courses and camps. Providers can be school boards, subject associations or arts organizations or professional companies. Costs involved in in-service training can sometimes be quite prohibiting and school boards or ministries have few funds to allocate for this.

The need to provide training in the arts is seldom addressed. School boards and provincial ministries seem to focus their attention on the basics (language, math and sometimes the sciences). In many school boards there are no longer arts consultants. There is little incentive for professional development in this area and little opportunity for some to gain leadership skills. Pay scales are affected by additional qualifications in most provinces and act as incentives for taking courses. Politics and unions make it very difficult for arts organizations to offer accredited courses for teachers. Although technology has opened up new possibilities for learning in the arts, it still faces many challenges.

New Insights:

There is great diversity and similarities in models of in-service training across Canada. Most approaches/models are influenced by the location and the community in which they take place. By sharing these we can learn from each other. Organizations should be encouraged to give various forms of accreditation to those taking their sessions. We must also remember that not all the instructors need to be teachers or professors. Some current models are outmoded and do not meet the needs or interests of teachers.

New technologies are being experimented right now, e.g. large screen interactive teaching over distances. It is important to explore AQ courses or other in-service courses taught online in such a way that it respects the nature of the arts

Perhaps we should ask, "Have teachers changed?", and we should start from there. What are their needs and what is the level of interests. It would also be important to look at reflective practices as an essential aspect of effective in-service. Unfortunately in many places teachers are overwhelmed and in survival norm. It is critical to focus on learning in the arts as well as learning through the arts. For francophone people in Quebec and in other provinces the teaching of the arts is part of teaching

culture and language. They are an integral whole. Perhaps English Canada would also benefit from viewing the teaching of arts in this way.

Although there seems to be little need in Quebec for in-service, it is interesting to note that last year 875 teachers attended the conference for all of the arts in Quebec.

Avenues of Further Exploration:

Finding the spark that will drive and motivate teachers is key. The Peel Board 'teacher led research project' offered along with subject associations seems to have found that spark. Perhaps having an AQ course in observing other classrooms would be a worth-while from of in-service course. The use of observation as a tool is an important component of reflective learning. Inviting as many individuals and groups as possible to the table and help design teacher courses and create a sustainable development path from pre-service training to in-service would be another interesting initiative. Consideration should be given to needs, expectations, surprises and rewards for future participation and inquiry. An authentic community of real or virtual learners could capture teacher interest. We should specialize more and explore post learning communities for arts teacher.

We need to find ways to make technology training or online training available and accessible for all of the arts as well as interactive and experiential. Subject associations can help in cross curricular/ panel training mentoring and the use of individualized mentorship for teachers. They can also provide a list of artists willing to mentor teachers over an extended period of time.

The issue of cost can be addressed by offering free workshops in partnership with public sponsored programs or institutions. Providing of supply time to teachers does not always motivate participation, but there has been enthusiastic responses from teachers who select and spend assigned \$ in ways they choose to meet their needs.

Highlighting what we do in the arts as really special, really future forward thinking and central to our way of life, is crucial. We can target school principals to inform them of the importance of on going training of teachers in arts education and the benefits for the students and focus on artistic projects that involve the whole teaching staff of the school that benefit everyone.

3. THE ROLES AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF COMMUNITY, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL ARTS PARTNERS

Given the complexity and challenges of providing pre-service and in-service training in the arts for teachers and educators, it is important to explore and understand the diverse communities of partners and their possible contributions to the betterment, development and delivery of a variety of training programs. Many models exist and many more are being explored.

Observations:

There are many types of partnerships that impact and contribute to teacher training. Partnerships or programs can be, with government ministries, provincial groups, subject teacher associations, community groups, professional artists groups and local business groups. ("Pulse" is a provincial Youth Dance willing to share their partnership template) There is however a need to improve some existing partnership models making them more accessible, relevant and sustainable. For example,

many partners involved in teacher training, like research groups, can not always get school board approval for their research requirements.

LTTA (Learning through the Arts)- is a teacher/artist model emphasizing learning through the arts to understand other subjects. Other programs, such as the mentorship program used in the York region, use arts educators. They bring a different learning experience than that offered by artists. Arts organizations need a consultant or someone at the board level to provide sustainability and continuity.

How do we encourage more teachers to become part of a learning program in the arts? Elementary generalist teachers don't always see themselves as Art/Music/Drama/Dance teachers and don't pursue involvement with partners in their communities.

New Insights;

Over the years funding for art organizations willing to engage in teacher training courses, has come from many sources. These include government ministries and programs such as, Education and Culture; but could also include Health, Justice, Citizenship and Democracy...

The NAC has several programs and resources that can be very useful to generalist as well as specialist teachers currently working on improving integration with language arts. They offer theatre to classroom/teacher programs in various satellite locations. We could also explore partnerships online as an option.

Specialist High Skill Major in Arts and Culture is an important program in Ontario secondary schools. This is a way to get to know and work with the cultural sector in our cities.

Avenues of Further Exploration:

There is a need to discuss partnerships and start the conversations and to bring all partners (multi-cultural, businesses, artist, etc...) to the same table right now. Providing an inventory of all possible partners across a province would be a great help to local groups who want to organize their program. We need to focus on both the small and large centers. We need to consider long term relationships vs partnerships as well partnerships for political action/advocacy. It is important to protect the notion that the arts as a way of knowing and of research are emphasized and not lost when partnerships and the resulting programs are established.

Empowering teachers using partnership with organizations to help them get accreditation is also important (i.e, trying to get both a university and a ministry of Education to recognize programs offered by a dance school). Very often teachers are overloaded with information, but they don't know what exist. Retired teachers can provide direction and mentorship to teachers or artists and this should be explored. Creative spaces are conducive to bringing these people together- arts resource centre... open source curriculum/website. Encourage special projects between teachers and local artists. Invite teachers to do the art then discuss how to use it to teach the expectations.

Other areas to explore include: Youtube channel for teachers, access lessons; NAC summer camps; teleconferencing, webcasts exemplary mentorship programs - the ark - NTS students go through theatrical boot camp - senior actors as mentors, Stratford summer teacher intensives, bring in artists

to work with teachers at pd days, train the artists to teach, create an arts secretariat and create research in this area.

4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSTRUCTOR AND CANDIDATE

This question was not related to any particular sector of teacher education in the arts but pertained to all. Issues examined included instructor modeling; information vs experience; differences between excellence in teaching teachers compared to teaching in schools; unique characteristics of excellent teaching in arts teacher education; relationship of artistic excellence and pedagogical competence.

Observations:

The instructor in all phases of teacher education is always in a duality – teaching the candidates directly and modeling how those candidates might teach their own students. This duality exists whether the candidates are novices or experts as artists themselves. With experts, there are new challenges in the need to expand artistic knowledge to include the pedagogical. The role of the instructor is “to open the mind” of the candidate. This becomes even more challenging when it becomes clear that candidates have a variety of reasons for being in a faculty of education, only some of which include inspiring their own students. So, an additional challenge for the arts instructor is to overcome such a disparate orientation, in order to provide the opportunity for candidates to become motivated to provide for their own students, the powerfully learning opportunities of the arts.

The re-curing theme of interconnectedness arose with the observation that university teaching is so different than that of a regular classroom. Candidates are often troubled by the lack of congruence between faculty instructor and associate or mentor teacher in the schools.

New Insights:

Many participants felt that an important key to effective arts teaching to students in schools, is the re-discovery of the creative and aesthetic qualities of teachers. Most teachers knew, as 4 year olds, that they were very confident in all areas of creative discovery in the arts. Their own life journeys have, in most cases, snuffed out that confidence and sense of importance of the arts in their lives. So, a primary challenge of faculty instructors is to help candidates re-gain that original sense of play, creativity and the discovery of beauty.

Several participants suggested that all instructors should read and digest the book ISH by Peter Reynolds.

Avenues of Further Exploration:

Participants stressed the importance of giving candidates and by extension, their own students, the maximum degree of personal ownership in their own learning. Also, they felt it useful if there existed a basic foundation arts knowledge and competence, in a graduated way throughout elementary years, that a generalist teacher might be able to impart or enable. In addition to appropriate content, participants felt that instructors should also discuss appropriate philosophy and aesthetic theory, to provide some general pedagogical rationale for the content introduced.

The discussions strongly revealed that instructors should investigate partnership possibilities in enriching their own programs, so that candidates could understand the value of varied experiences and points of view in the arts. In line with this suggestion, was the strong implication that instructors should work more closely with participating mentor or associate teachers so that the transition from university class to practicum reality is as cooperative as possible.

CONCLUSIONS

Participants were asked at the end of the two day event to propose a metaphor that all participants of the group felt comfortable with and that best described their experience. The suggestions were all very succinct and the explanations invited us all to further reflections - indeed further action. Here are their contributions.

The two day experience was:

- ...like viewing an ecosystem. Everything in an ecosystem is interconnected. If one piece is out of balance everything suffers. Every part must accept responsibility for the problems and the solutions;
- ...like, Gardeners....nurture Plants that we plant rhizomes? Hidden? Not sure when they will appear
- ...like, Baggage – unpack the baggage, minimize the baggage, selective baggage, travelling together
- ...like, a Bridge over trouble waters, work together
- ...like, Forget-me-nots, continue conversation, grow everywhere, magic like the arts, remind each other.
- ...like, an abstract painting very complex and takes time, contemplation, inquiry, dialogue to understand, appreciate and deepen the experience.