

NRTEA Draft Report 2014-08-15

Background

The National Roundtable on Teacher Education in the Arts (NRTEA) is a national laboratory of ideas, a national forum for discussion and communication, and an incubator of visions, strategies and principles, concerning all aspects of pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development. Given the unique and specific role the National Roundtable, the engagement in advocacy or developing related action plans, is not part of its mandate. The central participants in NRTEA generally come from faculties of education, teacher organizations and institutions, artist organizations, and government officials from the Federal and provincial governments. They come together, in a very non-partisan manner, to share, discuss and explore focused issues that are important to them and topics they helped to define over a period of three months prior to the roundtable meeting. The fulcrum for discussion is always the nature of the teaching-learning encounter in teacher education. Given that it is a major fountain for the development of arts education in schools across Canada, our first principle is to support the finest possible teacher education in the arts, for those involved in school classrooms and community settings. By arts, we refer to dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts, in traditional settings and in new and experimental combinations. NRTEA was founded in 2011 with the first National Roundtable held on May 25 and 26, at the National Arts Centre, in Ottawa. All of the annual Roundtable meetings have been followed by summary/analytical reports that have been given wide national distribution.

Focus

This year, the theme for NRTEA was, *'A Self/ Community Initiated Journey: a Quest with the evolving nature of Teacher Education in the Arts'*. It had three main objectives:

- A. Explore the evolving status and nature of arts education for teachers and educators:
 1. How have arts education courses for teachers changed in the past ten years?
 2. How important are arts education courses in the overall curriculum for pre-service and in-service education?
 3. What innovative ways are there to provide various forms of education in the arts that are useful and appealing?
 4. What is the nature of the gap between arts education for teachers and the values and reality of teachers in the field?

- B. Focus on specific strategies to engage pre-service and in-service teachers/educators in arts education:
 1. How should we link with other curriculum subjects?
 2. What could be the content of a specific app made for smart phones

on teacher education in the arts?

3. What should the relationship be, between teaching the arts as a whole and teaching components of specific disciplines?

C. Use underling principles of education to discuss mergers, fusions and integration as possible avenues to meet our goals:

1. What are the basic concepts at the foundation of all teacher education that are identical to those found in arts education?
2. How can we find the right balance between theory and practice in our teaching?
3. How can all arts subject associations in the arts merge and create a national association?
4. What is the best platform for a national association for teacher education in the arts?

Methodology:

The 38 participants were assigned randomly into six groups. They selected and discussed the three objectives and specific sub-questions they wished to address over the course of the two day roundtable. All groups had a facilitator, usually a steering committee member, and a reporter.

Participants walked between four selected venues (the SAW Gallery, the National Arts Centre, the Bytown Museum and the National Gallery of Canada) engaging in a planned combination of dialogue sessions, arts workshops and the contemplative experiences of walking, all adding different ingredients to the power and richness of the total experience.

The arts presentations/workshops included those given by Jason St-Laurent, artist and curator of SAW Gallery, Kristina Watt, an international actor, director and educator, Anita Mitra, a nationally acknowledged wellness instructor and Carolee Mason, an Ontario-wide renowned teacher educator in drama and arts education.

Madeleine Aubrey (NRTEA Co-Chair) used, summarized and interpreted comments made by the groups when addressing specific objectives and sub-questions. For a compilation of all reports and comments received, please visit our website at ww.nrtea.ca. Michael Wilson (Co-Chair) formulated conclusions and made suggestions for future roundtables.

The views expressed in this document represent the participants who represented professors of education, arts administrators, government officials, teachers, artists and others interested, from most geographical regions of the country.

Introduction

This event was the 4th annual roundtable on teacher education in the arts. Although there were presentations/workshops, this year's event focused more on discussions between participants occurring while walking from one venue to another and during planned work sessions. The event format became, itself, an important energizing process for those involved.

Walking was a very important component of the event. It allowed participants to play and to be open to the sensual as well as aesthetic experiences from the breath-taking views around them. Walking also created a time where they were less driven to finding answers and more open to exploring and experiencing on a wider plane. Comments below from some of the groups seem to confirm this.

'Walking, as a process, a working through, allows for clearing the mind and tackling problems/thoughts. It allows connections to be made with random objects, or scenes, or happenstances along the way. Walking also led to a destination/end product.'

'The walking format or incorporating movement into the Roundtable should be a staple of future events. I liked it and many of the individuals I spoke to liked it too. I found that it facilitated thinking, better conversation and better bonding with other participants. It's also a healthy challenge to the traditional conference format.'

The following sections attempts to capture and interpret comments made by various groups. Because arts education in general is so closely related to arts education for teachers/educators, at times, some of these comments seem to target more the former than the later.

Objective A and Selected Sub-questions

The objective was to explore the evolving status and nature of arts education for teachers and educators: and the questions focused on by the groups were: How important are arts education courses in the overall curriculum for pre-service and in-service education? What innovative ways are there to provide various forms of education in the arts that are useful and appealing? What is the nature of the gap between arts education for teachers and the values and reality of teachers in the field?

Interpretation of Comments to Objective A

Participants were concerned about the status and evolving nature of arts education for teachers,

"We are in a climate change of arts education" and "there is a trail of

evidence confirming the endangered nature of the arts” there was some optimism in the statement that “there are new clues to be discovered on a new journey of discovery”.

Although some suggested “*possible new directions within traditional organizational and structural contexts*” none were elaborated. They more often reiterated advocacy strategies that had been used in the past such as: making presentations at annual school board superintendent meetings; and securing special funding for arts education.

By continuing to engage in advocacy for arts education it was felt that arts education for teachers would benefit. Although the following strategies had been done in the past, participants suggested that they continue to be used. These include: doing research on past students who have done well because of their arts education; seeking the help of well known celebrities to champion our cause; and using advertising to communicate our cause and its benefits.

It was seen as very important to build allies within the school community and unify our message. There does not exist presently a good relationship between teachers ('front line workers') and administrators regarding the place of arts education in schools. *“There is a need to develop strategies to negotiate the tension between advocating for arts education through a singular voice and doing so through the diversity of voices that comprise the arts education community. (We need to...) Acknowledge that there are multiple and intersecting conversations occurring in arts education.”*

The importance of community involvement in pre-service and in-service training in the arts was central to many discussions. Many felt that we need *“to built respect and understanding of an arts learning community.* As pointed out by Jason St-Laurent arts education and arts experiences come from a variety of very different venues and methods, all have their place and value and are available in our local communities. He encouraged participants to explore different not obvious venues for arts exploration as well as new materials and techniques.

Some participants restated that arts education training for elementary school teachers and secondary teachers is different and that the evolving nature and the present status of arts education for teachers is impacting both. There is a greater need for specialization at the secondary level and a more integrated approach or infused approach at the elementary. Is this situation to be accepted or should this situation be changed? Should both levels, elementary and secondary, be different? Perhaps questioning the status quo and outlining a new path for both in-service and pre-service for both secondary and elementary teachers would help us find new solutions.

Objective B and Selected Sub-questions

The objective was to focus on specific strategies to engage pre-service and in-service teachers/educators in arts education; and the questions focused on by the groups were: a) How should we link with other curriculum subjects? c) What should the relationship be, between teaching the arts as a whole and teaching components of specific disciplines?

Interpretations of Comments to Objective B

One strategy put forward was to take the word arts out of arts education in other words the arts are part of education as are math, language and sciences. The rationale is that by naming it arts education we are making it different from education and not acknowledging its integral role in education. The arts are part of general curriculum and we, through our communications and media, should portray it as such. Individuals involved in arts education should perhaps spend more time on demonstrating how the arts are very integral to what we do when we are 'educating'.

The suggestion of fusing the arts raised certain fears of seeing specific art subjects disappear. One group said: *"The term "fuse" seemed to evoke a feeling of panic..."* They preferred talking about arts education being *"infused"* into other subjects in the curriculum. They were specifically concerned about losing the status of arts education in the hierarchy of subjects that are taught. *"Losing arts importance was a concern. Our group also felt that this should not replace arts specialist teachers, and learning the separate arts disciplines. We felt this specialty knowledge and expertise continues to be important to students learning, and student-teacher learning, as well."*

One group felt that paying attention to the infrastructure surrounding arts education was a very important strategy to keep in mind. They argued that we need to pay attention to adequate facilities, resources, staffing and time allotments on busy schedules. Adequate facilities in institutions or in the surrounding communities need to be in place. They also addressed the responsibilities of school boards to offer a balanced professional development program for staff that includes the arts. Facilities include the notion that, cities, towns and villages around schools need to reflect a rich cultural heritage that promotes the wellness of its citizens.

An often repeated observation was that teachers must have had personal aesthetic experiences and have a personal understanding of beauty in order to effectively teach any and all of the arts. So, all teacher education must be based on that experience and insight. Often, for generalist pre-service teachers, those personal experiences must be provided in their initial arts education courses. Only then, can the learning of skills, knowledge and strategies have any real meaning for teachers.

In addition, pre-service and in-service providers should engage in brainstorming sessions to map out new directions for their work. In particular, teacher educators should include the community in their course umbrella. In most communities, there are rich arts and aesthetic resources that can enrich all of education in the arts. A very close network of subject associations and other arts organizations can provide support. There are a great variety of artists in our communities who would be willing to help. On the technical side, a cellphone app or a new Arts education 'ArtsedWikisite' might be invented to help new and seasoned teachers to access a rich variety of resources.

We need to focus on "Numer-art-cy" or the aesthetic qualities of math. We also need to be pro-active in suggesting aesthetic qualities in all of education. Similarly, arts educators and teacher educators need to see how all other subject strands can enrich the arts. Deep meaning in all of education is only achieved through this kind of linkage and cross-pollination.

Objective C and Selected Sub-questions

The objective was: use underling principles of education to discuss mergers, fusions and integration as possible avenues to meet our goals: and the questions focused on by the groups were: What are the basic concepts at the foundation of all teacher education that are identical to those found in arts education? How can all arts subject associations in the arts merge and create a national association? What is the best platform for a national association for teacher education in the arts?

Interpretations of Comments to Objective C

The concepts/processes most groups felt were inherently fundamental to arts education and to other subject areas of the curriculum were: the promotion of wellness, the creative process, aesthetics, analytical skills and the inquiry process. When teachers teach they are in some way dealing with these. These concepts/processes act as common denominators. Perhaps teaching all subjects through these concepts would provide a more effective learning platform for all our students and our society.

The creative, analytical and inquiry process are central to every practice and learning in the arts but these are also found in other disciplines. Play is an important component of the inquiry process said one group but it is also central to the creative process.

Aesthetics are also a concept common to all subject areas. Understanding and appreciating the beauty of math, science, language arts and the arts can allow us to make connections and give us a better comprehensive understanding of our world and ourselves.

The arts can promote wellness. There has been a long and established connection between the positive benefits of the arts with intellectual and emotional disabilities. Increasingly, we need to focus on teacher well-being in order for them to cope with the increasing stress and complexity of current classrooms. Many of the fundamental and generic qualities of the arts are instrumental in providing such experience for teachers and hence to their students.

How can all arts subject associations in the arts merge and create a national association? What is the best platform for a national association for teacher education in the arts? These questions were answered in part by suggesting that networks be created. One group drew a map of Canada and placed on it, all the associations they knew relating to arts education and invited the rest of the participants to add to this list. A merging of arts education associations would not only provide a great resource to teachers but would also pool our financial resources and could provide a forum for a rich collaboration of knowledgeable individuals.

Conclusions:

The very design and structure of this year's event had a profound effect on all observations, responses and articulated reflections on almost every aspect of the stated objectives and associated questions. An equal mix of dedicated discussion and aesthetic experiences, both planned in the workshop/presentations and the spontaneous, discoveries in the collective walking between venues, opened a new area of dynamics in the nature of individual and collective dialogue. The evidence gleaned here, supports the growing body of discovery that the process of individual and collective walking can stimulate our ways of reflecting and our sense of adventure in thinking and collective discussion.

In analyzing all of the above, a number of currents surfaced. Below, consideration is given to a) A Paradox b) Traditional arts disciplines c) Funding for Specialized Programmes d) Teacher Mindfulness e) Assessment and Evaluation and f) More Regular Engagement.

a) A Paradox:

The experience of Roundtable 2014 has introduced a paradox. While most participants seemed to value the mix of ongoing dialogue with colleagues in small group settings, together with a variety of aesthetic opportunities, this mix seemed to dilute the depth of responses that were reported by individuals and by group reports. It is almost as if, when an experience has deep enough meaning, it is correspondingly difficult to articulate in words, any reflections that can capture either the experiences or address the questions at hand. The steering

committees of future roundtables will need to address this paradox if future responses can continue to have the resonance of those in the past.

b) Traditional Arts Disciplines or Common Foundations:

There remains a deep conflict between a sense of the integrity of each of the traditional arts and the clear need for changes in foundational thinking about the nature of arts in education and the arts in teacher education. It is also about whether all arts subjects should be 'fused' or 'infused into all curriculum. One of the conflicts is time. There simply is not enough time in most elementary school programs or pre-service teacher education programs to allow for any sense of completion provided by equal experiences in each of dance, drama, music and visual arts. Programmers must either choose only some, even one, of the above or re-formulate the arts into some kind of balanced foundational principles. Yet, participants at Roundtable 2014 were reluctant to choose. This conflict remains unresolved.

c) Funding for Specialized Programmes:

At the university level, a funding issue presents further challenges, particularly in the provision of specialty course for secondary arts teacher education. Most public funding of universities is decreasing which places registration pressures on the provision of congregated courses. Registration for specialty high school arts courses tends to be smaller than for many others. So, it is increasingly difficult for some universities to offer such opportunities to qualified candidates in any traditional way. The possibility of combining such courses in single sections is resisted by provincial licensing agencies. The new organizational models for all Ontario pre-service programmes beginning in September 2015, do not offer much promise of any increased funding or enhanced support for arts programming.

d) Teacher Mindfulness:

There emerged from Roundtable 2014, a theme of teacher mindfulness. All three presenters: Kristina Watt, Anita Mitra and Carolee Mason highlighted this issue in their presentation/workshops. Kristina emphasized the need to embrace conflict, Anita linked mindfulness to wellness and Carolee suggested we could control mindfulness by deciding how we with engage or not others. All of these strategies are useful to the entire experience of the Roundtable highlighting the need for the humanness as well as the technology of teacher education. The emphasis placed on mixing dialogue with aesthetic encounters, reinforced the necessity for teacher education to concentrate as much on teaching as a deeply personal encounter as well as on an acquisition of rational teacher thinking and skills. The key here is to fuse rationality with emotion, or matters of the heart, to illuminate a kind of felt-knowledge.

e) Assessment and Evaluation:

The priority given to “felt-knowledge” in teacher education, highlights an additional challenge in any consideration of arts education provision. That of assessment and evaluation. To the extent that arts activity is either creative or aesthetic, or both, to that extent, it remains very difficult to capture the essence of the ‘value’ of such experience and expression, as a grade. Creativity involves unpredictability and so challenges the premise of rubric assessment and evaluation. In addition, it is very difficult to generalize concepts of ‘beauty’ as a point either of assessment or evaluation. That which can be easily assessable is only on the periphery of the meaning of the work. So, the challenge here is to suggest assessment and evaluation instruments and orientations that can usefully and validly capture what is most significant in arts activity.

f) More Regular Engagement:

Participants in Roundtable 2014 and participants in past roundtables have generally recommended more regular engagement throughout the year between annual roundtables. This may take the form of expanded and more involving technology or face-to-face meetings, either nationally or regionally, or both. Participants from all roundtables do seem to need to feel more connected to our work on an ongoing basis. Participants this year went further. They recommended greater efforts be made to put suggestions into field action with evolved national and regional strategies. In addition, they urged a kind of on-going national teacher education institute that is connected by a variety of electronic encounters and live sessions.

Future Directions

The Conclusions drawn from Roundtable 2014 lead us to suggest the following recommendations for exploration at future Roundtables.

1. We must examine further, the issue of foundation principles that are pedagogically relevant, underlying all of the arts and other subjects. While recognizing that there is much support for preserving the traditional integrity and autonomy of each art form, public education increasingly demands that we find new envelopes in which to continue to deliver a balance of meaningful experiences in all of the arts. We believe that a detailed and comprehensive examination of the tensions inherent in this complexity must be specifically undertaken in the immediate future. This must be mirrored in all pre-service teacher education programmes, especially those aimed at elementary teachers.
2. To address the increasing funding challenges that all Canadian universities will face, we should investigate alternative modes of delivery of arts education programmes. For example, what are the advantages

and disadvantages of on-line exchange between candidates and instructor? Are there ways to make courses equally or more effective that cost less to deliver? Should pre-service education be housed in universities? These issues, related to structuring and programming, need to be more thoroughly examined.

3. In the reality of today's classrooms, how do we encourage teachers to survive the new tensions facing all schools in their attempts to engage students? There are a multitude of strategies suggested for reaching students. But, how do we support and encourage the act of teaching over time? To what extent should pre-service and in-service education include issues of continued teacher resilience in the face of current student resistance to anything about typical schooling? This suggestion concerns teacher wellness and confronts the dynamics of changing student need and interest, and the altered dispositions of teacher candidates. Here we need to ask what is the place of the arts in addressing this overall concern?
4. Related to #3, we must ask what is the relationship of teaching the arts and teachers continuing with a personal aesthetic and creative practice? Does continued personal involvement in the arts actually improve one's teaching? Is there evidence to support a causal relationship? In general, what should teachers do personally to continue to feel fresh in their arts teaching? The Roundtable had always considered this principle to be very very important in the actual design of the Roundtable experience in each of the past 4 years, but what is the significance of this feature in the actual teaching dynamic? A corollary question here is the dynamic between aesthetic experience and accepted research methodology.
5. Often discussed by participants in 2014, was the need for a national 'action plan'. We might examine what that actually means. What is the actual definition and nature of an 'action plan'? What would it entail re the Roundtable? Are there benefits to looking at other sectors where 'action plans' have been employed? Is the Roundtable the logical place to develop a national 'action plan' for teacher education in the arts?

The above are 5 recommended directions for future Roundtables to explore, experience and examine. It is up to all participants to suggest priorities for the next national Roundtable.

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