

# Excellence in Arts Teaching and Learning: A Collaborative Responsibility of Maturing Partnerships

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## Biographical Information

David Myers, Director of the Center for Educational Partnerships in Music (CEPM) at Georgia State University, focused on research-based "arts" learning. He examined principles of effective partnership derived from an analysis of the particular ways in which collaborative delivery models can support and enhance high-quality arts learning. The relationship among arts specialists, artists, and classroom teachers is a key component of effective instruction in a partnership model. Political and economic benefits of partnerships, though important, should not be used to justify programs that fail to implement research-based principles of arts education. Dr. Myers is Professor of Music, Associate Director of the School of Music, and Founding Director of the Center for Educational Partnerships in Music at Georgia State University. Dr. Myers is currently director of Sound Learning, a project funded by the Texaco Foundation, that partners Georgia State, the Atlanta Symphony, Young Audiences of Atlanta, and the Fulton County and Atlanta City Schools in a curriculum-based music education program. In 1995, he conducted a national study funded by the NEA to identify characteristics of successful partnerships between symphony orchestras and schools. The findings were published in a book entitled *Beyond Tradition: Partnerships among Orchestras, Schools, and Communities* (Georgia State University, School of Music, 1996) and disseminated to orchestras across the country to assist them with development of their education programs.

Interactions among artists, teachers, and students are at the core of arts education partnerships. These interactions support three factors critical to the effort and expense of partnerships: artistic excellence, instructional effectiveness, and high levels of student learning. Institutions typically form partnerships with the intent of advancing and strengthening arts education. However, in too many cases, economic, political, and managerial issues take precedence over instruction. No institutional partnership can claim success if classroom experiences fail to fulfill standards of excellence for arts teaching and learning. As Jane Remer (1996) has put it, "Too many partnerships that feature artists in schools falter . . . behind the classroom door " (p. 230). According to Arts Survive (Seidel, Eppel, & Martiniello, 2001), "Clarity about the primacy of student learning is a hallmark of partnerships that survive" (p. xv).

### The context of arts education partnerships

The presence of practicing artists in schools has been a defining and sometimes controversial aspect of national arts education rhetoric and policy for nearly four decades. Early efforts included the Young Composers Project (YCP), funded by the Ford Foundation in 1959 and later known as the Composers in Public Schools Program administered by the Music Educators National Conference, as well as the Poets-in-Schools program of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the U.S. Office of Education. These programs emphasized the enrichment role of resident artists in schools, with a focus on modeling and engaging students in the creative process. The concept soon spread to other art forms through NEA's Artists-in-Schools programs and other funded projects, such as the John D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund's Arts-in-Education program and Interdisciplinary Model Programs in the Arts for Children and Teachers (IMPACT). Concurrently, the role of artists expanded to include teaching the arts and using the arts to support academic learning. Today, NEA describes artists' roles along three complementary dimensions: artist-teacher collaborations, in-school performances, and in-school residencies. The agency's materials also advocate sequential programs that are taught by qualified teachers and that regularly engage artists (National Endowment for the Arts, 2000).

Blurring of practitioner and teacher roles dates back at least as far as the Yale Seminar on Music Education in 1963, which advocated relaxing teacher certification requirements to foster the use of professional and amateur musicians in schools (Murphy & Jones, 1976, p. 28). In 1977, *Coming to Our Senses: The Significance of the Arts for American Education*, released by the Arts, Education, and Americans Panel, suggested that given the economic downturn causing job losses for arts educators, it would be prudent to use artists more widely in schools, *selecting them for their potential as teachers and compensating them fairly for their work*.

The question of enrichment versus teaching has perhaps been the most recurrent theme in a long period of policy debate between arts educator organizations and arts agencies. The issues are complex and involve many aspects of responsibility and funding for arts education. However, there has been ongoing concern that artist-based programs may supplant arts specialist positions and thus relieve schools of their responsibility to fund curricular arts programs taught by specialists. Closely related issues involve questions

about whether artists work in schools primarily to enhance the arts curriculum or to support academic learning through the arts. Despite ongoing differences in specific interpretations, there is general philosophical agreement that artists can enrich the learning process, and that when they are present in schools, the ideal arrangement is one in which arts specialists, artists, and classroom teachers collaborate (Pankratz & Mulcahy, 1989). Emphasizing the point, Charles Fowler (1984) once said that concerns about artists' usurping arts educators' jobs was "territorial . . . exaggerated, highly distorted, and totally paranoid" (p. 5). In a recent definition of arts education, derived collaboratively in the midst of Congressional threats to de-fund the NEA, artists and arts organizations are clearly viewed as supportive to sequential arts instruction taught by qualified teachers (Morrison, 1997).

Over the past decade and a half, there has been a virtual explosion of partnerships between community cultural institutions and schools, most of which assume artist-teacher collaborations in the classroom. Fueled by the lobby to include the arts in Goals 2000, the development of national standards in the arts, the formation of the Arts Education Partnership, and the role of education in saving the NEA, partnerships have become a hallmark of contemporary arts education. This movement finds ongoing support from three areas: 1) the ubiquity of community partnerships as an assumed, but largely untested, contributor to school improvement; 2) the public relations value for schools, cultural institutions, and funders in developing school-community projects; and 3) community engagement as a funding criterion for arts institutions, coupled with the economic advantages schools can enjoy through funded programs. The National Endowment for the Arts, the Kennedy Center's Alliance for Arts Education, the Arts Education Partnership, and Annenberg funding initiatives all espouse artist-teacher partnerships as a viable instructional model.

### Partnerships and the question of instructional quality

Partnerships are frequently cited as a strength of arts education. Wilson (2000) argues that the number of relationships schools have with arts organizations is a distinguishing feature of outstanding programs. *Arts Survive* (Seidel et al., 2001) lists as its first major finding the fact that sustained partnerships place a high priority on excellent learning opportunities (p. 21). And *Gaining the Arts Advantage* (Arts Education Partnership, 1999) asserts that the first critical success factor of arts education programs is "active involvement of community, including artists and arts organizations, in the politics and instructional programs of schools" (p. 11).

There is danger, however, in promoting the idea, whether intentionally or inadvertently, that partnerships and excellence in arts education are synonymous. While partnerships may characterize certain programs of documented quality, there is in fact no substantive evidence that partnerships are a criterion of quality or success in arts teaching and learning. As with so many claims for arts education today, advocacy of partnerships without concurrent attention to operational aspects of quality in the classroom may in the long run jeopardize the goal of institutionalizing the arts in schools.

Historically, the evidence is clear that the presence of artists in classrooms does not guarantee quality in teaching and learning. In fact, research reveals significant concerns about weak philosophical underpinnings for such programs, tendencies toward entertainment and appreciation over substance, and a lack of relevance to sequential programs (Bumgarner, 1993; Eustis, 1998; Mok, 1983).

Moreover, while partnership literature often advances the notion of learning in, through, and about the arts, many partnerships tend to emphasize learning *through* the arts as an argument for arts education. Winner's and Cooper's (2000) research indicates that the academic advantages so widely promoted in conjunction with arts education may be more of an "epiphenomenon" than an indicator of quality. To justify arts education on this basis runs the risk of what Barzun (1978) described as inflating the "plausible or possible into the miraculous" (p. 5). In short, if reading scores improve with the presence of an arts partnership in schools, but the quality of arts teaching and learning is questionable, it hardly makes sense to attribute the result to the arts.

*Champions of Change* (Fiske, 1999), includes research studies that looked at why positive changes occur when young people are involved with the arts. All but one of these studies targeted projects that enabled direct involvement with artists and community resources. Several of the studies offer rich descriptions of classroom activities and interactions between artists and teachers in the support of quality teaching and learning. However, only limited attention is given to students' sequential acquisition of arts knowledge and skills or the classroom processes that support growth of understanding. Moreover, descriptions do not consistently document the substance of arts content, or the ways in which direct involvement with artists uniquely supports learning.

Seidel's study (1999) of Shakespeare & Company describes aspects of teaching and learning that are different from more superficial and pedantic approaches sometimes typical of schools. In consideration of generalizing the approach to other settings, the researcher poses this question: "Can people working in settings with far more limited professional and artistic resources still create and sustain effective programs?" As a condition of replication, the researcher assumes that "a community of artists and educators with an inclination toward this kind of work" is important (pp. 89-90).

Given both the history of partnerships and the current emphasis on school-community collaborations, it is incumbent on the field to offer increasingly mature perspectives on the relationship between partnerships and quality teaching and learning. Moving beyond assumption, advocacy, public relations, and expedient ways to circumvent schools' reluctance to support arts education, the essential question of partnerships must be twofold: first, what constitutes a viable, high-quality arts instructional program; and second, how can partnerships between artists and teachers fulfill identified standards of rigorous arts education. Only when the relationship between partnerships and high-quality teaching and learning is demonstrated can partnerships serve as a defensible example of how communities and schools cooperate for educational excellence. Moreover, only then can partnerships represent lasting change in the practice of arts education in schools.

## Instructional quality in arts education: music as an example

In studying music education partnerships, researchers have found that educational effectiveness can be enhanced through the following: artist training; use of quality repertoire; developmentally appropriate strategies; and awareness of children's attention spans (Bolanis, 1996; Moses, 1994; Smith, 2000). In evaluating the Boston Music Education Collaborative, Wolf (1997) suggested that musicians needed to be more connected with the curriculum, that curriculum links needed to be made out of the inherent skills and understandings associated with music, and that the partnership should work only in schools that employed music specialists and demonstrated an investment in building a musical culture. Her findings had remarkable consistency with the contentions of Lehman (1986) and Bumgarner (1993) that the best investment for placing artists in schools is in arts programs that are already strong.

Research in music education has firmly established that effective music teaching derives from three complementary areas of knowledge and practice: 1) the nature and content of music; 2) the nature of the learning process as it occurs in music; and 3) the design of learning experiences that meet the developmental needs and interests of learners. None of the three is sufficient without the other two.

Extrapolating these principles to the arts at large suggests that a clear distinction must be drawn between the practice of doing art in educational settings and the practice of arts education. One recent study that attempts to document factors of quality in arts-integrated instruction suggests that art products and highly skilled artists are important components (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999). Though arts objectives and consistency with statewide arts goals are indicated as aspects of effective lesson plans, two implicit themes emerge from descriptions of lessons that incorporated arts with academics: a) that *doing* art enhances academic content; and b) that *doing art* and *learning art* are essentially synonymous. What is missing from this summary is documentation of an inherent and complimentary arts learning process that must be understood and effected if instruction is to fulfill one of the stated criteria of effectiveness: "The content lesson and the artistic lesson are of equal importance" (p. 58).

This example points up a common problem in much of the work about artist-teacher partnerships: a lack of attention to distinctive ways in which arts learning and arts knowing (as opposed to arts doing) occur. As useful as it may be to demonstrate that the arts reinforce and enhance cognitive processes used in other subjects, it is imperative that the distinctive contributions of the arts be articulated, and that they be supported by evidence of quality teaching and learning.

Eisner (1998), for example, has argued that there are processes and dispositions particularly inherent in the arts (e.g., willingness to imagine possibilities; desire to explore ambiguity; ability to recognize multiple perspectives) that may have implications for non-arts tasks. Similarly, Burton, Horowitz, and Abeles (1999) suggest that there are habits of mind associated with arts learning, such as "elaborative and creative thinking, fluency, originality, focused perception, and imagination" (p. 43) that have important implications for learning generally. Winner and Cooper (2000) suggest that studies of relationships between arts and academics have tended to be based on outcomes or products. They

recommend process-oriented research that investigates how thinking and working in the arts might be applied in academic areas. However, as Eisner asserts, "Courses taken say nothing about the quality of experience or the kinds of curriculum used. In addition, the quality of teaching matters . . ." (p. 8).

Teaching, of course, derives from learning. In music, the learner's construction of meaning involves active exploration of musical materials through listening, performing and creating; symbolizing the musical experience through personally meaningful representations; and learning to understand the standard symbol systems that allow people of all cultures to communicate in, about, and through music. Music as an expressive art comes to be known, understood, and appreciated through the complementary processes of technical development, conceptual understanding, and artistic music-making, regardless of the learner's entry point. Making music, listening to music, and creating music are all parts of the learning whole. To teach music is to ensure that standards of quality in music materials and processes undergird the development of arts-based dispositions, or habits of mind, that potentially inform perception and learning in the world beyond the arts. Without accountability for such quality, the arts are reduced to media that function only in the support of processes inherent in other fields, rather than as rigorous disciplines that, in their own right, develop distinctive processes essential for the education of the whole child.

### Indicators of quality

Looking at arts experience. The most important aspect of artistic quality in the classroom is that artistic models and materials represent high levels of technical competence and artistic expression. Whether provided by artists or teachers, models of sculpting, painting, singing, dancing, playing, acting, and creating should reflect the same levels of artistry one would expect in the museum, the theatre, the studio, or the concert hall. While the artistic examples may be shaped to children's developmental interests, abilities, and attention spans, there can be no substitute for authentic artistic modeling.

Similarly, children's artistic experiences in support of learning should be as artistically rich and expressive as possible. Literature, music, and media used in the learning process should have intrinsic artistic value, and their use and performance should be within the reach of children's perceiving, producing, and performing capabilities. A song or drama poorly performed cannot be characterized as an arts experience.

Looking at instructional quality: Instruction should be organized to ensure sufficient technical competence to achieve aesthetically satisfying outcomes. In contrast to rote-based or pedantic models, instruction should reflect the experimental and exploratory nature of the arts. It should foster flexibility within rules and standards, the role of rehearsal, revision, and practice, and a balance of individual and collaborative enterprise. Learning the arts requires active engagement in the processes of the arts, guided and shaped by teachers to build sequential skill and understanding. Tasks should be chosen both for challenge and for potential success given the prior knowledge and experience of the learners. Decision-making, problem-solving, critical analysis, and creativity should reflect the real-world contexts of arts production and performance, but be tailored to the

developmental needs and interests of learners. Questioning and shared learning should guide teachers in helping students acquire understanding in an atmosphere of comfort and facility with the arts.

Looking at learning. Children's learning in the arts should demonstrate progressive conceptual understanding, valuing of the arts, and willingness to take risks with artistic exploration and expression. While art products may offer some evidence of learning, observations of student learning should reveal growing intrigue with art and ongoing efforts to participate in artistic production and performance. Students should evidence interest in artistic problems and challenges, formulating multiple solutions and comparing their expressive attempts with those of other artists, both peers and professionals. Growing technical competence should support increasingly complex artistic involvement, and students should demonstrate growing independence as arts learners and arts participants. As students perceive, perform, create, and respond, their analytical skills should demonstrate increased understanding of how the arts work and their role in larger societies and cultures.

Implementing quality programs. The first task of implementation is planning. To develop high-quality programs, teachers and artists must work together to understand one another, to develop curriculum, and to appreciate one another's expertise. Teachers must gain confidence in the arts, and artists must gain confidence for working in classroom settings. Criteria must be established for artists who will work with children, including both artistic and relational qualities. Artists should be reviewed systematically prior to placement in schools, and their work should be monitored and assessed on an ongoing basis. Teachers must be empowered to understand that they are accountable for children's learning. They must make critical judgments about the educational value of arts experiences, and recommend improvements or discontinuation of weak programs.

Knowledgeable and expert individuals should conduct ongoing classroom review to assist artists and teachers with their working relationships, to offer suggestions for teaching and learning experiences, and to empower both teachers and artists to apply their expertise in mutually beneficial ways. New assessment models should be developed that grow intrinsically from the nature of the arts and arts learning, as well as from the collaborative delivery models inherent in partnerships.

Most importantly, institutional partners and funders should understand that program development in the arts is a time-consuming, labor-intensive process. The transcendent values of the arts demand programs and assessments that are consistent with the arts and arts learning, not molded into input-output models that potentially sacrifice quality in an effort to demonstrate measurable outcomes. Assessing too quickly denies the expertise it takes to develop quality programs, as well as the fact that cross-disciplinary transfer results from depth of understanding within individual disciplines. Reductionistic approaches that seek evidence of short-term outcomes are doomed to failure. The consequence will be a loss of programs as funders shift their priorities to other arenas.

## Artists and teachers together

Given these parameters for quality teaching and learning, what are the implications for artist-teacher partnerships in classrooms? In *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (1999), Margaret Wheatley writes about the impact of any part of the whole on a global system. Interestingly, she uses a music metaphor to make her point:

This [quantum] world demands that we be present together, and be willing to improvise. We agree on the melody, tempo, and key, and then we play. We listen carefully, we communicate constantly, and suddenly, there is music, possibilities beyond anything we imagined. The music comes from somewhere else, from a unified whole we have accessed among ourselves, a relationship that transcends our false sense of separateness. When the music appears, we can't help but be amazed and grateful. (p. 45)

Wheatley's metaphor is especially appropriate for two reasons. First, it evokes the centrality of a relationship, not just a passing acquaintance, between the artist and the teacher as a foundation for any partnership. Second, it reminds us that in our particular case, the core of what happens emanates from the very nature of the subject, i.e., the art we are teaching.

The quest is to establish models of collaborative enterprise that bring together the expertise of artists, classroom teachers, and arts specialists on behalf of arts education. For such models to develop, each individual must have his or her expertise affirmed and then must be empowered to interact equally with the other two. Charles Fowler wrote in *Arts and Education Handbook: A Guide to Productive Collaborations* (Katz, 1988) that artists often need help in developing appropriate curricula, adopting teaching strategies, relating to other subjects, and exercising evaluation. From the perspective of arts educators, however, these are the very kinds of expertise that classroom teachers and arts specialists bring to partnerships.

The benefit of having artists in classrooms is that they are, first and foremost, artists, not teachers. Their contributions rest largely with their expertise as models in producing or performing art, with their ability to share themselves as living artists, and with their demonstration of artistic or creative process. To the extent that their sharing is shaped to children's developmental learning needs, they also function as teachers.

Teachers bring expertise in curriculum, pedagogy, child development, and establishing learning environments. They know how to hold children's attention, refocus through responsive strategies, ask effective questions, and generate thoughtfulness. They understand children's minds, and they know how to build intrigue, aid children in constructing meaning, and establish positive classroom environments.

In the arts partnership classroom, it should be clear that artists, specialists, and classroom teachers work as a team in establishing a learning community. Modeling collaborative teaching and learning among themselves should set the tone for student attitudes and work habits. As teachers and artists demonstrate interactive respect for one another, students will participate in learning environments that encourage exploration and risk-taking, mutual appreciation, and interest in learning.

## Pre-professional education and professional development of artists and teachers

It is tacitly unfair to assume that individuals who have been educated and enculturated in vastly different professional contexts will collaborate naturally in the classroom. To promote the kinds of classroom interactions proposed here requires attention both to the pre-service training of artists and teachers, and to their professional development.

Nearly every arts education partnership involves professional development, but the typical models are often inadequate for true collaboration in the classroom. A frequent approach is to have arts professionals train classroom teachers during short-term workshops. This model compromises the opportunity to forge dynamic relationships between artists and teachers. According to Remer (1996), insufficient attention is paid to the artist/teacher connection, "the most important dynamic . . . if any significant and enduring learning is to take place." (p. 231) With regard to typical professional development programs, she asserts that "there is no guarantee that what is taught is actually learned and then applied with skill, imagination and a judicious intelligence" (p. 231). In a study of the effort to rebuild arts education in the Los Angeles Unified School District, Slavin and Crespin (2000) found that the expectation for classroom teachers to master both arts content and teaching led to inadequate implementation. Similarly, an expectation that artists can learn to sequence and organize instruction in accord with children's learning needs is equally as problematic. In a study of Carnegie Hall's *Linkup!* Program (Boston, 1999), evaluators found that artists who implemented professional development for teachers lacked knowledge of curriculum and teaching.

Pre-service training and professional development models are needed that bring artists and teachers together for collaborative learning and planning based on their particular areas of expertise. Simulations of actual classroom experience should be a part of ongoing training. Artists should be aware of the structure of a partnership, the structure of schools, the nature of classroom learning, the curriculum, and the characteristics of learners as a context for their work as artists. Most importantly, they should recognize that classroom work demands the same artistic standards they would employ in any other setting in which their work might be judged. Arts specialists should focus on arts concepts and learning strategies. They should draw on artists' expertise to bolster children's natural affinity for the arts. Classroom teachers should rely on artists and arts specialists to convey arts content, extending the knowledge and processes developed in arts experiences to enhance learning across the curriculum.

The challenge of working together in classrooms demands that professional development be ongoing rather than occasional, and that it be both collaborative and specialized. Professional development for partnerships should involve representatives of partnering organizations, artists, and teachers in understanding the multitude and complexity of tasks involved in implementing high-quality teaching and learning through a partnership approach.

At the pre-professional level, it is essential for colleges and universities to acquaint artists with the likelihood that they may be doing work in school settings. In music, institutions such as Eastman, Juilliard, the New England Conservatory, Northwestern University, the University of Maryland, and Georgia State University are already engaged in developing

educational programs that bridge the traditional boundaries between performance and education while affirming expertise in each area as an essential component of effective programs. Seminars, internships with teachers and artists, and re-thinking of traditional curricula are important aspects of this process.

## Conclusion

A higher education report entitled *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (American Association for Higher Education et al., 1998) suggests that "People collaborate when the job they face is too big, is too urgent, or requires too much knowledge for one person or group to do alone. Marshalling what we know about learning and applying it to the education of our students is just such a job" (p. 1).

Clearly, a similar argument might be made in arts education, where for too long arts specialists have attempted to service the learning needs of hundreds of students, or classroom teachers have been expected to teach the arts without adequate preparation. There is little question that supporting school arts programs through the combined efforts of arts organizations, artists, arts teachers, and classroom teachers offers an opportunity to marshal forces for the benefit of our schools and our society.

It is reasonable to expect that today's partnerships can become sufficiently mature to emphasize quality in teaching and learning. Funders should raise concerns about partnership proposals that fail to incorporate strong instructional standards, or that propose major change without reasonable time and budget allotments for collaborative planning.

In the final analysis, the function of partnerships is to endorse and implement excellence in arts teaching and learning. It is about artistic excellence, the learning of art, and the instruction that makes learning at high levels possible.

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A particular focus is how collaborative online international learning (COIL) has a transformational impact on decolonisation, interculturalisation, and internationalisation on curriculum. Overview.Â COIL exchange offers opportunities to bring diverse partners into intentionally designed relationships to explore and transcend geographic and perspectival boundaries and develop new, more complex (disciplinary) understandings of themselves, others, and society around them. Research on COIL to date has led to work that compares, links and examines learning in specific areas such as intercultural competences. Myers, DW 2001, Excellence in arts teaching and learning: A collaborative responsibility of maturing partnerships: The Art of Partnership. in M McCarthy (ed.), 2001 Charles Fowler Colloquium on Innovation in Arts Education: The Art of Partnership. Myers DW. Excellence in arts teaching and learning: A collaborative responsibility of maturing partnerships: The Art of Partnership. In McCarthy M, editor, 2001 Charles Fowler Colloquium on Innovation in Arts Education: The Art of Partnership. 2001. Myers, David W. / Excellence in arts teaching and learning: A collaborative responsibility of maturing ...