Rethinking Professional Development: “Action Research” to Build Collaborative Arts Programming

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Biographical Information

Gail Burnaford, from Northwestern University and the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) spoke on arts programs and professional development. This was a discussion of integration within the larger context of arts in schools. Dr. Burnaford advocates rigorous arts-specific education, but also sees the power of making connections and encouraging transfer. She also spoke about Teacher Action Research. Dr. Burnaford has been a teacher educator for fifteen years; before working in higher education, she was a preschool music teacher and a high school English teacher. Her current research focuses on the processes of arts integration and its implications for teacher development. She consults with the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education and the Ravinia Festival’s Music in the Schools Program in Chicago Public Schools. She shared editorship of Renaissance in the Classroom: Arts Integration and Meaningful Learning (Mahwah, N.J : L. Erlbaum Associates, 2001) with Arnold Aprill, and Cynthia Weiss.
I am pleased to be with you today and to continue the conversation about the nature of arts partnerships. It is indeed an honor to discuss where we have been with partnerships and where we can look forward to going. From my perspective as a university teacher educator, former classroom teacher, action researcher, musician, and arts consultant, there is a tremendous opportunity right now in the field of education for partnerships to fully participate in the school reform agenda in order to increase access for all children to engage in arts experiences. The Charles Fowler Colloquium has been designed to focus on “innovation in arts education.” Many partnerships in this country have gone far beyond innovation. They have been in existence for some time. We in this room can learn from each other, from the experiences of partnerships across the country, and from the research that has helped us to characterize their impact, such as that offered by Harvard Project Zero’s Steve Seidel and his associates (2001). We need to examine how we can have more impact on schools, teaching, and learning than we currently do.

In Chicago, in addition to my teaching and research at Northwestern, I work with the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) and the Ravinia Music Festival’s Outreach Program for Chicago Public Schools. CAPE is in its ninth year of partnerships between Chicago Public Schools and arts organizations involving a range of art forms. Ravinia is in its third year of partnerships with partner schools and selected teaching artists from a variety of musical backgrounds. I have learned much about what has and has not worked, and what has profoundly influenced arts specialists, teachers, and artists in their work in schools. It is my hope that my comments will help to continue the conversation and suggest some avenues for further investigation in the future.

The brochure for this colloquium notes that our time together is an opportunity “to explore collaborations between schools and communities for the enhancement of learning” in the fine arts. Today, I will discuss three aspects of those collaborations that I believe are essential to the long-term goal of sustainable, research-based arts education in our schools. These three points are as follows:

1. There appears to be a need for “mixed tables” in the discourse around arts education in schools. If partnerships are to fulfill their purpose of contributing to sustainable and research-based arts education, they need to be truly collective and collaborative in nature. The mixed table metaphor contributes to my own definition of what we are exploring within partnerships in Chicago—the process and products of arts integration.

2. There is a tremendous potential to apply what we know about effective and enriching professional development for teachers and artists within and across partnerships. I will discuss some of the elements of such professional development and propose ways to instill more of it in arts partnership work. As David Myers noted in his discussion of Elliot Eisner, the quality of teaching matters.

3. As collaborative associations, participants in arts partnerships—that is, classroom teachers and arts specialists, teaching artists from cultural organizations, and arts administrators—can and should participate in some form of reflective action research that not only contributes to their own internal plans but also contributes to the field of arts in education. Action research that is done by teachers, fine arts specialists in schools, and teaching artists need to be part of the funding mechanism,
reported and disseminated as part of the evaluation structure for partnerships, and part of the professional development initiatives across and within partnerships.

Generally, the question we must ask is, what are we leaving behind when we work as arts partners with schools? What do we do to sustain arts programming and school change? How are we building capacity within the school to maintain and encourage strong arts?

First, the issue of what it means to be a collaborative partnership. In my role as a teacher educator at a research institution (Northwestern University), it is apparent to me on a daily basis how often we in the academic world pursue individual agendas without tapping into the knowledge, experience, and interests of colleagues who often work in the same building. Similarly, research faculty in Schools of Education often do not avail themselves of the practical knowledge that exists with adjunct faculty who are or have been classroom teachers. Those adjunct instructors sometimes have little information about the research that full-time faculty are engaged in with teachers and children in schools.

In schools or colleges of fine arts, I suspect a similar situation exists. A School of Music that prepares future music teachers may have little or no occasion to work with a School of Education on the same university campus, even though their goals and their partners i.e., local schools, may overlap. Partnerships that engage artists to work with children in schools may likewise have no opportunity or structure in which to discuss how the arts processes should and could be taught with the faculty and students from the local universities who prepare specialists in those fields to teach full-time in schools.

That dilemma is magnified tenfold when one moves beyond the university campus to the local high school, middle school, or elementary school. There, teachers will readily acknowledge their isolation—often from each other—and more often from the professional discourse in their own academic disciplines and from university colleagues interested in the same subject field. Arts teachers, as we know, often find themselves physically isolated from their “regular education” peers and even more so, as has been the case in some of our partner schools in Chicago, from the partnership initiatives that are working in their own schools.

The same is certainly true for principals and superintendents in school districts who, when and if they meet with colleagues, often find themselves immersed in conversations about budgets, standards, and legislation rather than about teaching and learning in their respective schools. It is a rare venue that welcomes both administrators and teachers to meet together to discuss the challenges of learning—especially in the arts. Some research in the late 1980s confirmed that school administrators rarely are required to take courses in school arts as part of their licensure training (Dunn, et al, 1987). They may have little or no opportunity to participate in or learn more about the arts when they become school leaders and are often excluded from the planning for partnership initiatives that occur in their schools.

Now consider the community of arts administrators, cultural institutions’ education directors, and arts coordinators. I have attended meetings and conferences with those who have designed and led truly innovative partnerships across this country and in Europe. Seldom are there teaching artists or classroom arts specialists involved in those
discussions. Perhaps even more seldom are there representatives from the university community who are not evaluators in dialogue with the leaders of partnership arts organizations. The notion of delivery of services is still the predominant model; outreach is still something that organizations in partnerships do to schools.

Our experience in Chicago suggests that a “mixed table” of those who have contributions to make to the design and implementation of meaningful partnerships is essential if such collaborations are going to persist in the next decade. Several of my colleagues at Northwestern have instituted what they call a “work circle” as part of the process of curriculum development in the Center for Learning Technologies in Urban Schools. Work Circles are so named because they engage everyone in a specific task and people sit in a circle. Participants must, however, come from a variety of experiences and roles. Classroom teachers sit with faculty researchers; middle school students participate in problem solving with graduate students; undergraduates discuss an issue with a school administrator. Seldom do I see such conversations in the arts world. We are beginning to institute some of these intentional mixed tables in our work in Chicago. Principals and other administrators in partner schools with the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) play a key role in shaping the arts programming in many schools. Arts coordinators at partner schools work closely with not only the classroom teachers but also the administrators to ensure that programming is consistent with the standards within the art form, but also acknowledged as integral to the learning goals of the school. Arts partnerships as collaboratives would benefit from expanding the circle within and beyond the school building.

At Northwestern University we are currently beginning a funded project involving music in education in four partner schools with CAPE and the Ravinia Music in the Schools Program. This is a consortium project, involving the New England Conservatory of Music, the Metropolitan Opera Schools Program, and Georgia State University’s Center for Educational Partnerships in Music. For the Chicago project, Northwestern’s School of Education and Social Policy is in partnership with the School of Music. Before we began this initiative, the School of Music had not previously worked with the two arts organizations, CAPE and Ravinia. Faculty in the School of Music who prepare future music teachers as well as music performing artists never had occasion to consider the impact of partnerships on the profession and the world of the prospective teachers they were preparing. In the project, Northwestern interns will work with classroom teachers, arts specialists and teaching artists to develop curriculum projects, document and reflect on the learning, perform at school sites, and learn about collaborative process to engage students.

It seems clear that we need to reach out to bridge gaps such as this if future music teachers “in this instance” are to understand what arts partnerships are and how they could enrich the work of a music teacher in a school. In turn, arts professional associations, such as MENC and NAEA, can find occasions to meet and find points of discussion to deepen arts experiences for children in and through a partnership design.

How do music, drama, or dance, or art specialists within schools fit into the arts partnership initiatives? We have learned valuable lessons the hard way in Chicago. Often, initial attempts at partnering have not honored the integral contribution of in-school arts
specialists. The design for enhancing rigorous and enriching arts learning for young people in some schools has been translated into programs delivered by teaching artists, sometimes in collaboration with academic teachers and sometimes as artists in residence. I have known of schools in which the music or art teacher in the building was either unaware or totally uninvolved with such arts curriculum being sponsored by a partnership. Incidentally, this problem is not uncommon in schools. I know of other projects in science or writing, for example that are also not consciously structured to involve all those in a building who could help to ensure their success. Such an approach is clearly not collaborative; it is also not beneficial to the long-term health and sustenance of quality arts education at that school.

Let me give you a few examples to illustrate how partnerships in our context work. There are also instances where the collaboration between the school art teacher and the community partner is strong and vibrant and the program has transformed not only the school curriculum but the community as well. Two weeks ago, such an art teacher in Chicago was featured in an article in *The Chicago Tribune* entitled, "Mosaics put Pilsen School on art map." The title describes the impact that the art teacher, Francisco Mendoza and his 8th grade class had on the community. If you drive by Orozco Community Academy—a K-8 school in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago—you would see a building laced with 2,110 square feet of mural panels paying homage to the Mexican neighborhood’s character.

Mr. Mendoza could not have accomplished this with his students without the Mexican Fine Arts Museum partnership. He could not have raised the money—$250,000 for the murals—without the resources inherent in the community partnership. Now, the school itself is described as "one of Chicago's best outdoor galleries."

Partnerships that actively engage arts teachers in schools also can enable in-school programs to connect with programs from other schools. Organizing a collective of schools to participate in something such as a community-based art exhibit is not easy for a single art teacher in a single school. But the experience that his or her students have in exhibiting their work in a space that is also exhibiting work from several other schools is the positive result. In Chicago, we have done this a number of times. Students have come to the galleries to view each other’s work, listen to students from other schools discuss their work, and learn about the art of curating for a larger audience.

This past year, school-based arts specialists in one of the Ravinia Music in the Schools Program partnerships had a unique opportunity. Because of the partnership, a dance teacher and visual art teacher had the opportunity to prepare fourth graders to perform to Stravinsky's Firebird Suite at Cleveland Elementary School. Students in the fourth grade had a 15 week experience with members of a full orchestra and a conductor. They learned the story of the Firebird; they learned all the instruments of the orchestra by sight and sound; they learned basic principles of composing. The art teacher worked with students to construct visual art pieces that adorned the gym where the final performance was held. She guided students in the set design and construction. She assisted classroom teachers with costumes. The dance teacher choreographed the piece and no less than 60 students performed.
The night of the event featured an 86 piece professional orchestra, a conductor in a tux and 60 fourth graders who knew the Firebird Suite in ways that few of us ever will. The partnership afforded the children—and the teachers—with new options that they probably had not envisioned before. Literature, writing, dance, art, and music played a role in learning for those students that they will never forget. Last year, this school had no music teacher. Today they have a full-time music teacher who will work with the Ravinia Program and her peer teachers this year.

The Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education, as well as the Ravinia Festival’s Outreach Program, have worked on a model loosely described as arts integration. While that term has been defined in a variety of ways and has received its fair share of scrutiny—as all models involving teaching and learning in our schools should—we have learned several key things about integration that are pertinent to my comments here today.

A model of arts integration that has the potential to contribute to meaningful learning—within the art form and perhaps beyond—is one that engages artists with others in the school community. Integration, as we have come to know it, is about the planning, articulation, and careful assessing of artistic experiences by a collaborative that includes artists, specialists, arts/cultural organization representatives, school administrators, and teachers (Burnaford, Aprill, Weiss, 2001). Goals for the art form hold equal weight with goals for other learning areas. Integration may occur, not just with other content fields, but also with a community. Policies and procedures that allow those interested in arts programming in schools to meet together, plan together, implement together, and assess together are, by their very nature, integrative in the best sense of the word. That means that the music teacher in a building must have planning time built into her/his schedule to meet with a visiting artist. It also means that the visual art teacher, as part of her/his assigned load, is a part of the planning team at the cultural center’s partnership meetings. It suggests that, only through such a collective planning process, will students receive fully what they might not otherwise gain through a partnership. Partners, such as artists outside the school, need the expertise and attention of those within the school and vice versa.

The alternative is the seeking of partners that exclude schools. After school programs, youth arts development programs in communities, and center-based arts are all beginning to play an incredibly important role in the lives of young people particularly in urban areas, as the work of Shirley Brice Heath (2001) describes. But our purpose in examining “the art of partnerships” here today is to articulate how/why such partnerships are also good for schools—within schools—as part of the school day. Integration, in that sense, raises the larger scheduling and policy questions: how does a partnership become integrated into the school environment? What does a school look like that is “in partnership” through the arts? How can classroom teachers participate in a partnership without undermining the ongoing work of the general music teacher, band director, drama teacher, or visual arts specialist? What is the value added for the art form? We are beginning to get some answers to those questions in our work in Chicago.

Arts integration can be a means of looking at partnerships as a collective of people interested in a common goal—maintaining and promoting the integrity of meaningful arts experiences in schools—however that goal may be manifested in the curriculum. For me, it is not about how or whether music should be used to teach mathematics or whether
mathematics should be used to teach music. It is, more meaningfully, the process of bringing the mathematician and the musician to the table to perform knowledge (Beane, 1997) as they see it—and see what the implications might be for students.

My second point relates to the scenario I just described with the mathematician and the musician. We in teacher education know much more than we did even ten years ago about professional development. We know that we in the United States devote less than any other western industrialized country to professional development of teachers. Thanks to the research of Linda Darling-Hammond (1997), Ann Lieberman and others (2001), we know about how adult teaching professionals learn and what kind of contexts engender learning that somehow affects what teachers do in classrooms. We know that teacher quality is the single most important determinant of what children know and are able to do. In other words, as Maxine Greene reminds us, it is a matter of awakening: “a matter, gradually, gradually, of attending to the teacher and with the teacher” (2001).

We understand the inadequacy of one-shot in-service programs and we see the value of long-term, collaborative inquiry as a means of helping teachers continue to improve their practice. We have come to agreement that we as teachers need less of a conventional training model and more of a consultation, problem solving, and program development model (Ball and Cohen, 1999). We have, thanks to the work of Eric Booth (1997), Steve Seidel and his colleagues (2001), David Allen (1998), and others, considerable experience in the field affirming the value of assessing student work to improve student performance, but also to improve pedagogy. "The art of partnership", as this colloquium is titled, can and should also be the art of professional development. If partnerships are to make a tangible difference in the lives of teachers and children, professional development must be a concrete, explicit, and funded part of the work that they do.

Artists, arts teachers, and arts organizations know much about rehearsing, rethinking, critiquing, and re-imagining their work. They know about revising and they know about exhibiting. They know about performing and serving as audience members for others. They know about planning, creating, composing, constructing, designing, and choreographing for a purpose, with a goal, with creative energy.

Partnerships have an increasing opportunity and, I would contend, an obligation, to make an impact on the professional development of teachers, specialists, and teaching artists that they have just begun to tap. Partnerships have the capacity for such professional development. In the Ravinia partnership, we are developing curriculum frameworks with ongoing assessment and revision by artists and teachers involved. We view video of planning sessions, of co-teaching, of student performances in order to be able to articulate effective practice and point to evidence of learning. That process, in itself, is professional development that has a lasting effect on school cultures.

In your schools, as arts teachers, arts administrators or curriculum coordinators, I would urge you to look for or create instances where “in-service days” or professional development days include and/or all of the following: rehearsing, performing, critiquing, exhibiting, composing, revising, being an audience for one’s peers. Partnerships with cultural organizations, museums, arts organizations and independent artists can help you to design
such professional development that is long term, consistent, and focused on teaching and learning.

Partnerships can bring a new vitality to professional development as they work within schools, but only if part of their mission and part of their funding is solidly rooted in that work. Partnerships in my view have been excellent at delivering programs. They have apparently made a great impact on children and young people in schools, with visiting artists and cultural organization specialists working directly with groups of students to perform a musical or mount an exhibit. We are learning more in Chicago about the often-implicit impact that partnerships might have on schools—through working directly with faculty on the arts staff and throughout the building.

In our Ravinia and CAPE programs, professional development is absolutely at the center. To their credit, the Ravinia Music Festival has allocated much funding to the ongoing, long term workshops, in class visits, teacher/artist planning, writing workshops, and curriculum development that is beginning to show evidence of impacting on children. We view video of children singing; we compose music using symbols; we examine photos using homemade frames. We participate, in short, in arts processes together. Then we plan for student learning. There is support for analysis, reflection, and change within the collaboration we have begun to develop.

In the CAPE partnerships, we refer to artist-teacher collaborations that have become stronger and mutually sustaining over time as deep teams. Such teams engage in these practices consistently each year. We have discovered that, as they work more often together, their teaching improves. More importantly perhaps, the quality of the students’ work that is produced is significantly better. This is a crucial learning and has implications for partnership design.

Judith Warren Little (2001) describes four approaches to professional development as follows: 1) professional development as inspiration and goal-setting—the kind that districts often offer to whole staffs at the beginning of the school year, 2) professional development as knowledge and skill development—a design that has been at the core of many recent math/science partnerships with universities in which research and practice inform all participants as classroom teachers learn the most current theory in their fields, 3) professional development as collaboration and community—a process that we are learning more about, as teachers repeatedly express their sense that they are learning more from each other in cross-school meetings than they could have learned in their own building professional development, and 4) professional development as inquiry—my final point for this discussion—which I will elaborate on briefly in a minute.

Arts teachers, teaching artists in schools and partnership coordinators can learn from the ways in which these approaches have worked in other disciplines. The mathematics profession, in particular, has embraced the challenge to see professional development as inextricably tied to rigorous mathematics teaching and learning in our schools. There are now external mathematics communities in many areas; there are university-sponsored teams of teacher researchers exploring mathematics concepts and student understanding; there are association-sponsored think tanks for math teachers and math experts outside the schools. They have begun to develop what Ball and Cohen (1999) call a “practice-based
theory of professional education.” The arts community, its professional associations, and partnership colleagues—can do so too.

The new performance-based assessments that are being encouraged for teacher preparation and teacher re-certification across the country offer a range of opportunities for partnership investment. In Illinois, teachers prepare Professional Development Plans to pursue re-certification over a five-year period. How might partnerships play a role in teachers’ career professional development plans? What difference might that make in the arts experiences of students?

My final point addresses the issue of inquiry—the fourth process that Judith Warren Little suggests as professional development. I would suggest that the potential of inquiry, which, for the present purposes I will call action research, extends beyond the value it holds for teacher learning. It is a process that invites practitioners to set an agenda for re-searching their practice and developing policy proposals that are data based to inform decisions. The central question for arts educators may be, how will engaging in a partnership really improve the learning of the students? In other words, what is the value added for engaging in an arts partnership? The most compelling responses to that question come from an educator’s own action research, collecting data with and from her/his own students in the rehearsal hall, studio or performance space.

Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) said that it is not enough for teachers’ work to be studied; they need to study it themselves. Teacher action research has its roots in the work of Kurt Lewin in the 1940s in this country. Lewin developed a research model that focuses attention on observing, understanding, and changing a situation in a particular context. Action research does not look for large-scale, generalizable phenomena, although looking across contexts is valuable and familiar to action researchers. Rather, the current practice of action research as implemented by teachers focuses on data collected within their own classrooms and schools. Action research, in this sense, places teachers at the center of the research process (Burnaford, Fischer, and Hobson, 2001). In this context, they are not subjects in other’s investigations. Action research can be a process within partnerships for designing more effective arts curriculum and authoring better school improvement plans that are grounded in real experiences, systematic data collection, and collaborative analysis.

In our work in Chicago with the cross-city collaboration, action research is a key component that not only contributes to the dialogue at teacher/artist/student meetings. When we researched for the CAPE book, Renaissance in the Classroom, we interviewed teachers, artists, parents, and children. We examined curriculum lesson plans and student work. We viewed performances and we asked participants to comment on what they had learned. Such practices are an integral part of changing what doesn’t work and improving what does. These practices will also be a consideration in the larger research and evaluation agenda of the consortium. Music specialists will be collecting and interpreting student work in their classrooms; Northwestern students will be doing field-note observations and discussing them with their artist mentors in schools. Video slices will be gathered and discussed in order to improve teaching and learning. Students will interview and be interviewed as they move into, through, and beyond the arts curriculum planned for them by the arts specialists, visiting artists, university students, and classroom teachers at their schools. If arts partnerships are to thrive, reflective inquiry on the part of participants
must play a role. We must go beyond program delivery and provide the collective evidence of effective teaching and learning.

Teachers in some states are now being required to prepare Professional Portfolios, video analyses of their teachers, and samples of student work with reflective commentary. All of these are consistent with the processes I have described as teacher action research. Projects come and go; outsiders pass through school buildings and move on when the funding is gone. If we are to do more than “educational triage” on arts programs—a phrase I have borrowed from Linda Darling Hammond—then we need to examine the processes that make a difference for the long term. If teachers within school buildings embed the most effective practices of professional development, artistic inquiry, and generative expression into their teaching as a result of engagement with artists, museum curators, university students and faculty, or symphony orchestra members, they will be forever changed and so will their classrooms. *If learning goals are aligned with partnership goals, accountability will be served.*

Now more than ever, we need more than educational triage. The arts can help our children express what they are feeling and seeing around them in a troubled world. They can highlight skills that can provide new ways to envision solutions to the problems that are a reflection of this global community that we live in today. Arts programming in schools today needs the resources and the capacity to build upon what we know. Professional development within schools can encompass the world beyond schools. If we are to make the case for enduring and memorable arts in education, forging partnerships for professional development can make a valuable contribution. The more impact partnerships can have on school change and student learning, the longer we will have a place at the table.

**References**


