

Rapporteur's Report:
Reflections from the CNAL Conference
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In thinking about how I would approach my response to the stimulating presentations and discussions of the past two days, I began to reflect on own career and to base my comments on my experiences with arts education in Canada over the past 40 years. I began my teaching career as a music educator in a Fine Arts Centre for staff development in the Calgary Separate School Board in 1973. I was twenty-three years old, and very impressionable, having just graduated from St. FX University. Alberta was on the opposite side of the country to where I live in Nova Scotia, and it represented new adventures in this amazing country.

Shortly after arriving in Calgary, I settled into my new environment, and was very enthusiastic about my first job. My responsibility was to provide in-service training for generalist teachers so they could effectively deliver a meaningful music curriculum. Those were indeed exciting times, and I was working in a very innovative model for teacher development. Last night at dinner, Douglas Risk and I reminisced about life in Calgary in those early years in the 70's. He was at Alberta Theatre Projects and recalled the tremendous drama education that was happening in Calgary schools at the time, thanks to key folks who were committed to developmental drama. It was indeed vibrant times for arts in education, but being young and naïve, I thought it was the way things were supposed to be. I had left Nova Scotia where during the 1960s, Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia offered a range of summer school programs for music teachers to introduce them to a new way of teaching music, and in particular the Kodaly method. Hundreds of teachers from across the country and the eastern US attended those summer school courses taught by leading Kodaly educators from Hungary. I believe I took arts and learning for granted, especially since music and the arts are so rooted in Maritime culture, and consequently receive extensive support in schools – a state that continues to this day.

Now, 40 years later, I have a totally different perspective, having devoted my entire career to arts and learning in Canada. After listening to the presentations yesterday, I was reaffirmed in my belief that arts education must reflect our current realities – culturally, fiscally, and politically. What has changed? What is our understanding of the arts today as they relate to creativity, innovation and the economy? What are the 21st century competencies that are required of our graduates? We could fill volumes on each of these topics, but alas, here we are still discussing how we create more awareness for the arts in education.

Lately through my consulting company, I have been given opportunities to work in other fields, including heritage and the library world. In comparing my experiences there to those in my career as an arts educator and advocate, I was immediately drawn to the many powerful messages that emerged during the past two days, and was brought to a place and time where I doubted if our approach to arts education and to advocacy has relevance for today's children and youth, for parents, business and industry, politicians and the public at large. For example, twenty years ago in the early days of e-media,

libraries soon realized that they could no longer exist as quiet havens of retreat for avid readers who selected books from shelves and immersed themselves in reading. We all know the ramifications of e-media on print, and we know that fewer and fewer people are relying on print text as a form of information. In a way, libraries were becoming irrelevant and they had to reinvent themselves. Most soon embraced a new vision as community centres where people gather, discuss aloud, and socialize. The same thing is currently happening in museums. Traditionally, store rooms of artifacts, artworks and historical items were dusted off at intervals and the public was in a way “given permission” to view them. The public felt unattached to these items, and so interest in museums dwindled significantly. The result....the museums are reinventing themselves in an effort to seek relevance. Collections are now digitized and available for the world to experience online. Are the arts ready for a similar transformation?

During the Round Table discussions yesterday, I was reminded of the many challenges that currently exist in arts education in Canada:

- The arts in schools in many parts of this country are not taught by arts educators with specialized training, but rather by generalist teachers. This creates a huge deficit model for students who, despite effective curriculum in each province, are limited in their learning by those who teach.
- New curricula in dance, drama, music, and visual arts have been developed in most regions of the country, but they are often disseminated to teachers without proper resourcing and professional development. In music curriculum, for example, there is a definite shift to more “creative” music making where students improvise and compose from the very early years, through to high school. How can teachers do this without the experiences of creating music themselves, or without proper training in creative music-making pedagogies?
- Our schools are becoming global villages where we see a range of cultures in each classroom. Is the teaching and learning appropriate for this new shift in demographic in classrooms? How do we embrace other cultures in the teaching and learning process?
- Each year, students at the secondary level are required to take additional mandatory credits in subjects like maths, sciences, social studies, second languages, physical education, and as a result, arts courses can often no longer be accommodated in their schedules.
- Co-curricular activities after school are no longer viable for many students because of transportation (bussing schedules rule the time table in many school districts across Canada). I recently did a professional development day for the string teachers in the Halifax District School Board, and was shocked to learn that the orchestral program in the Dartmouth schools is dying because the students who normally come together for rehearsals after school, cannot participate because they need to baby sit their younger siblings, work at part-time jobs to save for post-secondary education, or because they cannot get rides.

So this brings us to the big question of advocacy. When we advocate, who are we speaking to? Do others see the relevance for the arts in schools? If no, then why not? Are we speaking to the converted? Look around the room. Is the delegation at this event reflective of Canadian society and culture today? How do we approach the issues of arts in education in 2013? Do we try to pitch our

arguments for more support for arts education to politicians, funders and the general public in terms of what has always existed in arts education over the past few decades? Or do we need to reinvent arts education and make it more relevant to learning in 21st century Canada? As Lee Willingham questioned earlier this morning, “Are the arts the soft subjects – the handmaiden of more important disciplines?”

I am reminded of a friend in Newfoundland/Labrador who is delivering the secondary school curriculum in music through on-line delivery. As you know, there are many communities in that province that are isolated. There may be only 5 students in grades 10 – 12 in the community. How do they receive an education in and through the arts? Through a consortium to support an e-learning platform called CDLI (Centre for Distance Learning Innovation). Andrew, as a qualified music educator – and yes, they still exist in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island – sits in a studio, and conducts classes for students from these remote regions, and they make music together synchronously. It is a model that is drawing attention internationally. This is the new look of arts education and as Jeff Melanson told us yesterday, “These are unprecedented times to move the Arts and Learning agenda.” He asked some pointed questions:

- Why is art important? (and I would ask, why is arts education important?)
- Why should it be government funded?

Jeff stressed the importance of cross-sector collaboration. He said, “To separate arts education from the arts community is tragic. We need to see ourselves as stewards for the entire eco-system....leaders in the sector. Collaboration is key. We need to aim higher. We undervalue ourselves and this does not help our cause.”

During the panel on creativity, Roberta Smith highlighted that we need to eliminate physical barriers, persuade others that engagement in the arts is a worthwhile endeavour, and convince others that it is a rewarding way to spend their limited time and resources. Francine Chaîné reminded us of the importance of process over product when defining an effective education in and through the arts. She also reinforced the importance of teachers experiencing creativity themselves before they facilitate creative music making with students. Francine stressed the fact that “formation is key.”

Antoni Cimolino eloquently expressed the need to help the public understand the ‘why, how and what’ you do as an artist. “We need to break down the barriers and misconceptions, and Culture Days is a start in this direction.” In his comments on that panel, Jeff noted that from his experiences many politicians are totally on board and then something shuts down. Why is this so? We always said that if only arts educators could rise to positions of power and influence, things would be different. But in many parts of the country, we see this happening, and yet there is no significant change in attitude on the part of governments. What happens when a politician returns to her/his office? How can we guarantee sustainability and not be viewed as the perpetual target during budget deliberations?

During the discussion on creativity a very relevant question about language was posed. I firmly believe that when we advocate for arts education, we speak as though everyone knows and understands what we are saying. This creates an attitude that the arts are exclusive and only for those with talent. We

need to break down those barriers and as Angela Elster so aptly put it, “We must find our own words, and we must resist complacency.”

In the last panel of the day on marketing, Max Wyman reminded us that we need to stop whining. Thank you for that Max, because it is how I have felt for the past several years. We have a reputation of being whiners: “Give me more money so we can get on with our work!” During that same discussion Sanjay Shahani reinforced the notion that we need to be more collaborative and consider work that cuts across sectors, and Scott Thormley urged us to stop considering ourselves as ‘marketers’ and think about the case we are trying to make.

As I read the responses from each of the Round Table groups, I saw many common threads, with solid suggestions for moving the agenda forward. To sum up the overall suggestions, it is recommended that

1. CNAL continues to launch a concerted effort to get the message out. This was articulated in CNAL’s proposed work plan that we heard about in the AGM yesterday. This can be achieved through a variety of ways, including an online forum for arts and learning, and the development of regional hubs across the country. In addition, events like this conference should continue and take place in regions across the country, with politicians and decision makers present as active participants. Through on-going partnerships and collaborations, we can become stronger.
2. CNAL continues to build the network, and develop stronger streams of communication, not only from CNAL to its members, but also communication between and among its members, providing support when possible. We are stronger in numbers!
3. CNAL can become a repository for sharing best practices. Despite the fact that we often whine about the current state of arts education in Canada, there are amazing things happening in pockets across the country, such as National Youth Arts Week, the amazing work in arts education happening in Quebec, the work of the Coalition for Music Education including Music Monday, and countless initiatives in schools and communities in every province and territory, some of which were highlighted earlier this morning in the breakout sessions. We need to get these stories out, and we need to share them to garner more support for arts and learning in schools. CNAL has a pivotal role in making this happen.
4. CNAL has a role to lobby and represent our interests to politicians and decision makers at all levels of government. In particular, it is important to remain on the radar of CMEC – the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.
5. CNAL must continue to support research in arts and learning, and to build a solid body of evidence that makes our cause a priority. In addition, we need to collaborate with other organizations who are attempting similar studies, thus providing a more concerted effort in getting the message out.
6. CNAL must develop key messages for us to use in our advocacy efforts when we return to our respective jurisdictions.

On a personal recommendation, I would like to recommend that the document prepared by the National Symposium on Arts Education – Policy Guidelines for Arts Education in Canada – become a

working document for CNAL. This was developed over three years with some of the leading experts in arts education contributing, including folks from Ministries of education in most provinces. It provides a comprehensive framework for school districts and Ministries as they develop policies for arts education in their jurisdictions.

During the final Round Table, key messages were discussed, and there were several common elements that emerged. This will need to be reviewed and formalized in a committee setting to ensure continuity with CNAL's mission, vision and goals, but the following statements represent common threads in the conversations (in no particular order):

- Every child has a right to have a quality education in and through the arts.
- Arts from a community, by a community, with a community can change a community.
- Understanding the arts happens through a process. Policy makers should experience the art-making process to be inspired.
- The arts have a significant impact on the Canadian economy.
- The arts are important for addressing social issues in communities across Canada.
- The arts are not intended to make everyone an artist, but rather to make critical thinkers who appreciate the arts and are creative.
- The arts are not just for the talented, but for everyone.
- The arts provide safe places where all are welcome and encouraged to participate.
- The arts lead by example, encouraging engagement, use of technology, problem solving, innovation, creativity.
- The arts have emotional impact.
- The arts motivate.
- The arts encourage us to "change the world however we can."
- The arts are bigger than 'arts and learning'.
- The arts are constantly evolving. We need to be part of the paradigm shift.
- The arts are a record of mankind, and as such need to be fostered and developed side by side with other priorities.

And so in conclusion, I congratulate Larry O'Farrell and Katie Bergin and all who contributed to the planning of this conference. I am more encouraged than ever that the arts and learning agenda will be strengthened, thanks to the work of the Canadian Network for Arts and Learning. You are all part of this network now, so let's continue to build momentum and work together to achieve our common goals. To quote Jeff Melanson, "There are many opportunities available to us. We need to be un-renting and remain optimistic. "