

# Canadian Network for Arts & Learning Online Mapping Project

## Summary of Findings

Toronto Hub – Young People’s Theatre

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# Hub Overview

## Purpose and Description

The aim of this first hub was to start gathering insights from various stakeholders in the arts regarding the status of arts and learning in their communities, the issues and barriers they face, and how the proposed online map might help them achieve their goals.

The hub started with two brief arts workshops (one music-based and one theatre-based), followed by a brief presentation of the online map, and then a roundtable focus group discussion.

## Participants

A total of 12 people participated in the focus group discussion (9 participants, 3 CNAL representatives). Of the non-CNAL participants, seven were female and two were male. They represented a variety of backgrounds (i.e., visual and performing arts) and positions (i.e., school teachers, as well as community arts education organizations and businesses) operating out of the greater Toronto area.

## Focus Group Discussion

The following questions were provided to participants and were used to guide the discussion:

1. What is the status of arts and learning in your community?  
Prompts: *What are your hopes and dreams for the arts in your community? What challenges/barriers do you face in implementing and supporting these aspirations?*
2. How could the map help/serve your arts and learning community and achieve your goals?  
Prompts: *For example, would it help promote awareness of different arts programs within the community?*
3. What elements/features might be modified or added to further enhance the effectiveness and relevance of the map?  
Prompts: *Would it be useful to include networking or professional development opportunities? Is there anything you would change in terms of layout to make it more user friendly?*
4. Are there additional questions you feel we should be asking with regards to the Mapping Process?  
Prompts: *Is there something unique to your community or your circumstances that you would like to draw our attention to?*

## Summary of Discussion Findings

The discussion generated a lot of valuable insight into perceived issues and barriers for participation and learning in the arts, particularly within the contexts of Toronto and Ontario, and how the online map might serve to alleviate some of these issues. Participants also provided suggestions and considerations to improve the map.

### Perceived Issues and Barriers

#### 1. The arts are not valued within the school system and society at large:

- There is a disconnect between the arts community, education community, and general public. We need to create better partnerships, connections, and shared understandings/goals to ensure the sustainability of the arts.
- The people funding and making decisions in education do not see the arts as being a fundamental part of human development.
- There needs to be a shift in education from what kids can learn to *do*, to how they can learn to *be* in the world; the arts play a vital role in this kind of education, and thus deserve more recognition in the education system.

#### 2. Accessibility and equality:

- Certain neighborhoods, schools, and organizations have more resources to offer, creating inequity in terms of access to the arts.
- Adult learners are often overlooked in arts programming and advocacy, even though they are the demographic that is most likely to have the money and decision-making capability for learning in the arts. They need to know where and how to access arts programming that is catered to their specific needs.

#### 3. Lack of training and experience:

- Teachers in schools lack training in the arts, limiting their ability to provide quality art education to their students. Furthermore, professional development art workshops are typically a one-time deal and teachers lack the knowledge to build on the skills they develop in the workshops.
- Artists lack pedagogical training, limiting their ability to facilitate groups of students and deliver developmentally- and age-appropriate programming.
- There is a lack of time, funding, and resources to provide teachers and artists with the training they require, or provide opportunities for partnerships between teachers and artists.

## How Can The Map Address These Issues?

- It has the potential to be used as an advocacy tool by providing a visual of where there are inequities in accessibility (i.e., marginalized vs. over-served communities);
- It can show opportunities for professional development to enhance the practice of teachers and artists alike;
- It can serve as a place for adult learners to find programs that suit their needs;
- It can help “elevate” the status of the arts in the public eye by expanding outreach;
- It can show artists/organizations potential areas where their services could be useful.

## Suggestions and Considerations for The Map

- Creating different map layers stacked on each other that filter the different art disciplines.
- Consider how organizations have to self-identify. Many are multi-disciplinary, which may create problems with filtering under one category.
- Highlighting different sections/neighborhoods within one city, instead of just the city as a whole.
- Add a filter for adult learning.
- Quality control of the represented arts organizations is an issue, but may be impossible to regulate:
  - A star rating system was discussed (similar to those used for restaurants and hotels), but in the end was not supported by all.
  - Other potential options: links in member profiles to websites with testimonials; recommendations to join from other members (may however perpetuate inequity).
  - CNAL should remove themselves from any endorsements (having links to testimonials instead of having them directly on the map could be a solution to this).
- Focus on having the map as a registry/identifier, rather than as an endorser of organizations.

## Suggestions for Future Hubs

Based on observations and feedback from this hub, here are some recommendations for future hubs:

- Professional development opportunities are valued by participants and should be continued;
- Consider limiting the number of presenters/workshops to one;
- There were definitely “leaders” throughout the focus group discussion, with a couple of people only contributing at certain points and one person who did not contribute at all. Smaller groups would possibly allow for people to voice their opinions equally.