The Canadian Network for Arts & Learning

Online Mapping Project

Research Report – Year 3
Ontario Hubs
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Introduction

The Canadian Network for Arts and Learning (CNAL) is working to unite local, regional, and national arts and learning communities with the aim of transforming the arts education landscape and cultivating a more creative, innovative, and prosperous Canada.[1] Part of their networking task involves the development of an online map that will showcase and connect the diverse arts and learning entities across the country. A three-year initiative funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation is currently underway to start the mapping process in Ontario.

To gather feedback pertaining to the usefulness and functionality of the map, CNAL is conducting a series of Eduarts hubs across Ontario that bring together various stakeholders within arts and learning. Each hub involves arts workshops and/or presentations followed by an audio-recorded focus group discussion.

Findings from the six Ontario hubs from Year 3 of the project are summarized in this report. The finding presented here are meant to build on the themes of the Year 2 report, including the ongoing barriers faced by arts and learning stakeholders in terms of funding, accessibility, and resources, value of the arts, connecting and communicating with other artists, and concerns related to arts in schools.

As with the discussions from the last two years, participants provided insight into the status of arts and learning in their communities and schools, and discussed how the map might benefit their particular contexts. Practical suggestions and strategies to improve the map and promote the growth of the arts sector were also discussed at length. The information gained through the hubs is continuously being used to inform and develop the map.

[1] see CNAL vision, mission, and values at http://eduarts.ca/vision-mission-values

Overview of Focus Groups

Purpose and Description

The Year 3 discussions aimed to gather insight from various stakeholders in the arts regarding the status of arts and learning in their communities and schools, the issues and barriers they face, and how the proposed online map might help them achieve their goals. A summary of locations/events, and discussion participants are detailed in the table below.

Focus group participants represented a variety of professional backgrounds (e.g., visual arts, performing arts, education, arts and crafts) and positions (e.g., school teachers, arts administrators, city cultural administrators, teaching artists, board members).

Date	Location	Non-CNAL Participants*
March 25, 2019	Toronto (Scarborough)– Burrows Hall Community Centre	Approx. 40-50
March 28, 2019	Thunder Bay– Baggage Building Arts Centre	12
April 5, 2019	Tyendinaga– FNTI, Aviation Campus	28
April 24, 2019	Windsor– The Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County	15
May 22, 2019	Toronto– CSI Spadina	12
May 25, 2019	Ottawa– National Arts Centre	13

*These numbers represent group participants only, not overall hub attendance.

Discussion Questions

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

1. Please tell us your name and a little bit about your position and organization or school.

2. What are the needs and aspirations for arts and learning in your context and what challenges and barriers do you face to its implementation?

    Prompts: *What are your hopes and dreams for arts and learning in your context? What challenges/barriers do you face in implementing and supporting these aspirations? What successes have you experienced?*

3. Thinking back to the needs you just mentioned, how did or could *Canada's Map of Arts and Learning* help you address some of your needs? Let's begin with those of you who have had the opportunity to use the map.

    Prompts: *How did/could you use the map? Did/could it help you do what you wanted it to (e.g., solve an issue, promote awareness of your organization/school, make professional connections, locate someone to collaborate with, etc.)?*

4. In addition to *Canada's Map for Arts and Learning*, what else could CNAL do to support you in your work?

Summary of Discussion Findings

Many of the participants in this year's discussions were school educators and arts professionals working with schools. Findings centered around outlooks and concerns associated with school-based learning, as well as some discussion about the overall arts environment within the communities. Participants had many positive stories to share about the arts in their areas, including resources that many communities offer for artists and the general public. Similar to findings in Years 1 and 2, common challenges included funding, resources, and accessibility, as well as connecting and communicating with other artists, and school concerns. Participants were enthusiastic about the map and were eager to try it out for themselves, noting the potential impact. A few suggestions were offered to improve its functionality.

Positive Outlooks and Directions for Arts and Learning

Many participants noted that in schools, teachers are working hard to bring the arts into their classrooms despite potential obstacles. Fortunately, it was also shown that there are programs in cities such as Toronto and Kingston that try to bring artists into schools. In addition, there are many programs within the community that support the arts and artists. The following sections summarize the current status of arts and learning and aspirations for the future, as observed by participants.

The Arts in Schools

- Teachers in various schools feel fortunate that they have a solid arts education and are supported by their administration, school board, and parent councils;
- Teachers are constantly trying to find ways to bring the arts into their schools, either by inviting artists to do a workshop or integrating the arts through cross-curricular activities;
- Schools in cities like Toronto offer programs, such as the Science Genius program, where students use music to create a rap about science, which then allows students to go to competitions and share their work;
- Teachers are creating new programs, such as Kennedy High School in Windsor, where they offer arts classes geared towards ESL learners.

Support for the Arts in the Community

- In areas such as Toronto and Kingston, there are numerous arts events, such as Nuit Blanche Toronto;
- There is a growing diversity within the arts, such as LGBTQ artists, female artists, and Indigenous artists in areas such as Ottawa and Toronto;
- Municipalities, such as the City of Kingston, are interested in helping artists find employment and will fund individual artists and their projects;
- Many participants in different regions stated that there was an active arts community in their areas and that artists are supporting other artists;
- Programs such as RISE in Toronto allow younger and emerging artists to perform their work and get feedback and support from other local artists;
- Arts organizations such as the Windsor Symphony Orchestra and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) are teaming up to build programs for people who have visual disabilities;
- The general community is starting to see the importance of the arts and there is a growing appreciation for creativity.

"I do believe we are in a moment in time where the broader community is understanding the need for creativity and that's exciting. There is a growing awareness across all types of sectors how vital creativity is." – Ottawa Participant

Perceived Issues & Barriers

Although participants were excited to share personal tales of success in their work, many were concerned for the state of the arts in their areas. Funding, resources, and accessibility was a common concern amongst the focus group participants. In addition, artists stated that the value of the arts has been deteriorating within the general community and are worried about the future of the arts. Emerging organizations as well as artists, especially newcomers to Canada, reported to finding it difficult to build connections and communicating with other artists. Within schools, teachers are worried that they do not have the space or the capability to bring the arts effectively into their classrooms, and do not have the right resources to invite teaching artists.

"As artists, we have to pigeon hole ourselves into crime prevention and other strategies like mental health to get funding but the arts should be able to get funding on their own as a practice."
– Thunder Bay participant

Funding, Resources, and Accessibility

❖ Funding for the arts tends to be project-based which is a challenge to its sustainability;
❖ For national programs located in Ontario, it is difficult to apply for funding since it is usually given for one region:
    ❖ The needs here may not be the same needs as other provinces such as Alberta or British Columbia;
❖ There are not enough opportunities for youth under the age of 18 to be placed in leadership roles;
❖ Transportation and having a centralized space has become an issue in areas such as Toronto and Windsor where different programs and organizations are spread out around the city;
❖ There is an overall lack of space to meet and create art (e.g., performance space, exhibition space, studio space);
❖ There is no guild, union, or association representing teaching artists like there is for playwrights or visual artists:
    ❖ Due to this, teaching artists do not have standard rates and they feel pressured to decide what to charge for their educational/community-engaged work;
❖ There is a lack of professional development opportunities;
❖ While some cities, such as Kingston, have programming to help kids access sports, there is nothing like this for kids to access the arts.

Writing Grants

❖ Artists and teaching artists have stated that they struggle with grant writing, especially for those just learning English:
    ❖ Participants stated that they are frustrated with the funding process, saying that they are "in a box" and have to specify exactly what they are doing;
    ❖ Grantees do not want to fund existing programs and are often looking for something new;
    ❖ The granting process is competitive, especially in an environment of scarce resources;
    ❖ Funders are more interested in outputs (e.g., numbers of people signing up) than outcomes ("impact on people").

Value of the Arts

❖ People in the community do not believe that the arts are accessible for them because they do not directly interact with the arts;
❖ Some artists feel they are not getting support and that people are "putting them down" all the time;
❖ Artists are not being compensated for their work or getting the recognition for the true value of their work;
❖ Parents do not show enough support to their children if they want to pursue the arts and they have a lack of understanding of the importance of the arts;
❖ Some communities, such as Thunder Bay, had a strong arts community years ago, but have lost many arts programs since then;
❖ There is a perception that if an artist works in community arts education they have failed as an artist;
❖ There is a fear that the arts will dwindle and that artists and the community will not have what they have now;
❖ There is a lot of frustration in having to constantly fight for the arts and keep them alive;
❖ There has not been much support in terms of arts-based learning or activities for youth

Connecting and Communicating

❖ Some artists stated that they do not have a strong enough network on new projects that may need some sort of collaboration;

❖ Some organizations in the same area overlap with others in what they are doing and their programming;

❖ There is stress, especially for smaller or newer organizations, in finding people to work with and looking for spaces;

❖ New and emerging artists are unsure of how to contact potential partners and schools;

❖ It is not only difficult to find connections, but sustaining them as well;

❖ There is not enough awareness of Indigenous art and artists;

❖ Artists struggle with self-promotion

❖ There is a lack of opportunity for sharing and networking amongst teaching artists

School Concerns

- ❖ Students feel that teachers are taking away their creative freedom in schools:
    - ❖ Youth do not see themselves or their art represented in the arts classrooms
- ❖ Teachers who teach art and music do not have a background in the arts;
- ❖ Adult education is often overlooked, especially when trying to invite artists to work with adult learners;
- ❖ Schools do not have the proper space for the arts;
- ❖ Some teachers are not interested in running extra-curricular activities in the arts, especially since it would take up time;
- ❖ Teachers find it difficult to think of ways to bring the arts into their classrooms;
- ❖ Administrators will hire artists to come to schools but are not really interested in what they are doing;
- ❖ STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics) is no longer a priority in schools;
- ❖ If a principal is not interested in a program or artist, it will not happen;
- ❖ There are cuts being made to arts programs in schools;
- ❖ Some schools are unable to afford to have artists come in;
- ❖ There is a shortage of trained and qualified art and music teachers in schools

"I do like that cross-curricular connection too because you can bring music in to look at math, to look at literacy, etc. That said, [arts-integration] is something I struggle with a little bit because I believe that art should be fundamental, but we'll do what we need to do to reach the teachers and have the teachers feel that it's important to bring this experience in."
– Ottawa participant

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Hopes and Aspirations

Participants listed a variety of hopes and aspirations for the future, including bringing more arts integration into schools, as well as more accessibility and connectivity to the arts within schools and the community.

- There is a need in other communities for students to access *quality* arts education by having arts specialists come and teach;
- More time needs to be dedicated to the arts in schools;
- There needs to be more opportunities for teachers and arts educators to work with people outside of the system to allow new ideas.
- While some communities may offer grants, there needs to be some assistance to artists in finding funding programs and how to write grants;

- There needs to be more connectivity for minor demographics such as youth and Indigenous populations, as well as building more connections between artists;
- The arts need to be more accessible in terms of space in different communities so people are able to attend more events and join more programs.
- More opportunities need to be made for arts-integrated teaching that links the arts to other subject matter

Brainstorming The Map

After discussing successes and challenges of arts and learning in their specific area, participants were given the opportunity to discuss how the map has impacted users and how it can benefit them. Participants offered suggestions on how the map can be enhanced to meet their needs. This section summarizes participants' views on the potential benefits of the map, as well as their concerns and suggestions for improvement.

Potential Benefits & Uses

Many of the participants were enthusiastic about the map and how it can help them in the future. Points of impact included building connections, bringing the arts into schools, and highlighting opportunities for promotion and advocacy for the arts.

Building Connections

- Artists found that they could connect with each other in hopes of collaborating on projects or even merging if they have a similar goal;
- The map can be used to connect with students from Indigenous communities living on reserves who may not have access to other artists and events;
- Can be used as a way for artists to reach out to the community;
- The map can help artists reach out to youth in the community and can connect those students to other opportunities;
- Can help new artists in finding connections and resources, such as funding.

Bringing the Arts into Schools

- A few teachers stated that they were going to share the map with their colleagues and friends to spread the word;

- Participants are excited about the potential ability of the map to help them meet and work with artists and invite them to their schools;

- Teachers found that they could use the map to help find funding programs in their area that might help them bring more arts into their schools;

- The map can help teachers find an artist or a program to take their classes and work with professionals;

- Can be a useful tool for organizations to identify schools that have a budget for bringing in artists and that have a history of bringing teaching artists and arts programs into classrooms.

Promotion and Advocacy

- The map can inspire youth to pursue a career in the arts;
- Can be used as a way for artists to build a platform for themselves, especially emerging artists;
- The map could help everyone see the importance of the arts and its impact on their communities;
- Artists were excited to use the map and see others who want to be involved and also believe that the arts are important.

"I think the map is important so that you don't realize you're operating in isolation." – Windsor Participant

"As a teacher, having this map, this is something I would share to my colleagues." – Tyendinaga Participant

Concerns & Suggestions for Improvement

While participants were excited to use the map, there were a few concerns and suggestions that were made to improve it. Topics included general features of the map, publicity of the map and use, and registration for the map and artist profiles.

General Features of the Map

- Provide a link on the website or map that includes funding sources for artists and teachers;
- Include monuments and other institutions related to the arts for the general public to find and visit;
- Include a testimonials page to show how people have successfully used the map to find connections and/or find schools to collaborate with;
- Add a discussion area or forum for artists to interact with each other to share new ideas;
- Have a function to change the language of the map, especially for newcomers to Canada;
- Include data that shows the benefits of arts education for advocacy purposes;
- Have a way of keeping track of profiles that a user has already visited.

Opportunities Board

Many participants expressed the need for an opportunities board on the map so artists and/or teachers can list what they are looking for and what kinds of workshops they want. This will allow artists to connect with schools and come and work with classrooms.

Concerns about Use

- Some communities, such a Thunder Bay, already have a teaching artists directory, and believe this map would have the same information;

- Artists were concerned that they may be too busy to sign up or forget to update their information;

- A question was raised as to how communities who may not have easy access to technology might use this map or be made aware of it;

- Teachers were overwhelmed at how many profiles there were and how they could get through them all and deciding on the right artist for their classroom.

Publicity of the Map

- Many participants had stated that they had not heard about the map before the hubs and thought more awareness needs to be made;

- Teachers had asked how the map was being advertised to schools;

- A few participants wanted to know how the map might be different than other online maps or search engines, such as Google.

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Registration and Artist Profiles

Registering on the Map

- A couple of the participants wanted to know who exactly could register for the map (organizations, trade-workers, etc.);

- One participant acknowledged how they have come across discrimination within the arts community and thought that there should be an agreement when registering that all users will treat each other with respect.

"Bringing things digitally is really interesting– one solution to accessibility."
– Toronto participant

Profile Information

- There is a concern about including pricing in artist profiles as this may change depending on workshop and event. Instead, it may be better to state whether they offer free or paid programs;
- Include testimonial sections within artist profiles;
- Have artists be specific about languages they know and can teach in, as well as age groups and difficulty level of their workshops;
- Identify whether they can work with adult education;
- Artist information needs to stay up-to-date, possibly by sending out annual reminders;
- State whether they are willing to mentor emerging artists.

"The map gives us access, and that's extremely powerful!"
—Toronto Participant

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General Suggestions for CNAL

In addition to discussing the state of arts and learning and the map, participants were asked how the Canadian Network for Arts and Learning can help artists and educators continue to succeed. The following section summarizes participants' responses.

- ➢ Continue to advocate for the arts by going to different organizations to generate support;
- ➢ Provide evidence that the arts are crucial by collecting data and using prior research;
- ➢ More networking opportunities, such as the hubs, where artists can have discussions and network;
- ➢ Set up regional branches/chapters of CNAL to work with communities on the ground;
- ➢ Help standardize rates for teaching artists and educate others wanting to partner with them as to what teaching artists can provide and what they do;
- ➢ Share resources such as business models, fundraising ideas, project models, etc.

"I think it would be nice to have
an entity that could advocate
somehow for us."

– Toronto Participant

Conclusion

The findings from Year 3 reflected many of the same themes as those from Years 1 and 2. For example, positive outlooks included continuing resources and organizations throughout Ontario. In addition, many of the challenges and barriers remained the same as the previous years, such as funding and accessibility, and connecting with other artists. It is through these consistencies that we can begin to build a unified understanding of the status of arts and learning across the province.

Participants were excited to learn about the map and discuss the possibilities it can create for artists and teachers who are looking to collaborate. They also found that the map could be used as a tool to help resolve some of the aforementioned challenges, such as building connections and examining the broader arts community throughout the province. Suggestions were made to improve the map, such as creating an opportunities board where artists and teachers can post about what they are looking for and what they offer.

Finally, participants were happy to know that there is an organization like CNAL who is advocating for the arts and provides networking opportunities. People were interested in attending more hubs such as these to talk with other artists and educators. They are excited to see the future of the map and the organization.

The hubs have shown to be a positive experience, and much enthusiasm has been expressed towards the map. Finding more stories of impact will be important as more people learn about the map and continue to use it.

A big thanks to all our hub venues and partners!