

The Canadian Network for Arts & Learning

Online Mapping Project



**Research Report – Year 2
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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 five hubs from Year 2 of the project are summarized in this report. The findings presented here are meant to build on the themes of the Year 1 report, including the ongoing barriers faced by arts and learning stakeholders in terms of funding, accessibility, equity, and outreach of programs.

As with the first year discussions, 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://www.eduarts.ca/vision-mission-values>

Overview of Focus Groups

Purpose and Description

The Year 2 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, discussion participants, and language used are detailed in the table below.

Focus group participants represented a variety of professional backgrounds (e.g., performing arts, visual arts, education, arts and culture) and positions (e.g., school teachers and administrators, ministry representatives, independent artists, program coordinators, funding representatives).

Date	Location	Non-CNAL Participants*	Language
October 18, 2017	Ottawa – CNAL national conference	10	English
October 18, 2017	Ottawa – CNAL national conference	6	English
October 18, 2017	Ottawa – CNAL national conference	10	French
May 22, 2018	Hamilton – Art Gallery of Hamilton	19	English
May 26, 2018	Cobalt – SPARC symposium	5	English

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. What is the status of arts and learning in your classroom, school, and/or community?

Prompts: *What are your hopes and dreams for the arts in your classroom, school, or 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? Would it help promote awareness of different artists who can support arts and learning in the classroom or schools? Would it be helpful to create connections between the school and 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?*

Observations & Suggestions for Improvement

As the project moves into its third year, CNAL might consider altering the research process at each hub according to the number of participants. To date, the hubs have varied in terms of participant numbers. However, it is always the hope of CNAL and the partners to attract and include as many people as possible. From a practical standpoint, higher numbers present many challenges for focus group data collection. For instance, more facilitators and recording devices are needed, as well as *space* to ensure the different discussions do not interfere with each other.

Thus, the following recommendations are offered to address some of these concerns:

- Eliminate the focus group format for data collection when participant numbers at the hubs are higher than 15 people;
- For groups larger than 15 people, consider posting the discussion questions on a projector screen and having participants form their own small discussion groups. They can discuss the questions, write down main ideas and points on a paper or poster board, and then share their reflections with the whole group afterwards. Parts of this process can still be recorded if necessary and the written ideas can be collected for analysis. This format may also prove more engaging for participants and eliminate a lot of the redundancy in the data collected through multiple focus groups within the same hub.

Additional Considerations:

- Having funders present at the table was really valuable for CNAL, as well as the other participants. Consider inviting them to future hubs!
- Participants suggested measuring the impact of the map on its users (which is already underway). Consider sharing this information with partners and stakeholders, in addition to funders;
- French-speaking hubs would benefit from having someone who is Francophone leading the discussion group(s) to ensure better flow of conversation and to show that CNAL is fully respecting their voices and contributions in this process.

Summary of Discussion Findings

Many of the participants in this year's discussions were school educators and arts professionals working with schools. As such, the findings center mostly on outlooks and concerns associated with school-based learning, with some additions from a community arts perspective. Overall, participants had many positive things to say about the status of arts and learning across the communities we visited, such as the need and demand for artists in schools. Similar to the findings from Year 1, common barriers include funding and resources, connecting and communicating with partners, and school-based issues (e.g., curriculum expectations). Again, the map was well-received as a tool to help communities achieve their goals and many suggestions were offered by participants to improve its functionality.



“I think that’s why this mapping is so vital, because it’ll help connect us all.” –Ottawa Participant (educator)

Positive Outlooks and Directions for Arts and Learning

There appears to be a great need and interest for public engagement with the arts and artists. Schools are consistently looking to integrate the arts into their spaces and programming, despite financial and curricular restrictions. Major cities, such as Hamilton and Ottawa, have several supports and programs in place to promote this type of engagement. The following sections summarize the current status and direction of arts and learning, as observed by the participants, in terms of support for the arts and artists, and resources for arts and learning.

Support for the Arts and Artists

- There is a need and interest on the part of schools to participate in community arts opportunities and to have artists working in classrooms;
- Several schools are supportive of the arts and integrate the arts into parent/teacher nights and other events;
- Teachers are constantly looking for new artistic energy and resources for their students;
- Community organizations are supporting local artists by seeking out their services for programs;
- The arts are increasingly accepted and supported by the public in rural areas;
- The larger cities of Ottawa and Hamilton offer a lot of public arts opportunities (e.g., art crawls, performances, exhibits). Ottawa participants mentioned a growing number of grassroots arts initiatives, while Hamilton participants noted the many supports for arts education, as well as a committee dedicated to the serving the interests of the arts community.

Resources for Arts and Learning

- Community arts centres provide resources (e.g., kilns, studio space) that schools may be lacking and are happy to work with schools to meet their needs;
- There are programs to train artists to bring their craft into schools and work with children, such as the *Music Alive* program through the NAC which currently trains local artists in Iqaluit to work in schools;
- Partnerships between schools and artists through organizations like MASC have been successful in connecting individuals and providing quality arts education;
- There are regional grants available for arts education opportunities (e.g., Art Smarts in Waterloo offers about 10 grants per year; the Oakville community foundation has a Trillium grant for cultural experiences) as well as guest speakers (e.g., through organizations such as Historical Canada);
- Indigenous and arts consultants are available through the school boards and have created valuable resources for teachers (e.g., the HWDSB Indigenous consultant has created a website for teachers called “Indigenous Education at the Commons” that is available through the online school board hub);
- There is an increasing focus on the part of funders to bring the arts into out-of-school contexts, such as seniors’ residences and Boys and Girls Clubs;
- Organizations such as the National Arts Centre (NAC) offer opportunities for individuals of all ages to engage with the arts through their various internship, bursary, and educational outreach programs.

“I’ve always found there to be a tremendous interest from schools and school boards in having artists in the classroom. But there has conversely been next to no funding. I’m always keen to try to keep going to schools, but it’s always been a difficult thing to do.” –Cobalt Participant (artist)

Perceived Issues & Barriers

Despite general positivity toward arts and learning, participants expressed concern for Indigenous artists and communities. More funding and resources are also needed to improve the situation in schools (particularly the elementary level) and rural areas. Communicating across sectors and disciplines was viewed as a barrier to the growth of arts and learning in general. In the school context, teacher readiness and wellbeing were primary concerns, as well as issues with curriculum expectations and administration.

Indigenous Artists and Communities

- ◆ There is a lack of access to materials, technology, and other resources in northern and Indigenous communities;
- ◆ Promoting Indigenous arts and artists is a problem, namely because there is a persisting “us” and “them” mentality that is supported through the colonial institutions in which we operate;
- ◆ Underrepresentation of Indigenous artists across communities is an issue because they do not separate themselves as “artists” in the way that Western culture does.

“It’s not just about equipping Indigenous artists with some knowledge about our colonial system, it’s about changing our colonial system so that the doors are really open.” –Ottawa Participant (arts professional)

Connecting and Communicating

- ◆ Organizations outside of the arts do not always know how to approach artists, how to work with them, and what their services are worth;
- ◆ Locating artists working within specialized areas (e.g., Indigenous artists with specific storytelling knowledge) is time consuming and difficult;
- ◆ The general public may not understand or care about issues facing the arts, and so are reluctant to speak up for arts causes;
- ◆ Arts groups and organizations tend to work in silos and don't engage in conversations that might help leverage the work they do in support of artists and arts education, or perhaps they don't know how to start those conversations;
- ◆ Spreading the word out about different arts opportunities within and across rural communities is a challenge;
- ◆ Community arts and culture organizations have a wealth of lesson plans and resources for teachers, but often have no place to share them because they are disconnected from the school community;
- ◆ Artists may not know how to connect with schools, and vice versa, for professional development workshops for teachers;
- ◆ Schools and partnering artists do not always have a clear aim for the initiative or project;
- ◆ Arts teachers are isolated from each other and are too busy to share ideas or meet with others.

Funding, Resources, and Accessibility

- ◆ Community and school arts education are often viewed in the same way and are funded through the same sources, despite having different goals and outcomes. They need to be considered separately;
- ◆ Private funders are “doing the job of the government” by providing money to the arts;
- ◆ There is a lack of financial resources for artists and community arts organizations, for bringing artists into schools, and for running regular arts programming in schools;
- ◆ There is a scarcity of materials and space within schools for arts education, particularly at the elementary level;
- ◆ Artists are often not offered enough (or any) compensation for their services in schools and communities;
- ◆ Rural communities struggle more to provide services and resources for arts education;
- ◆ Transportation to and from arts opportunities in rural communities is hard to come by.



Teacher Readiness and Wellbeing

- ◆ Teacher education programs are experiencing a loss of instructional hours for the arts at the Intermediate/Senior level;
- ◆ Unqualified teachers end up teaching the arts at the elementary level, and often have no idea where or how to search for resources;
- ◆ Teachers with limited experience in the arts are overwhelmed with having to teach the arts and are reluctant to include the arts in their teaching;
- ◆ There is a lot of emphasis on student mental health, but not teacher mental health and wellbeing;
- ◆ Arts teachers often feel isolated and unsupported within school environments.

Specific concerns were voiced in terms of teacher readiness and willingness to integrate Indigenous content in the classroom:

- Teachers want to move beyond presenting Indigenous content through one-time workshops or activities to encourage appreciation and continuity, but find it difficult to do so;
- There is a lack of Indigenous curriculum and professional development resources for teachers;
- Non-Indigenous teachers in schools are uncomfortable using online Indigenous lesson plans for fear of cultural appropriation;
- Non-Indigenous teachers are unsure of who to ask for guidance on Indigenous content.

School Concerns

Curriculum Expectations and Approaches

- ◆ Schools still focus on teaching European artists and using templates;
- ◆ There is a lack of time for arts education at the elementary school due to curricular constraints;
- ◆ Teachers are required to connect all out-of-school activities to curriculum expectations and have to fill out extensive paperwork to bring students on field trips;
- ◆ Some teachers feel the arts education expectations for younger grades are unrealistic;
- ◆ Students in the higher grades tend to lack confidence in their arts skills due to preconceived ideas of proficiency and talent, which may, in part, stem from the way schools approach arts education.

Administration, Decision-Making, and Logistics

- ◆ The feasibility of engaging in arts activities depends on the school (i.e., some administrators may be on board, others won't be);
- ◆ School administrators are increasingly fearful of lawsuits in relation to field trips and activities (e.g., arts museums);
- ◆ There is a top-down approach to decision-making from the Ministry to the boards, the boards to the principals, and then the principals to the teachers;
- ◆ The focus on accountability takes away from community-building in schools;
- ◆ Administrators and teachers are busy and may experience difficulty fitting artists/ arts programming into their schedules.

Hopes and Strategies for Success

Participants voiced several hopes and strategies for the future success of arts and learning in their communities. Mainly, they saw partnerships and collaboration as key strategies for improving access to resources and also for building a sense of community. Changing mindsets within and around the arts and the notion of reconciliation are important for moving forward. Schools in particular can achieve higher quality arts education through accessible online resources and by building relationships with each other and surrounding communities (especially Indigenous communities).

Partnerships and Collaboration

- Building bridges for collaboration within and across communities, and having opportunities for roundtable discussions;
- Hosting events and conferences, like the CNAL conference, to connect people and organizations, as well as promote shifts in traditions;
- Creating partnerships across organizations/sectors to make arts initiatives more attractive to funders;
- Forming partnerships between rural schools and “big brother or sister” organizations that can help advocate for and provide access to arts education;
- Seeking out opportunities for arts funding by tapping into mental health or professional development initiatives;
- Creating relationships and partnerships between schools and Indigenous Elders/communities.

Changing Mindsets

- Understanding that arts and learning extend beyond the school environment;
- Breaking down disciplinary boundaries in the arts in order to innovate and change our way of thinking about arts and learning.
- Altering our colonial mindsets and systems to facilitate reconciliation.

Improving Teaching and Learning in Schools

- Creating a digital catalogue of artworks that is inclusive of many different cultures and arts practices, and that teachers can access from anywhere;
- Uploading YouTube videos that model age-appropriate arts activities in real classrooms;
- Promoting reconciliation across all areas of the school curriculum;
- Having arts experts and Indigenous artists engage teachers in planning activities they can then bring back to the classroom;
- Organizing regular meetings between teachers and administrators across schools to build community and to showcase arts projects.

“I’ve been appalled by Canadian history, and I think it’s really important to bring the idea of reconciliation forward in my classroom through the arts, through social studies, through drama, any way I can.” –Hamilton Participant (educator)

Brainstorming The Map

After talking extensively about the positive and challenging aspects of arts and learning in their schools and communities, participants were given the opportunity to discuss how the map might be useful and how it might be enhanced to fit 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

There is potential for the map to address many of the aforementioned concerns and help communities achieve their goals by supporting learning in schools, increasing awareness and representation of the arts/artists, and highlighting opportunities for partnerships and advocacy.

Supporting Learning in Schools

- Schools can connect with each other using the map to organize shared virtual arts classrooms;
- Could be an interesting interdisciplinary learning and research opportunity for students in social sciences, arts, and even math (e.g., find artists in different provinces, research their arts practices, see how far they are located from each other, contact them through e-mail for an interview, etc.);
- Teachers can find museums, centres, and organizations that offer different perspectives through their activities than what is offered through the school;
- Showcases community organizations that may be able to provide funding and resources to schools.

Awareness and Representation

- Expands perspectives of one's surroundings in terms of artistic activity, particularly in rural communities;
- Creates opportunities for individual artists to be represented;
- Increases the representation of Indigenous artists;
- Can be a resource for intermediary/senior level students who need to find co-op and volunteer positions;
- Helps aspiring young artists and young professionals who are searching for mentorship and learning opportunities, as well as alternatives to conventional jobs and university training;
- Smaller cultural organizations outside of major city centres can be recognized for their unique offerings (e.g., lower prices, local artists);
- Helps touring artists with planning potential shows, venues, and audiences for their work (e.g., providing valuable contact information).

Partnerships and Advocacy

- Acts as a tool for connecting artists with each other and the public at large;
- Helps to build partnerships that are vital to the growth of the arts sector;
- Raises the profile and status of the arts so people understand what artists' services are worth;
- Advocacy tool for funding and policy purposes;
- Showcases potential partners for projects and funding (funders in particular can use it as a tool with their stakeholders to point out potential partners);
- Highlights which schools have experience working with artists/arts organizations.

“For a lot of our funding programs, we’re looking for partnerships... I always tell people to find partners.” -Cobalt Participant (funder)

Concerns & Suggestions for Improvement

The general idea behind the map was well-received by participants, but not without some recommendations for improvement. Participants expressed concerns and suggestions with regard to general features of the map, who and what is represented, outreach and use, and profile and registration information.

General Features of The Map

- Have an option on the search menu for international arts and culture opportunities, in addition to Indigenous opportunities;
- Artists/organizations could have a separate icon (e.g., flag) that shows they offer services in different languages;
- Perhaps include a downloadable document for teachers that offers insight into how they can use the map in their classrooms (e.g., lesson plans, how to contact/approach artists, how to find artists for Skype lessons, etc.);
- Have the option to ask questions, similar to an “ask your librarian” box or tab;
- Include a drop-down menu or feature that allows an individual to identify as “an artist looking for...” or “a teacher looking for...” and then have links to the relevant services.

Representation

- Increase the representation of Indigenous artists;
- Connect with different Ministries within Ontario, such as the Ministry of Seniors' Affairs, to find different kinds of arts initiatives and funding that might be included;
- Include after school programs and arts partnership organizations (e.g., MASC);
- Include professional networking and development opportunities;
- Make an effort to represent French-speaking artists and organizations, as there is currently a lack of options on the map;
- Keep in mind that some organizations, such as traveling theatre companies, may not have a specific location to pin on the map, but should still be included;
- Make sure arts opportunities and venues that are perhaps less known are represented. That way the map is not only offering opportunities that are too far away for some individuals to access.

Concerning the representation of schools...

- There is some concern about adding schools to the map, as their offerings change year to year and differ across classrooms, etc.
- Being represented on a map of arts and learning may not be a high priority for many schools;
- Schools may be concerned with unknown artists contacting them through their information on the map (this is generally frowned upon);
- Instead of individual schools, perhaps have one point for school boards that then lists the schools within that point. Also, make sure school boards give approval before putting them on the map;
- Encourage schools to showcase the art projects being created!

Outreach and Use

Concerns about USE

- The map needs to stay current and up-to-date for teachers and the public to keep using it
- The map needs to be easily searchable through Google and must be cellphone/tablet friendly to appeal to teachers and other users
- The map should cater to as many users as possible, otherwise it would be a waste

OUTREACH Strategies

- Have a simple list of “looking for” ads that gets sent out to the CNAL listserv so artists and/or organizations can easily see where their services might be useful, and also where artists and/or organizations can post their offerings;
- Connect with resources that teachers already use (e.g., Ontario Arts Council) to build an audience;
- Provide the link to school board arts consultants and networks (e.g., EFTO) who can send it to teachers and post it within the school board hub;
- Reach out and develop community partnerships (e.g., libraries, arts affiliated organizations) to ensure the map gets disseminated to as many people as possible;
- Have a bulletin board, Facebook group, or some other format where people can post happenings;
- Look to other organizations’ models and approaches to find effective methods of outreach and communication for the map;
- Encourage funders to tell their funding recipients to register on the map.

Registration and Profiles

Registering on the Map

- Some facilitators may have difficulty with the pedagogical wording used on the registration forms (e.g., one artist preferred the term “sessions” rather than “lessons”);
- Pricing options on the forms do not necessarily reflect the way organizations price their activities (e.g., the Art Gallery of Hamilton does not have hourly rates and has subsidies available for groups in need). Have the option for organizations to explain their pricing schemes.

Profile Information

- Artists and organizations can list how their programs meet age-specific curriculum expectations;
- The question of space for program feedback was brought up again, but participants did not agree on a format. It was suggested that individual artists/organizations should be responsible for asking for their own feedback;
- Organizations might have a calendar of availability (or at least list it somehow), similar to what you would see on vacation rental sites;
- Artists can indicate on their profiles if they are interested in becoming a mentor for young artists;
- Artists need to indicate on their profiles if they are permitted to work in schools (i.e., police background checks).

“Un autre défi, je dirai, c’est l’isolement. On est parfois seul dans nos écoles pour enseigner art... Une carte comme ça ou on peut connecter avec d’autres enseignants, ça sera bénéfique.” –Ottawa Participant (educator)

Conclusion

The findings from Year 2 in many ways reflect those from Year 1. For instance, participants' positive outlooks and hopes for the future of arts and learning in Ontario are consistent, as are the common barriers experienced by those working in the field (e.g., insufficient funding, outreach, and professional development). It is through these consistencies that we can begin to build a unified understanding of the status of arts and learning across the province.

This year's discussions provided additional insight into the experiences of school professionals and their arts partners. Non-Indigenous teachers at all levels feel overwhelmed and unprepared to incorporate Indigenous content into the arts curriculum, despite wanting to do so. Top-down approaches to decision-making and accountability in schools also seem to impact arts education and teacher wellbeing in profound ways. Artists and arts organizations are eager to work with schools to enhance the quality of arts education, but don't always know how to approach them. The map can help alleviate these challenges primarily by connecting schools to each other, to artists, and to Indigenous resources.

We also had the opportunity to speak with stakeholders working within rural and French-speaking communities. The map was viewed as particularly useful in these contexts to increase representation and awareness of artists and arts opportunities. However, for the map to be truly useful in this sense, CNAL must first enhance its outreach and build an audience in these regions.

To date, the majority of respondents have been supportive and interested in the map. Its full potential can only be realized as the artist/organization database continues to grow (2618 and counting!) and stories of impact begin to emerge. Onward into Year 3!

A big thanks to all our hub venues
and partners!



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