

Canadian Network for Arts & Learning Online Mapping Project

Summary of Findings

Kingston Hub – Tett Centre

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Hub Overview

Purpose and Description

The aim of this hub was to gather further insight 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 presentations from three local arts-related initiatives and organizations, followed by a brief presentation of the online map, and then roundtable focus group discussions (two groups).

Participants

A total of 17 people participated in the focus group discussions (12 participants, 5 CNAL representatives). Of the non-CNAL participants, ten were female and two were male. They represented a variety of backgrounds (i.e., visual and performing arts) and positions (i.e., artist-educators, students, as well as community arts education organizations) based in the Kingston area and surrounding communities.

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

Although the focus groups covered a range of different topics related to learning in the arts (e.g., people with disabilities, arts in rural communities, teacher training), two major categories of perceived issues emerged from the discussions: 1) issues with accessibility and equity, and; 2) issues with teaching and learning. Participants shared their views on the future of arts and learning in their communities, and also how the map might help move them in that direction while simultaneously addressing the existing issues. They further provided a list of concerns and suggestions for the map in terms of accessibility, criteria for users/organizations, and technical considerations.

Issues

1. Accessibility and Equity

- Cost and transportation to and from arts opportunities are major issues for many different populations (e.g., the elderly, individuals with special needs, school groups with limited field trip funds, low-income families, people living in rural communities).
 - It was further noted that there is a difference between equality and equity; an example of the former (equality) being that an event or activity may be free for all to participate, but many are not able to because they do not have the means to get there (equity).
- Information about programs can be difficult to find and access, as there is currently no one central location where people can search for opportunities.
- Rural communities and low-income areas are more limited in their resources than more densely-populated and well-off regions, but still have a wealth of creative offerings that need to be showcased and celebrated (e.g., a woman knitting beautiful socks in her farmhouse who perhaps teaches others or sells at a local fair).
- The arts are viewed as an elite and professional realm that is not accessible or approachable for all.

2. Teaching and Learning

- There are currently not enough qualified, trained teachers and/or artist-educators to provide quality arts education for diverse populations.
- Teachers in schools differ in terms of comfort levels with the arts, ranging from downright fear to easy-going and motivated. In general, they do not have enough time to devote to working with artists or for planning meaningful learning

experiences in the arts. All these factors together influence students' perceptions and participation in the arts.

- Children need more opportunities to partake in quality arts education in order to:
 - Ensure the sustainability of the arts (i.e., students who have positive experiences will continue to seek out arts opportunities across their lifespans);
 - Build self-confidence, pride, practical skills, and creativity;
 - Enrich their lives with something that is personally fulfilling!
- Short-term or one-off arts programming is problematic for all learning populations, offering little more than a time filler activity. There is a need for long-term funding and teacher support to allow for extended learning opportunities.

Future Directions for the Arts

- The “silos” around the various learning and professional disciplines are slowly breaking down. There is now more of an interdisciplinary focus, leading to more collaborations between domains (e.g., the corporate sector is increasingly looking to the creative sector for solutions). This trajectory is viewed as important not only for the sustainability of the arts, but also communities as a whole.
- We are moving away from the notion of the arts as a simple consumable. People are starting to realize the value of active participation in the arts (i.e., making a painting vs. going out and buying one).
- People want more entry points into the arts, as evidenced by the growing popularity of activities such as knitting and colouring.

The Map

Potential Benefits

- Show how the arts are thriving in Kingston and different communities, as well as the rich opportunities that might be available in smaller towns.
- Great for research and advocacy, as it can show change in programs and offerings over time (today vs. ten years from now).
- Showcase community leaders in the arts who might potentially serve as role models for other organizations and surrounding communities.
- Keep organizations up-to-date with the happenings and programs in the community, so they may then refer clientele to specific programs that meet their needs.

- Serve as a tool to bring diverse people and domains together and create connections within the community.
- Provide much needed “entry points” into creative endeavors for people who are less affluent or educated in the arts, or who are seeking affordable and accessible programs, or who have just moved to the community.
- Normalizes the arts in our society so that the artist is equally represented within the community and serves an equally important role as the grocer, salesperson, fireman, etc.
- Can make rural communities and individuals feel less isolated if they see how many opportunities are in their own towns and surrounding communities.
- Allows Aboriginal artists to be represented and integrated into the fabric of a community.

Concerns and Suggestions

Accessibility

- The map needs a lot of visual images and icons to make it more accessible to people with impairments or language barriers.
- Make the information available in other formats (e.g., newspapers, community bulletin boards, information kiosks, etc.).
- Promote the map and make people aware of it, and create connections with organizations who can help their clientele navigate the map. For instance, if a person does not have a computer, community centres should be aware of the map and be able to help that person access the map.
- CNAL needs to find a way to make the map approachable, so that it is for everyone and not just the “elite”.

Criteria for Users/Organizations

- Have a jury to curate the map (e.g., Ph.D. students). It was mentioned that this could be part of the next level of funding for the project.
- Some sort of learning component should be an important criterion for organizations or programs wanting to join the map.
- Profiles might mention whether an organization is run year-round, if it is established, if it is funded by any arts funding body, etc.

- Profiles should contain links to the organizations' websites.
- There is a concern for people who might do more harm than good (e.g., unqualified teachers providing programming to people with disabilities). Programs and educators need to be vetted in some way.
- Formal and informal learning opportunities should be present on the map so that it honors the "small opportunities" and makes it easier for people to participate. Thinking of the map in terms of "no opportunity too small" might also help draw people in.

Technical Considerations

- Consider adding filters for cost and distance. This is an important consideration for areas with no public transit, for instance.
- Consider having a sidebar for special arts events and regular updates/newsfeeds so people keep coming back to the map. Perhaps consider e-mail updates that people can filter to their liking.
- When organizations make profiles, you might have "sliders" or scales that allow them to indicate the level of difficulty/participation required in the program or activity (e.g., lots of talking vs. no talking, structured lesson vs. bring your own materials and paint in the presence of others).
- Can the map have a phone app? (Would be beneficial for people who are traveling).
- Keyword search is important, but also consider the possibility of searching by some kind of universal icon (again, for accessibility).

Suggestions for Future Hubs

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

- Consider limiting the number of presenters/workshops to one, OR be sure to include some form of hands-on learning to maintain participant interest.
- Smaller discussion groups worked out better this time in terms of allowing everyone to voice their opinion. Keeping the groups between 6-8 participants seems optimal.
- Have participants sign the informed consent to participate in research at the discussion tables, this way we can be sure everyone that is actually being audio recorded has signed the form (some people come in late, some leave early, so this will help to keep things in order).