

# ASSESSING LEARNING THROUGH THE ARTS

A Report by the Seattle Arts  
Education Consortium

“ EDUCATION THROUGH  
ART, (WHEN) CLEARLY  
UNDERSTOOD, MAY BECOME  
THE PARADIGM FOR ALL  
OTHER EDUCATION.”

ABRAHAM MASLOW 1957

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# 01

## INTRODUCTION

Within the past several decades, the emphasis in public education nationwide has steadily moved away from arts-rich and creativity-based learning toward more standardized, test-based learning. In recent years, budget cuts and the “No Child Left Behind Act” have pushed the education climate even further toward high-stakes testing, narrowing curriculum.

In line with this, Washington State has enacted the Washington Assessment of Student Learning standards, shifting local schools’ priorities toward meeting test-based standards. At the same time, public education in Washington state faced significant budget cuts. By 2005, Washington ranked 42nd in the nation in public education spending.

Public schools have had to cut many rich program offerings including in-school arts classes. In 2005, nearly 60 percent of Washington State principals reported one hour or less of music instruction per week in their schools. Worse yet, 60 percent of Seattle Public School elementary schools offered no visual arts program that same year.

During this time, several existing organizations in King County and countless more practitioners were growing to meet a new demand for the arts gap through diverse, innovative programming both in and out of the school day. Seattle’s nonprofit arts education organizations were natural advocates for more creative learning opportunities but remained somewhat disconnected from each other, lacking a cohesive, persuasive message to more effectively advocate for arts education.

In response to these challenges, among others, seven of these regional nonprofit youth arts education organizations formed the Seattle Arts Education Consortium (Consortium), a collaborative, two-year project, in the summer of 2005.

### Consortium Goals

Consortium members shared a unified desire to turn the tide of a system that was increasingly sidelining the arts as an academic discipline and not adequately recognizing it as a powerful tool for engagement for young people both in and out of the school day. In order to do this, these organizations sought to evaluate and document the impact of their youth programs individually and to contribute this information to a collective pool of evidence, communicating the impact of arts education programs in the region.

Specific goals were to: 1) improve the quality of each member’s program evaluations and assessments, 2) share best practices in arts education programming, 3) develop and implement professional development for the combined teaching artist faculties, and 4) generate consistent messages around research findings and the impact of arts education on young people.

The Consortium pursued the project by seeking and receiving multi-year funding from the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation totaling \$275,000. The Seattle Mayor’s Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs also made a small contribution to the project, which was officially launched in September 2005 and ended in September 2007.

In order to participate in the Consortium, organizations had to meet the following criteria:

- **Design and implement out-of-school arts education programs**
- **Contract with and pay professional teaching artists who are both practicing artists and teachers**
- **Focus on serving primarily underserved communities**
- **Base program development on specific educational principles and theory**
- **Support an experiential, learner-centered curriculum, multi-age classes and authentic opportunities to celebrate youth voice**
- **Create opportunities for increasing challenge in the art media offered**

Although members’ programs seemed to have much in common, the emphasis and delivery of their programs were distinct, specifically in ages/grades targeted, the amount and frequency of contact with students, the specific educational focus of programs and the art forms offered. The final roster of arts education organizations participating in the Consortium and their unique programming are captured in the following table:

**CONSORTIUM MEMBERS**

Name/ Program(s)	Grades	Program Structure	Enrollments or Youth Served	Focus
<b>Arts Corps</b>	K–12	In-school and after-school classes during school year and summer approximately one and a half hours twice a week for eight-week sessions	2,400 total student enrollments	Visual, performing and literary arts
<b>Coyote Central/ Studio Coyote</b>	5–9	Weekend or after-school 20-hour courses in fall & winter terms and weeklong intensive courses in summer	1,000 total student enrollments	Visual, performing, and culinary arts; media, robotics and design/build
<b>Hugo House/ Hugo Writing Classes for Kids, Scribes</b>	3–8 10–12	After-school classes two hours once a week for 10 weeks and scribes summer intensive program	175 unique students	Literary arts
<b>Nature Consortium/ Art &amp; Nature</b>	K–12	After-school classes two hours once a week for 10–12 week sessions and during summer for four hours per day for eight-week sessions	1,400 unique students	Visual, performing and literary arts; environmental education emphasis
<b>Powerful Schools/ Powerful Arts</b>	K–6	Primarily in-school integrated curriculum one hour twice a week for four to five week sessions; also after school	1,100 unique students	Visual, performing and literary arts
<b>Seattle Center Academy</b>	7–8	Two-week, summer intensive sessions for five hours a day	300 unique students	Visual, performing and literary arts, media, science
<b>Youth in Focus</b>	7–12	After-school and summer programming three hours twice a week for nine weeks	250 total student enrollments	Photography

In later phases of the Consortium’s work together, specifically in evaluation planning and shared messaging, these program differences offered unanticipated challenges and opportunities, as discussed in later sections of this report.

**Consortium Activities**

The project itself was broken down into two years of activities. The first year of the project focused on the development of each member’s own evaluation plan and the design of a professional development program for the combined faculties of all groups. The second year focused on implementation of this professional development program, execution of the evaluation plans, sharing of research findings, video documentation of members’ programs and development of shared messaging around program impacts.

The evaluation and professional development activities were enhanced by the facilitation and professional guidance of Janice Fournier, an outside consultant and educational psychologist from the University of Washington. Arts Corps served as the lead organization and administrator of the Consortium, overseeing meeting and contractor coordination, grant management and reporting.

From the video documentation, members produced a 20-minute film, “Powerful Learning through the Arts,” to illustrate specific kinds of learning taking place in arts classrooms. This film also serves as an advocacy tool to engage viewers in a dialogue about why the arts are core to every child’s education.

**Conclusion**

Reflecting on the work of the last two years, the Consortium offers several key findings and lessons learned related to both the process and the product. These findings may be an excellent resource to any group starting a similar process and especially for arts education programs hoping to elevate the rigor and public understanding of their programs’ impacts. This report will also be useful to foundations interested in encouraging collaborations among their grantees.

The sections that follow include descriptions of the process, outcomes and findings for each project activity including: Evaluation Planning & Implementation, Professional Development for Teaching Artists, Arts Education Communications & Messaging as well as What’s Next for the Consortium. The full, 85-page report—which details processes and findings and includes a bibliography and sample tools from each organization—is available upon request.

To request a copy of the full report, complete with a bibliography and sample tools, please e-mail [info@artscorps.org](mailto:info@artscorps.org) or call (206) 722-5440.

## Background

When Consortium members first convened in the fall of 2005, only a few had already made serious efforts in program evaluation. Although all knew that evaluation was useful and particularly important for funders, the day-to-day concerns of program operation almost always took priority. Those members that conducted evaluation efforts had collected information that was largely anecdotal—reports from teachers on how the class had gone, samples of student work, quotes from participants or parents—or simple quantitative reports on how many youth were served or how many classes were offered. Even in light of this information, it was difficult to figure out how relevant the information was to the organization.

As one member put it, the Consortium provided a means to “face the demon” of evaluation and finally do justice to a difficult task. Project funding also gave each member the financial resources necessary for a sustained assessment process, and \$18,000 was apportioned to each organization over two years to support their participation. With these funds, four out of the seven Consortium members hired an outside expert to help with different aspects of their evaluations.

The goal at the end this project was to equip everyone with the capacity to:

- **Articulate program goals and evaluation questions**
- **Design valid and reliable evaluation instruments**
- **Collect data from a representative sample of participants and stakeholders**
- **Draw an objective picture of program effectiveness based on the evidence**

Considering all the Consortium members’ evaluation histories, initial evaluation activities focused on empowering members with the knowledge and skills to design a thorough, purposeful and feasible evaluation plan that they could then implement in the following year. The first year of evaluation was dedicated to information-sharing and educational workshops at monthly meetings on evaluation planning as well as designing individual evaluation plans based on this foundational knowledge and the organizations’ program goals. In the second year, members collected data from a sample of participants and stakeholders, organized and analyzed the results and developed preliminary reports for key stakeholders.

## Evaluation Planning

### ARTICULATING PROGRAM GOALS

The first step in evaluation planning was targeting exactly what Consortium members found to be the ultimate purpose of each program as well as the positive change in youth that the organizations cared about most. Through the Consortium, members had an opportunity to dig deeper into evaluation and ask difficult questions about their desired program impact.

Critically assessing organizational goals required determining whether these goals were measurable, narrowing the resulting goals to a manageable number, developing practical evaluation tools and, finally, piloting them for effectiveness. The process made involvement of many staff and teaching artists essential.

Members quickly learned that there is no one “right way” to evaluate; differences in the structure, size and goals of their programs meant that each member would need to generate an evaluation plan unique to their needs. Consortium members also began to think more broadly about those served in their programs, realizing that their programs also directly benefited others beyond youth, including teaching artists, in-school teachers and volunteers, among others.

### DESIGNING EVALUATION METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

Once each organization’s goals were refined, Consortium members reviewed data collection methods and various survey question types, discussed pros and cons of each and decided on data collection methods appropriate for their programs.

# 02

## EVALUATION PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION

“Our evaluation process is by far much more extensive and useful now than two years ago. We have finely crafted surveys that garner specific information, templates that can be adjusted for future surveys, and a process to take the information learned and funnel it back into the program. Our curriculum is more solid and comprehensive as a result. Additionally, the organization now has a better appreciation and understanding of the value and necessity of evaluation tools. We are exploring ways to take what we have learned and put it to use on other Seattle Center programming.”

JULIA COLSON

DIRECTOR,  
SEATTLE CENTER ACADEMY

One struggle early on was how Consortium members could collect valid pre- and post- data on the effects of the program on participants. Students in classes often ranged widely in age and/or displayed a wide range of abilities. Some may have had prior experience or instruction in the art form, while others had none. Few classes had any standard baseline on which to measure growth or progress, and with some programs offering as brief as eight hours of contact time, changes in students might be difficult to note.

Several members came up with creative data collection strategies that allowed for logical pre- and post- tests that would look at the cumulative effects of participation over time. Youth in Focus, for example, surveyed students at the start and end of the first class and then again at the end of each subsequent class. Some members used simpler strategies. In a class for high school students at Hugo House, participants were asked to report how their skills had changed over the period of a single session. Other members engaged teaching artists in tracking changes that participants themselves might not notice; this strategy can be especially effective with younger students who have had little practice in reflecting on and articulating what they have learned.

“When Arts Corps first outlined its program goals, the list was long and ambitious ... there was this sense that it did so many things well. But the rigor of the Consortium process forced us to realize our ambition had the best of us. There was no way to measure so many goals and in turn no way we could state with certainty that we actually accomplished it all. Our evaluation work, as well as our overall communications, reaped the benefits of getting a lot more succinct about what we do.”

LISA FITZHUGH

FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
ARTS CORPS

## **KEY FINDINGS: INDISPENSABLE ELEMENTS TO EVALUATION PLANNING**

Evaluation was new to all but a few of the organizations involved in the Consortium. It was the first time most members had written an evaluation plan, much less implemented surveys and other research tools. Because of the innovation and newness of the work overall and the intensive time and thought required to do it well, there were several elements critical to the Consortium’s evaluation planning success:

### **1. Hiring an Outside Evaluation Coach and Facilitator**

The involvement of an outside evaluation coach and facilitator, Janice Fournier from the University of Washington, was instrumental to moving the group forward. Janice structured monthly lessons, sent members home with required reading and homework, and acted overall as a seminar professor holding members accountable for agreed upon milestones. Her role as an outsider was a particularly useful catalyst for everyone meeting deadlines and work goals.

### **2. Commitment to Group Work**

Having to report at monthly sessions was also a critical catalyst for members being accountable to the work. Many members admitted that they would not have completed the homework assigned had it not been for their desire to meet the group expectations.

### **3. No Quick Fix — Taking Adequate Time for Well-Suited Evaluations**

The work to develop a clear and well-vetted evaluation plan took a full year of the Consortium’s time. For each member to critically assess what their goals were, whether these goals were measurable, narrow them to a manageable number, develop practical evaluation tools and finally pilot them for effectiveness, the involvement of many staff and teaching artists was needed. It required time to develop, digest and revise these plans while continuing to run the day-to-day activities of organizations with small staffs and limited resources.

### **4. Less is More — Focusing on a Few Key Goals**

Many members began the process with too many goals. Through group discussion about feasibility and continued probing by the facilitator about what’s realistic and what’s measurable, all members ended up focusing on fewer goals than they started with. As a result, members were able to up do a much more thorough job of measuring the goals that remained.

### **5. Being Realistic in What Evaluation Can Tell Us**

Consortium members benefited from the evaluation process by reflecting on program goals, clarifying theories of change and developing objective, systematic ways of tracking progress toward organizational goals. However, program staff conducting

evaluations could not scientifically answer questions related to the long-term impact of their programs, such as “What is the percentage of students showing program impacts in five or 10 years?” Answering this kind of question requires the tracking of longitudinal data and, in most cases, a control or comparison group requiring a dedicated research budget. Moreover, research highlighted in the Stanford Social Innovation Review (Fall 2006) indicates that collecting evidence of long-term impacts can actually detract from a mission-based organization’s ability to make program improvements in the short-term.

In addition, some of these important long-term questions are simply not answerable even by the best researchers. Not everything that matters can be measured and not everything that is easily measured matters. Thus, Consortium members worked diligently to identify and measure meaningful, short-term indicators of program impact rather than settling for easy-to-measure indicators of program efficiency or participant satisfaction that do not necessarily relate to meaningful changes in the lives of young people. Existing program evaluation methodology, members learned, is not sufficient to demonstrate the complete value of a program.

## Evaluation Implementation

After one year, evaluation planning was complete and each Consortium organization set out to implement their individual plans by collecting, organizing and analyzing evaluation data according to their individual plans. Evaluation coach Janice Fournier met individually with each organization to see if and where they needed assistance or if they had learned any lessons in their work so far that would be valuable to other members of the group. In this way, lessons learned could be shared at specific Consortium meetings to continue this beneficial practice.

### COLLECTING DATA

Overall, the problems encountered by the group in implementing their plans were problems typical to any evaluation effort, particularly in regard to data collection. Ensuring that data is collected according to schedule, for instance, requires coordinating schedules so that someone is present to administer surveys during the second meeting of each of six classes or to conduct observations in week three, etc.

Collecting enough responses to draw valid and reliable conclusions was also a struggle for some organizations, especially those with small class sizes. Getting as many students as possible to complete a pre- and post- survey was an enormous challenge, coupled with student absences. Equally challenging for some measures was ensuring a representative sample.

Almost all organizations called upon their teaching artists to help with data collection in some way—administering surveys, conducting observations, using a rubric to evaluate student work, even designing their own performance assessments. Because these processes were new for most teaching artists, however, many organizations found that they had to train their faculty to use a new tool (e.g., a rubric or observational checklist) or clearly explain how a particular procedure affected the overall evaluation plan in order to ensure effective data collection. This work required additional time and energy from both program staff and teaching artists.

### ORGANIZING AND ANALYZING DATA

Consolidating and organizing the data after it is collected is also a labor-intensive step. A couple of members with a large number of classes and sources of data enlisted the help of volunteers and interns for data entry.

As previous evaluation efforts of several Consortium members consisted of assembling samples of student work, quotes or anecdotes, organizing and summarizing more systematic sets of data, and looking for patterns and themes across classes and participants was a new activity for many.

“Developing and implementing evaluation tools has been extremely valuable for our programs and organization. The challenge has come with staff turnover, which directly effects consistency of evaluation information. Although we have followed the plan, we have had to extend the amount of time allotted for evaluation.”

NANCY WHITLOCK

Executive Director,  
Nature Consortium

The evaluation also served to provide baseline data for many members on their programs—evidence of how well they were achieving their goals before any changes were made to improve outcomes. Several members found that they were indeed achieving their goals, but the step of analysis caused deeper reflection on the meaning of the data.

Other members found that their programs were not equally effective in all areas or that participants reported benefits that members were unaware of or had not considered initially. Analyzing data can be an effective reminder to organizations to be open to both the anticipated and unanticipated effects of their programs on participants.

“Numerical results can be somewhat misleading in gauging the importance of the relative types of learning in the respective courses. It stands to reason that a youth who has never before worked with hot glass beads, for example, will learn a great deal about the skills, tools and terms involved. That kind of leap is important to Coyote, since taking junior-high youth way beyond their common experience is one of Coyote’s stated goals. But increases in habits of reflection and tapping inner resources should be measured differently; the average increase of 15 percent in these learning goals cannot be compared on the same scale with a 68 percent increase in knowledge of terms, for example. We are only beginning to learn how to interpret the data we are collecting and are gradually distilling how it might be used meaningfully.”

CLAUDIA STELLE  
MANAGING DIRECTOR,  
COYOTE CENTRAL

## REPORTING TO STAKEHOLDERS

Some members were able to take time during the data analysis phase to assemble brief summaries for stakeholders who might immediately benefit from seeing the evaluation results, such as evaluation reports to teaching artists to provide constructive feedback on their performance.

Brief summary reports to stakeholders such as teaching artists, partner organizations and funders are important elements of evaluation. Findings are not an endpoint but an invitation to a conversation that asks:

- **What do these findings mean?**
- **Where are our strengths and weaknesses?**
- **What changes can be made to improve program outcomes for all involved?**

As several members found, it was a challenge to collect, analyze and report data in a timely manner—especially with instructors stepping out of their usual roles to act as administrators. Programs that have only a few weeks between sessions, in particular, may need to consider a year-end report to stakeholders and designate a period of time to respond to evaluation findings.

## **KEY FINDINGS: INDISPENSABLE ELEMENTS TO EVALUATION IMPLEMENTATION**

### **1. Data Means Labor**

Every member worked very hard to design an evaluation plan that would collect data for each goal from multiple sources to validate results. Thus, everyone collected data in quantities they had never before reckoned with, creating new challenges about who would enter and assess the data and how could it happen in a systematic way. Every member had a different method, but all agreed that having adequate warning of this challenge at the front end was instrumental in their being able to address it at the back end.

### **2. Quality Depends on Institutionalization**

With so many people (staff, teaching artists, partner sites) involved and significant infrastructure in place, it became clear to all that it would be impossible not to continue with rigorous evaluation in the future. Even the one member that dropped out of the structured meetings during the second year as a result of capacity constraints still completed all of their evaluation work because of the value it was adding to the organization. More importantly, many funders and supporters had now been provided with preliminary data from the evaluation and would only expect that to continue. The institutionalization of the work was already setting a higher bar for the quality of the work.

### **3. Outside Expertise is Perfect Foil**

Four of the seven Consortium members hired an outside specialist to help design their evaluation plans and administer the tools and surveys. This third party was an excellent foil for the organizations' insulated view of themselves and provided a reality check for staff about what's doable given staff capacity and resources.

### **4. Preliminary Answers Invite New Questions**

Consortium members now realize how much this initial planning effort has only begun to scratch the surface about what's possible to know about their programs and has, in fact, only raised more questions than it answered. In some cases, members have discovered impacts that they had not even targeted and will now begin the process to better understand how they are manifested through program design. Members have accepted that the information they collect will be iterative and push them to dig even deeper into the how and why of their programs.

“(Before this project), we had designed and implemented some measures but didn't know how to elicit information (that) was truly meaningful to our program. We have improved our capacity by making changes in how we measure and how we deepen the artist-classroom teacher relationship. We believe these changes will ultimately improve student learning because of the teaching collaboration focus during the residency ... This information is shared with the (teaching artists), which inspires them to be more focused in their teaching.”

HELEN MAYNARD  
PROGRAM MANAGER,  
POWERFUL SCHOOLS

“We had little formal evaluation prior, so effectively, this was a 100 percent new effort: creating evaluation instruments, procedures, use and distribution of findings. Funders were keen to understand program impact and have responded positively to this work. Staff and teaching artists have benefited from the effort. We would almost certainly not have built this effort and certainly would not have built it as successfully if we had not had funding to hire outside help.”

BOB PERKINS  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
YOUTH IN FOCUS

# 03

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHING ARTISTS

### Background

Teaching artists, who are both practicing artists as well as arts educators, are an essential resource for Consortium members, contributing enormously to the quality and success of their programs. Despite teaching artists' central role, however, many organizations in the Consortium had fairly limited interaction with their teaching artists before they began their evaluation work. Program staff believed that simply hiring good teaching artists in the relevant art form(s) would satisfy the goals of their program or that a mission and vision statement could suffice to communicate to teaching artists what they expected in the classroom.

Even in the planning phase of the Consortium, teaching artists were considered an integral component to effective evaluation. This was due, in part, to Arts Corps' efforts in the previous year to include teaching artists in the process of defining program goals. As a large organization serving students in grades K–12, Arts Corps sought to unify its faculty around a set of “core learning goals” that would be targeted by each class regardless of age or art form. Involving teaching artists in this process served as recognition of their experience and expertise. It also provided teaching artists with a common framework for talking about their practice. The goals also became a focus for Arts Corps' evaluation. In part, professional development for teaching artists was intended to strengthen each organization's ability to plan and carry out evaluation and program improvements.

Beyond evaluation goals, members wanted to support and nurture the growing community of teaching artists who work for the Consortium. “Teaching artist” is a relatively new term and an only recently recognized profession; unlike certified arts specialists employed by schools, most teaching artists have little formal training in education and few opportunities for sustained, comprehensive professional development. The Consortium sought to bridge this gap by providing professional development workshops and opportunities to share expertise and resources.

### Designing the Program around Teaching Artists' Needs

In the spring of 2005, faculties of all Consortium members were invited to an evening gathering to introduce teaching artists to the larger goals of the Consortium. Eric Booth, longtime teaching artist at the Juilliard School and founder of the *Teaching Artist Journal*, spoke about the growing national movement recognizing “teaching artist” as a profession and to inspire the teaching artists present to become involved. More than 50 Consortium teaching artists attended the gathering.

At a follow-up meeting, teaching artists provided input based on their needs and experiences to design relevant professional development opportunities and the Consortium planned three projects for the following year in response to this: 1) a series of monthly workshops, 2) opportunities for teaching artists to observe one another's classes, and 3) an online discussion forum for sharing ideas and resources.

Over time, the Consortium realized these goals were ambitious, requiring a great deal of administrative effort. In the end, the Consortium decided to focus only on the training and development of teaching artists through the workshops.

### Skill-Building Workshops

Based on teaching artists' interests from these preliminary meetings, the Consortium generated the following themes—classroom culture, teaching and learning, and child development—and planned to offer one workshop in each area during fall, winter and spring of 2006–2007, in the end delivering eight workshops.

Each workshop was scheduled for two and a half hours on a rotating, weekday evening. Consortium teaching artists received \$50 for each workshop they attended; teaching artists outside of the Consortium could also attend on a non-paid, space-available basis.

The interactive workshop presentations were almost universally well received. Often isolated in their teaching, the workshops were an extremely valued and rare opportunity for teaching artists to connect with one another as colleagues. Overall, 112 teaching artists attended the workshops—90 teaching artists from the Consortium and 22 other arts professionals (teaching artists, teachers and others representing 10 additional organizations). One-third attended three or more workshops over the course of the year.

Teaching artists and workshop attendees who responded to a year-end survey had attended between three and seven workshops on average and reported the following input:

- **“The workshops were helpful. Although I am a teaching artist with a great deal of experience, it was very beneficial to discuss the topics with other artists. The dialogue that presented itself at each workshop was meaningful and stimulating.”**
- **“I found the workshops to be very helpful in enhancing a sense of professional community. The gathering of teaching artists from various arts and youth organizations to learn and reflect on their work together was inspiring.”**

The workshops also yielded specific applications, as evidenced in the following survey feedback:

- **“I have applied what I learned from (the child development workshops). I have tried to listen in a different way to make sure I understand what the kids are trying to communicate.”**
- **“I learned that I am not alone in some of the discipline problems that I have faced. I learned to be more sensitive to different learning styles.”**
- **“I applied and shared with other teaching artists some of the techniques I’ve learned at the workshops. For example, I better identify different learning abilities pertaining to certain age groups and use new strategies in helping kids concentrate better at class.”**
- **“(The cultural identity and multiple intelligences) workshops in particular continue to influence my thinking about the variety of experiences that students will have in my classroom sessions.”**

The feedback indicated that workshops not only increased teaching artists’ knowledge and skills but also contributed to a greater sense of belonging to a professional community. As artists and independent contractors with highly varied work schedules, teaching artists often work in isolation and have few opportunities to come together as colleagues, the value of which may be greatly underestimated within arts organizations and foundations employing teaching artists.

Teaching artists also reported wide ranges of topics that they would have liked to learn about that were not covered in the workshops. These included: 1) institutional racism and the effects of poverty and oppression, 2) mental health considerations, 3) gender identity/gay youth concerns, 4) adult learning, 5) designing curricula that target organizational goals, 6) identifying potential abuse, 7) encouraging student individuality and participation, 8) teaching the arts in different settings and with different populations (classroom, after school, special needs, elderly, incarcerated, etc.), and 9) engaging youth in community activism.

When asked specifically about the kinds of professional development programs they would be most interested in attending if available, teaching artists’ responses show the greatest interest in “Opportunities to observe/work with another teaching artist” and “Informal gatherings for teaching artists to network and share ideas.” The full range of responses suggests that the Consortium work only began to scrape the surface of a deep need in the community.

“This new curriculum system has really been a stretch for me. When I first came on board with the Academy, it was all about being a professional who was coming in to teach their craft. Without the incredibly interesting and motivating (Consortium) workshops, I’d probably be at a loss to understand the learning objectives part of the curriculum planning. What has happened, though, is that the challenge that this new system presents has made it all that much more fun and exciting.”

TEACHING ARTIST,  
SEATTLE CENTER ACADEMY

## **KEY FINDINGS: INDISPENSABLE ELEMENTS TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHING ARTISTS**

Only one of the Consortium's members had previously convened their teaching artists for the purposes of networking or professional development. This lack of convening is not so much an oversight but rather a symptom of over stretched staff and limited resources. The value of such convening for the quality of programming, however, cannot be underestimated. The positive effects are clear:

### **1. Everything is Ripe and Valuable**

Unlike the traditional field of education, in which professional development for teachers has been in place for the duration, development of teaching artists is a brand new field and can begin with an infinite array of topics to explore. Consortium members asked teaching artists to list areas they would like to work on, and the list totaled over 35 topic areas. Even when veteran teaching artists were already well-versed in a topic, they still found the interaction with younger teaching artists extremely valuable, since teaching artist mentorship was such a new aspect of their work.

### **2. Networking Opportunities First**

Given the isolated nature of teaching artists and their lack of institutional affiliation, peer networking provided a strong base of support and an avenue for them to more deeply reflect on their practices in the classroom. Peer networking was teaching artists' top choice of priorities before the year of professional development started, and it was chosen as the most valued aspect of the workshops after the fact.

### **3. Teaching Artist Role in Planning**

The strong positive response to the Consortium's professional development program was due in large part to the strong role of teaching artists in program design. All workshops focused on topics teaching artists had identified as relevant, and they included dynamic activities that engaged attendees and got them out of their chairs. Many attendees claim to have integrated the material from the workshops into their teaching—all signs of the workshops' quality and level of engagement.

### **4. Ongoing Teaching Artist Support is Natural Next Step**

The professional development program has inspired individual Consortium members to continue supporting teaching artists. The Nature Consortium, for example, began offering workshops in environmental education to help teaching artists make stronger connections between arts and the environment in classes. New Seattle Center Academy faculty now attend an orientation and learn to develop formal lesson plans and review a range of model classroom-based assessments. And finally, Coyote Central, known for its extremely diverse class range, plans to bring its teaching artists together to discuss Coyote's common learning goals.

“(The workshops were) extremely effective and extremely valuable. I believe the bottom line reason for the effectiveness of the workshops was based upon the quality of the presenters ... In a concrete way, I noticed how useful the meetings were when:

I would find myself referencing a topic or quoting a presenter in conversation.

I would apply suggestions brought forth in a meeting into a classroom moment and experience the positive result.

A comment made during a workshop would become a starting point for personal investigation into the topic through further research.”

TEACHING ARTIST

## Background

While research across the country has shown arts education to have significant impacts on young people's social, emotional and intellectual development and can offer a tremendous engagement tool for teaching, the arts continue to be sidelined as an academic discipline. The arts education field overall has suffered considerably from this challenge. Consortium members engaged in an ongoing dialogue about this challenge over its two years and believe a consistent, simple message is key to moving the field forward.

A rigorous evaluation process in the first year allowed for the Consortium to share their goals and objectives with each other, hoping to find possible overlap for shared evaluation of program impact. Since each member's program model was distinct and built around specific elements (one art form vs. many, environmental education-focused vs. project-focused), program goals were not aligned enough to yield shared-evaluation of program impacts.

### Developing a Common Platform for Arts Education

It was only when Consortium members looked more deeply at the learning taking place in an arts classroom, regardless of program design, that the group found areas of shared strengths.

Inside each Consortium classroom, members agreed that something very powerful was happening that needed to be captured and that one of the most potent means by which to educate an audience about the power of an arts learning classroom is through direct experience.

As a result, members decided to invest in video documentation of some of their classes in the second year to supplement the report findings and be able to provide a visual demonstration of the work's impacts. Consortium members quickly found that joint development of video documentation required members to agree on key messages about the benefits of arts education across organizations. The group relied on the following to help shape the conversation:

- 1. Research into “creative habits of mind” (originally brought to the attention of the Consortium by Arts Corps as part of its own research to develop indicators of creativity for class observations): Creative habits of mind such as persistence, tolerance for ambiguity, generating ideas, reflection, risk-taking and critical thinking are foundational elements of an arts learning environment. Members all agreed that whatever art form they taught in, these habits were required to both teach and practice effectively.**
- 2. Homework by each member identifying creative habits of mind observed in each program's own classrooms: Through documentation and observation of classes across art forms, the Consortium found that these habits can be described, observed in practice and identified across art forms.**

# 04

**A R T S**  
**EDUCATION**  
COMMUNICATIONS  
& MESSAGING

Relying upon the creative habits of mind research and their own homework, the group took part in a facilitated meeting to discuss observations and decide which creative habits of mind were the most important or most frequently fostered by all. The key creative habits selected by the Consortium were:

- **Persistence and discipline**
- **Imagining/generating ideas**
- **Courage and risk-taking**
- **Trusting uncertainty/tolerating ambiguity**
- **Reflection/developing one's own voice**
- **Creative problem-solving/critical thinking**
- **Making meaningful connections/metaphorical thinking**

Using an agreed-upon video treatment as a template for the work, a video documentation team was selected to film classes from each organization with the intent to capture these creative habits at work. The team filmed in April and May 2007 and edited the footage into a 20-minute documentary-style video in August and September the same year.

The final video, *Powerful Learning through the Arts*, focuses on several creative habits of mind, including risk-taking, trusting uncertainty and persistence. It is supplemented by interviews with Steve Seidel, director of Harvard University's Project Zero; Eric Booth, Lincoln Center Institute faculty member and nationally renowned teaching artist and Sandra Jackson-Dumont, deputy director of education and public programs at the Seattle Art Museum. The video represents the documentation and shared messaging work of the Consortium completed by the end of its second year.

With this potent advocacy tool complete, Arts Corps developed a distribution strategy to key arts and education organizations, foundations and other groups as well as a discussion guide to package along with the DVD, officially released in January of 2008, as a resource and catalyst for dialogue.

RESEARCH SHOWS HIGHER ORDER  
THINKING SKILLS SHOULD BE  
FACILITATED PARALLEL TO THE BASICS

"Creative habits of mind are higher order thinking skills. The emphasis in traditional school classrooms has been on teaching basic numeracy and literacy skills first, before delving into problem-solving and analysis, leaving such skills for later in their academic career. Research shows, however, that student learning is much more advanced when these thinking skills are practiced in tandem with or even before the basics."

*Discovering & Exploring Habits of Mind.*  
Costa, Arthur L. and Bena Kallick,  
Eds., Association for Supervision and  
Curriculum Development, 2000.

Resnick, Lauren B., *Education Week  
Century Series*: "Making America Smarter."  
Vol. 18(40), p. 38-40, 1999.

To view or request a copy of *Powerful Learning through the Arts*, please visit [www.myspace.com/powerfulllearning](http://www.myspace.com/powerfulllearning) or call 206.722.5440.

## Looking Forward

Although the original grant for the Consortium ended in September 2007, the group has not disbanded. In May 2007, members held a daylong retreat to reflect on its activities to date and decide if and how to move forward collectively.

Citing improvement of evaluation efforts as a primary motivation—and an achievement—of their initial participation, they also expressed appreciation for the camaraderie of the group. The Consortium decided to continue as a collective by:

- **Sharing knowledge and resources**
- **Sharing the results of their evaluation work and their responses to the work**
- **Supporting the professional development of teaching artists**
- **Seeking funding for the arts and for additional collaborative projects**
- **Advocating for and educating others about the value of arts education**

The group also considered aspects of the Consortium that were particularly challenging or less successful and, based on these, decided to make changes to the structure of the Consortium to better facilitate participation and provide a focus for collective activity. While members have yet to finalize any decisions, they have proposed that in a new version of the Consortium, the following elements would be present:

### **LEADERSHIP WOULD BE SHARED AMONG CONSORTIUM MEMBERS.**

A revolving leadership role or outside facilitator might ensure evenly allocated responsibilities and investment from all members.

### **MEMBERS WOULD ENGAGE IN PROJECTS ACCORDING TO THEIR CAPACITY.**

The group decided to move away from large, collective projects like the evaluation work and toward shorter-term projects headed up by individual organizations or subcommittees. In this way, members might work together on issues of common interest for shorter periods of time, continuing to report back to the full group on their findings.

### **THE PRIMARY ACTIVITY WOULD BE ADVOCACY.**

While all agreed that the evaluation work and professional development for teaching artists were valuable activities, they felt that these were really in service to a larger goal of promoting quality arts education in the city and the region.

As a group of arts education practitioners, the Consortium felt that it could be particularly effective as a collective “voice from the field.” All members are uniquely positioned to comment on the changes in young people they witness daily as a result of engagement in the arts. The Consortium is currently planning future advocacy activities, particularly focused around the ongoing distribution of their film, *Powerful Learning through the Arts* and articulating a vision for sustainable, accessible and high-quality arts education in Seattle and the region.

# 05

## WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE CONSORTIUM

# SEATTLE ARTS EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

**ARTS CORPS** [artscorps.org](http://artscorps.org)

**COYOTE CENTRAL** [coyotecentral.org](http://coyotecentral.org)

**HUGO HOUSE** [hugohouse.org](http://hugohouse.org)

**THE NATURE CONSORTIUM** [naturec.org](http://naturec.org)

**POWERFUL SCHOOLS** [powerfulschools.org](http://powerfulschools.org)

**SEATTLE CENTER ACADEMY** [seattlecenter.com/academy](http://seattlecenter.com/academy)

**YOUTH IN FOCUS** [youthinfocus.org](http://youthinfocus.org)

To request a copy of the full report, complete with a bibliography and sample tools, please contact [info@artscorps.org](mailto:info@artscorps.org) or (206) 722.5440.

## THANK YOU

Funding for this project was provided by the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Seattle Mayor's Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs. We thank them for their investment in high-quality, holistic educational opportunities for all children.

THE PAUL G. ALLEN  
FAMILY *foundation*

BILL & MELINDA  
GATES *foundation*

