

# **Imagining new partnerships: Artists Schools and Communities**

A Melbourne Conversation

6.00 to 8.00pm Wednesday October 15

Melbourne Town Hall Supper Room

Convened by:

**City of Melbourne**

in partnership with the

**Cultural Development Network**

Opening up schools to artist residencies stimulates childrens' imagination, knowledge and confidence and can strengthen links between schools and their local communities. Imagination is the key to innovation. Children are our link to the future. This forum will explore opportunities for education institutions, councils, artists and communities to use imagination as a building block for new creative partnerships.

Speakers:

**Jennifer Bott**, CEO, Australia Council

**Arnold Aprill**, Director, Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE)

**Jon Hawkes**, Research Consultant, Cultural Development Network

Below is a transcript of the forum. The project profiled, *Small Towns Big Picture*, is not transcribed.

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**Jennifer Bott**  
**CEO, Australia Council:**

Good evening everybody. I'd like to be fairly brief tonight because we've got some wonderful things to hear from other people, but I wanted to comment firstly on what we've heard. Maureen, Judy and I have been on the same stage, not this stage another stage, about this project before and I've quoted Maureen's comment that, as a social researcher she would never want to go into a town again without an artist by her side. Which I think is a great line. I try to use it as much as I can!

Firstly, I assume that most people who are here tonight are true believers in terms of the arts in education and the arts in communities, so I won't go over all the reasons why most of us think that's a great idea. Therefore I did want to talk just a little bit about what I see as an important changing social and political agenda for the arts in schools and the arts in communities. I think, for a long time as a field, we've allowed ourselves to be fobbed off somehow by the notion that this is neither needed nor wanted in the community, and is some added extra that might be nice if we all had extra time, and extra money, and extra something. And we need to nail that – we can nail that now.

We have solid research internationally and nationally in Australia that says people want this. Eighty-five percent of Australians want the arts to be part of the education of their children. We know that Australians value creative skills and learning new skills to a much higher degree than the fact that they value a range of other things. For example, they value creative skills to a high or very high degree (88% of Australians have that as a high value system) as opposed to 68% valuing sporting skills. Now I'm not putting sport down, by the way, but let us not think that it's the other way around.

We know that people want to hear Australian stories, and we know that the arts are an important part of developing a sense of identity. And that is for us, as individuals, it's for us as towns and communities, and it's for us as a country as well - but I think we often use the identity argument frequently and comfortably.

The other side of that though is what I believe is a really strong connection between a vibrant cultural life for individuals, for towns and for countries, in terms of how that relates to our ability to deal with diversity. And I think it is absolutely crucial – and as a gentleman here referred to before – that for all the great developments and increased access to technology that improves communication. In fact, I think we are increasingly tribal and isolated. And the arts are such an important way for people to actually listen to each other's stories, as well as developing their own. So I believe in a society in which individuals are increasingly isolated, and where we are increasingly tribal, it is more than desirable, it is crucial, that we hear each other's stories, as well as knowing our own.

The second thing that I'd like to talk to you about is, I think, an important process. It sounds like a process that is about Government, but at the end of the day schools and communities are about the structures that enable us to connect and to make things happen. I think we are in the middle of really exciting series of changes in terms of education and the arts, which has been long on our various agendas. And there have been some really important studies and reports written that good and intelligent and committed people have given their energy too, and then they sit.

A few years ago the Australia Council did some important research, Saatchi and Saatchi research, into Australians' attitudes to the arts, and we came out of that with three main strategies, one of which has been in education and the arts. And that led to, 18 months ago, an important national meeting that for the very first time brought together people from every state and territory and Commonwealth education department and arts department.

And we made an important commitment to know what had been written in the past but not to just write another report, but to actually make a commitment to progress. And we have done that. And the second meeting of that group, called the National Education and the Arts Network (NEAN) is being held here in Melbourne today and tomorrow and what we are doing is continuing to firstly exchange important information about how we are moving ahead.

More importantly we had made a pledge 18 months ago to stop quoting international research no matter how powerful and exciting and definitive that was, but to actually make sure that we had a body of Australian literature in this area that we could quote and use, and we are in the midst of that and by the end of this year we will have that important research completed and other research completed by the end of next year.

So that we can actually say, 'No, this is not about the converted talking to the converted', these are the facts and figures. And so that is a really important progress that's being made by state and federal colleagues in this important field.

Thirdly, as part of that process, we have brought out to Australia Arnie Aprill, who is a very important person in this field. Arnie is running the Chicago Arts Partnership in Education, CAPE, as you'll hear it referred to. He's an important thinker and practitioner in this area of the arts in education, and has just recently been awarded the 2004 Ford Foundation Leadership for a Changing World award.

And I know that you will enjoy hearing from him about how this can make a difference but I just want to read you very briefly one quote of his, and one of the things that Arnie does that I think takes the thinking in this area in a different direction is his strong focus on partnerships. And he says:

*One of the primary purposes of partnerships is to create positive friction, to have partners disrupt each other's assumptions to shake them out of business as usual so that new ideas and authentic new leadership can emerge.*

So it's my great pleasure to introduce to you Arnie Aprill.

### **Arnie Aprill**

#### **Director, Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE):**

With that wonderful introduction I want to go hear me speak, this guy sounds great!

I want to build on some things that Jenny just said, its not about art is nice, its too bad that art is gone. This is really about a crucial right for our young people to have access to the kind of education that they are literally going to need in order to become successful adults. I'm going to read a little something from the book that I'm one of the co-authors of, it's called *Renaissance in the Classroom*, and we spent three years -my colleagues Cynthia Weiss, Gail Burnaford and I interviewing teachers, parents, community members and kids - principles about what was going right in their teaching and their learning. And we developed our theory of practice out to talking to people who were really doing it and whose lives have been changed. And so this is a little bit from that book, that picks up on some of the themes that Jennifer was talking about.

*All students have the right to equitable access to art in their lives and in their schools. The arts teach learners to know themselves as capable citizens in a democratic society. Observing creating reflecting, making choices, and taking responsibility for taking actions in the world. Our children face a future that is much more mobile and more shifting than we adults know. They need to be adept at crossing many more borders, real and virtual, social and geographic, intrapersonal and interpersonal, than we were prepared for in our educations. The lifelong employer one occupation career is over. And people need flexibility, creativity and a tolerance for ambiguity, to successfully manage their emerging adulthoods and to become effective citizens.*

*The skills they will need to grow up well in the 21<sup>st</sup> century include the ability to: plan with, negotiate with and work well with diverse collaborators; imagine alternate solutions to our problems and chose between options; manage multiple, diverse, simultaneous, projects; self monitor and adjust their work; organize space and time; convey information in diverse forms; and synthesize information from diverse sources.* That's from the US department of Labors report on what kind of people will actually get jobs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

So this isn't about feel good, wouldn't it be nice, we need to elevate the kids by giving them some culture. This is what kids need in order to become successful adults. Now all those things that we just described we saw enacted by the incredibly fine work that was done by this team. And I don't just mean the kids and I just don't mean the adults, I mean everyone.

One of our big ideas is that you need what you call a mixed table, you need young people and artists and teachers and researchers and artists from different art forms, and being a theatre person myself, I appreciate you talking about the performance aspect. But we need to move beyond this isolation that's happened in our culture, and recognise that we need people with diverse skills to really collaborate.

Now as Jenny had pointed out, one of our big beliefs is that the frustration of collaboration is incredibly valuable, that in fact we need people to be a little bit frustrated in order to develop effective new flexible practices. So very often with the tensions that come from collaborations people shut down and say 'Oh this is too hard', its like saying democracy is too hard!

It's the friction that comes from having to learn to collaborate with someone who doesn't think that well with you, as Dr Crane had said you know you need to learn to collaborate with people you don't like. Because democracy is not about everyone liking everybody, its that everyone living in civil society with everybody and learning how to share space with people you don't like, and you may find, if you share space with people you don't like, God forbid you may end up liking them.

I want to pick up on some comments that Anne and Judy made. They talked about that project drawing on untapped resources. Our biggest challenge is to move our efforts to improve our lives to effect change by taking the old solutions and just trying to repeat them. Its like in Chicago public schools which generally perform very poorly, the response has been lets use the same pedagogy, lets teach the same way, only lets do it more! Test more; you know if it doesn't work, increase the amount of what doesn't work. And the untapped resources idea means there are resources right that are in your neighborhood, in your community that are not being put into collaborative use.

So the sorts of partnerships that the Australia Council is developing, that the City of Melbourne is developing, that is actually being developed in communities literally all over the word. I mean I'm just shocked at how at home I am listening to this presentation 'cause I know these folks, these are folks I work with at home the style, the problems, the obstacles, the pleasures, the questions, they're identical. Because communities learning how to find themselves by starting to tap into the untapped resources right there in the community is what we're about.

I want to call your attention to two phrases that are here on your wonderful red and white sheets and that is that this conversation is about imagining new partnerships. This means that we have to actually imagine. This also means that you as audience members have responsibility here, this is not just seeing some wonderful work and saying 'wasn't that great?' or 'wouldn't that be great if there was more of that?' You actually have a responsibility to talk to your schools, talk to your communities, talk to your government, about, 'you want more of this'. You want more arts for our kids and you want more collaboration between universities, between the arts community between school systems.

The other phrase I wanted to pick up on was, 'Children are citizens and are linked to the future'. There are two phrases there – Children will not be citizens in the future, children are citizens now and they are linked to the future. Very often people act like –'isn't this good for Sophie to do this because then eventually Sophie and Megan will become good citizens'. No they make contributions to their communities now. And we have to treat them well now, and give them lots of options now, and they need to be in collaboration with interesting adults from their community now, they are citizens now and they contribute now, and they will not become capable or engaged if we don't treat them with that kind of respect and that kind of demand.

That's what the arts give. People think the arts give entertainment and that they're fun, and that there is flexibility and creativity and freedom, but what I think arts gives is a sense of action, responsibility and discipline. That is not the stereotype of the arts, but that's what I think they do, and that's what I think they do for communities and schools, is that they remind teachers, parents, community members that they are responsible and creative. That doesn't mean that everyone is going to become a professional artist. But we're all teachers, we're all artists, we're all scholars, and we need to collaborate with people who have that as a profession in order to have the flexibility we need to become responsible adults.

I wanted to show you some work done from one of our schools. (*projection is screened*) Lots of times we say schools are doing really cool stuff and our arts organisations are doing wonderful things we don't need new programs, we're already doing it. Yes we get number counts from arts organisations, we've served 300,000 children this year and we ran them through our program as fast as we could, and numbers, numbers, numbers...

This is a school, and an arts organisation. I'm going to show you a quick little documentation piece. They have been collaborating for ten years. This is a very talented arts organisation called Urban Gateways, they've been around for 30 years, I as a young man had been an artist in residence with them, and this was a school, Walt Disney Magnet School. Walt Disney Magnet School was the model in the US for Magnet Schools, it was the first school that drew on kids from different neighborhoods and tried to provide lots of rich resources for disenfranchised urban kids.

So it's a good school and a good art organisation working together for ten years and most of the work they had done together was very weak. So they had a partnership, but they didn't have a relationship, basically Urban Gateways provided very good artists, to very talented teachers, and the teachers said oh Yah Yah Yah, come on in wonderful artists – I'm going out to smoke a cigarette, or I'm going to grade papers while you do your wonderful residency with the kids. And the in-school art teachers and music teachers were furious, that this money was being invested in these outside artists. And by and large the kids thought the artists were very groovy and they did cool activities, and they didn't learn a damn thing. Ok they did cool activities. They didn't learn anything sustainable, they didn't have a sense this was growing the school. So what we said was you have to start acting like a real partnership, you had to attend professional development together, you had to start developing inquiry questions about your teaching, both the teachers and the artist and you had to document your teaching. And all it took was saying 'All right, what are you going to ask each other, what do you actually need to understand, you teacher, your artist about the differences in your understanding of kids, and what are you curious about in your own teaching?' And we went from very talented people doing mediocre work to very brilliant work, very quickly. Paradigm shift. So I'm just going to show you a little documentation from the project.

The first thing they asked was, 'Can the art of Vincent Van Gogh and Andy Warhol be used as a tool by first graders to understand emotions?' So they asked a hard question. And the kids really looked at Van Gogh's work and they really looked at Andy Warhol's work and the artist and the teacher talked about their understandings of these arts, and the teacher said, 'I've got to teach these kids about emotions and they need to be able to analyse text and image, and this is what I have to teach'. And the artist said, 'Oh that's great stuff, lets work on that' and they ended up, rather than competing with each other for the kids attention actually feeding each other's thinking.

So, they asked the question, they had the kids look at Van Gogh's portrait work and then Warhol's portrait work and then the teacher came up with the idea that they should look at, what do we know about people's emotions from photographic portraits. So the kids went home and

with their families cut out pictures of people from magazines and newspapers, and then the kids tried to identify (these first graders) what emotions were identified by these photographs, so they started analysing visual imagery. Ok. And then the kids took photographs of each other, all the photographs you're going to see are photographs taken by kids of other kids, and the kids, when they were photographed, posed to try and represent different emotions. And then the kids wrote (these are first graders) about what emotion they were trying to represent in their photograph, And later they would do compare and contrast which is the mandated curriculum, between what they thought they were representing and what other kids looking at their photographs thought they were representing. So this was all this attempt at writing to analyse feelings. Then the kids, modeling Andy Warhol's work, tinted their own photographs. And here are some of the photographs:

These are photographed by and tinted by first graders.  
(*Images shown*)

But then they started not to all want to be happy, they started to think about the complexity of emotion, you know I had very serious discussions with first graders about what is the character of emotion? They talked about what's the role of different emotions in human survival, they became little intellectuals. And once they started talking with this academic content did the quality of the aesthetic work go down? No it did not, it went up. OK?

Now, the last activity that they did, was the kids wrote about what they thought might have been going on in the other kids portraits. I think Saya is happy because she saw a movie at home and she liked it. She thought it was happy and then she looked happy. Now, Saya didn't say anything about a movie.

Manora is surprised because when she got her report card, she got all As. Her parents brought her a surprise. Manora's parents showed her the surprise, it was something that Manora had always wanted, a Cinderella and Prince Barbie doll. OK? All this from the photograph. And so on. And then all that stuff gets posted. And the kids start reading each other's responses to their photographic responses, to each other's portraits. And there's the whole crew.

So we think that this is a quite impressive piece of work, and all those little documentation pieces I've shown you, we teach our teachers and artists to develop these documentation panels, and to put them up in the hallway of the school, so parents come in and talk about the educational process, teachers come in, kids come in. I go visit our schools and kids take me out in the hallway and they explain the whole process. I would love to see an installation in your city documenting the entire process, that you went through. And so the point I wanted to make, and this will be my conclusion, is that even when we have talented people of good intention, until we pressure ourselves to work in collaboration across some of our discomforts, we do not have the positive, powerful impacts that we need to have for our young people to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Anne Dunn**

**Facilitator:**

Now as if you haven't had enough of a feast there's more. Can I introduce to you our last speaker John Hawkes. John, along with the Cultural Development Network, has become an advocate for culture and wrote *The Fourth Pillar of a Sustainable Community*. And in that context he will address the imagining new partnerships artists schools and communities. Will you welcome Jon Hawkes.

**Jon Hawkes**

**Research Consultant, Cultural Development Network:**

Well that's an impossible act to follow. There's really not much more to say. I think what Arnie has highlighted is the need for active work within communities, to find the specific resources within a community to connect those with schools. We, however live in a country that was colonised by the public service, namely the prisons department. And we haven't outgrown that culture yet. We live in an extraordinarily institutionalised society particularly in comparison with the United States where, as I understand it at least, schools actually have the capacity to determine their own curriculum to a large extent.

To probably elect their school principles, at least they elect their judges, and their sheriffs I presume they elect their principles also. So we live in a very different world. In a very institutionalised world. And in that context, it is as well as developing community capacity we have to find a way of influencing those major institutions, the department of education, the departments of the arts if we are seriously going to change the way that art and education connect. So that's I guess the first thing that I need to say. That until arts departments and education departments recognise unleashing and developing the creativity of children as a key element of their core business we won't really get any were – we'll have a series of fabulous examples of the way things can happen, and in fact we've had a series of fabulous examples of the way things can happen for some 20 years now. And still those departments persist in their troglodyte behavior. According to the arts department, education is an education department matter and therefore not something that the arts need to invest in. For example in Victoria there is an over twenty year old artists in schools program. It exists within Arts Victoria, all of its funding comes from the education department as far as I'm aware Arts Victoria makes no contribution to that program at all other than providing a roof for the single project officer that works on that program. It is in fact the smallest program within Arts Victoria with some \$150,000 available to it. And yet it is touted by ministers, all and sundry, as being a fabulous example of wonderful initiative which project by project it is. But I think it's damning that it remains as insignificant as it is in relation to the other things that go on in both those departments.

So, until we can introduce that change, until we can convince arts bureaucrats and arts politicians at the state and federal levels, and education bureaucrats and education politicians at the state and federal levels, that art in schools is not simply decoration. That young people have creative rights, that as Arnie has said, we are all artists, children are citizens that until those things are recognized at those levels we will continue to do isolated and good things but we won't achieve systemic change and that's really what we need. So I guess really much of what I've noted here is repeating Arnie.

It's interesting that what we need is recognition of the rights of young people; of their rights not just to access to arts activities but a right to actively participate in those activities, not only for them to be able to become successful adults but for them to become fulfilled adults.

That creativity is a right in itself. Yes institutions are beginning to recognise that children equipped with creative capacities, are what's needed for the future but again as Arnie said this is a thing of the present, children need to be respected and validated in their creativity now. Not simply as something that will make them useful for society in the future, but as something they have a right to in the here and now.

I should also say I think that one of the other problems we have, is that as we develop more and more exemplary projects and as more money is specifically made available for schools to use for example under the new Art Victoria policy they have a new program artist and community and finally at last schools have been recognised as communities so not only will schools be able to apply for money through the Artists in Schools program they will be able to apply for money through the artist in community program.

But one cannot help but suspect that what this does as well as providing more money for more good projects, is that it lets the schools themselves and the education department itself off the hook. That the more specific funding there is like that, perhaps the less likely it is that schools will bite the bullet and commit to developing a greater curriculum for developing professional development for teachers, to be able to deal with creative practice in schools. And beyond mentioning Artplay, and I mention Artplay because, the title of this forum, was Partnerships, and Artplay is interesting because it is neither an arts initiative nor an education initiative, it is in fact a local government initiative and one of the first in terms of a local government deciding that it was going to make the play in arts development for children. It is currently in development – it's based on a children's' arts facility in Ireland called the Arc. And it will open in February, and I think there's are a lot of possibilities in that. Although, and this is a problem with the artist in schools program itself, so much of this work has ended up being focused in primary schools that the huge preponderance of the creative work that is going on is with young children. That the minute you end up in secondary school subjects tend to be siloed, there is an arts teacher if you're lucky – but finding ways of applying arts practice across the curriculum appears to be extremely difficult. This may be because of the nature of training that our teachers undergo, in fact I'm sure it is, so there is an enormous amount of work to do there too. Beyond that I think Arnie said most of it really. So I'm not going to say anything else.

Thank you.