

Rally

Partnerships | Networks | Cross-System Supports | Technology

How can building collaborations with others in and out of schools strengthen teachers' capacities to offer arts education?

Don't go it alone. People who teach and support the arts in schools and the community can fortify each other. Allies can help educators improve their capacities to teach in and through the arts. Whether within school, cross-community or around a region, meaningful collaboration with others can deepen professional development. Partners can season the mix of relationships within schools and districts, providing additional content as well as pedagogical and political expertise. Coalitions may change policies that individual entities cannot, creating more supportive systems for arts education learning and teacher professional development.

Good partnerships require persistence and patience. Understanding and trust may take time to establish... First-time partners may discover that they have only learned to work well by the time their initial joint venture is concluded. The next time they build upon their shared experience and achieve more.

- Learning Partnerships, Arts Education Partnership (Dreeszen, Aprill, and Deasy)

Creating a beneficial learning community with external partners, such as institutions of higher education, arts and cultural organizations or national art alliances, takes more than bringing people together. It requires time, investment and mutuality to make it worthwhile for teachers and students.

Create new structures. Solidify interactions by forming new jointly supported structures. Education researchers Linda Valli and David Cooper write, "Without structures to institutionalize change, innovations have nothing to sustain them beyond individual interest and commitment...without cultural and programmatic changes to bring about shared language and goals, simultaneous renewal will never occur."

Mobilize people to find solutions. To help a coalition solve problems without clear cut answers and think in new ways, leaders have the opportunity to "mobilize adaptive work", according to Ronald Heifitz, director of Harvard's Leadership Education Project. In this model, leaders don't dictate solutions; members of the group must develop their own abilities to move towards workable solutions. People can help mobilize others whether or not they have the formal authority of principals, superintendents and school boards.

Embrace the isolated educators. Be careful of alienating school-based arts specialists, a focal resource when considering arts teaching capacity. Too often they are left out of the developing arts

learning community, yet, these educators have more arts content familiarity than any other educators.

Partnerships

Often more formal than networks, arts education partnerships provide a platform for people in and out of schools to structure thoughtful collaborations that help students learn. Ongoing relationships can help educators begin to combat the pervasive problem of isolation. For instance, teachers and teaching artists have found new, deeper ways to interact when engaged in a long term focus on specific classrooms and students' work.

Potential partnerships abound, particularly around more populous centers. Museums, theatres, orchestras, arts education organizations and cultural institutions have mission, funding, and audience development incentives to collaborate with schools. Colleges of education need practicum locations for student teachers. Researchers need innovative practices to examine and publish. Community schools of the arts look for ways to extend deeper arts learning opportunities. In rural communities, the partners may be individuals with arts backgrounds or involved in related businesses.

Large-scale partnerships and community coalitions can help education systems begin to address the challenges of equity and public support for arts education. For instance, vocal external coalitions and school-community committees that support arts education can maintain pressure for change. These advocates may be the levers needed to increase support to build the arts specialist teaching force and provide greater professional development for teachers and partners. Outside partners may bring a wide array of content subspecialties, approaches to arts-based education reform and connections to cultural collections and performances. See [Arts Education Partnership, President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities](#).

However, partnership work takes time and respect. Without it, a shared purpose may not emerge (Concerns and Considerations for Teacher Development in the Arts). Arts education partnership may be your first entry into expanded arts education professional development. If so, build in the time to plan and develop ongoing relationships among the people who teach. See *Big Thought: A Learning Partnership*, Center for Arts Education (CAE).

Creating productive conditions for partnerships

Partnership development is not easy and does not always work. When trying to collaborate with various educators and partners involved in arts and education, professional development designers have the challenge of helping disparate disciplines, organizations, and educators pull together to improve the quality of education for young people rather than dissipate into narrowly focused efforts. The field offers a few helpful strategies:

- **Make it easy to access resources.** Help educators connect with the resources they need to address their questions. Assist them in devising strategies to interconnect learning opportunities for their students, among their peers and with the school system. With too little time and an overwhelming number of resources, lesson plans and interest groups on the web, the real service can be to help people cut through the noise to chart their pathway to growth. See *Arts for Learning, Big Thought: A Learning Partnership*.

- **Tap families as professional development partners.** Seek out the parents who are artists, researchers, cultural workers, amateur musicians, skilled in teaching, and ready to be involved in arts and education. Take the time to learn about their backgrounds and interests. Consider providing resources to assist schools with involving parents in arts education and professional development. *See Center for Arts Education (CAE), Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE).*
- **Infuse ideas and experts from other communities.** Particularly when you're in the early stages of building capacity in the arts learning community, others outside of your geographic community may provide useful content, curriculum and structures to help develop your professional development services. Help teachers learn how to apply a particular approach, such as Backward Design (McTighe and Wiggins), by going to the experts, training your master teachers and personalizing the approach with your educators. *See New York City Department of Education.*

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Networks

Individuals nurturing their own professional growth benefit from formal and informal networks (Haack). Such networks provide a forum to develop ideas, offer emotional support and help teachers navigate early challenges and career changes.

National and state professional arts educator associations provide a quick route to connect with arts colleagues. Educators involved in administration and governance of such associations may refine their leadership and organizational skills, useful for negotiating with multiple stakeholders and strengthening arts education programs.

Annual involvement in local and regional conferences may provide a source of ideas and renewal. Teachers may find that arts-based journals, student festivals and exhibitions can provide further opportunity to learn about improving student arts achievement.

National networks can help local specialists and generalists connect to a wider community. The following national service organizations and their sister state organizations bring together single discipline arts specialists of all ages and types.

American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE)
National Association for Music Education (MENC)
National Art Education Association (NAEA)
National Dance Education Organization (NDEO)

Likewise, the research, advocacy, tools, and listserv of the Arts Education Partnership (AEP) help support a larger learning community beyond those attending quarterly forums.

The Music in Education National Consortium (MIENC) brings together school communities, higher education, researchers, educators and arts education cultural managers.

Similarly, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Washington, D.C.) serves as a national link to various state Alliances for Arts Education and VSA Arts (formerly Very Special Arts) with its state and international affiliates. The Alliances and VSA chapters frequently provide a variety of arts education professional development opportunities, ranging from work with arts specialists, classroom teachers and teaching artists, to work with community youth workers, administrators and special educators. The Alliances also frequently cultivate arts education coalitions and advocacy networks. The VSA chapters provide particular expertise around including students and people with disabilities in arts learning opportunities. Likewise, the Kennedy Center maintains its own [Partners in Education](#) network, with technical assistance, professional development, resources and support for cultural partners strengthening the ways the network can serve as a professional development resource for local schools.

Benefiting from committee work: Leadership opportunities for educators to shape arts and education tools, policy and protocols exist across the country. When schools, districts, and states seek prolonged input from the field, they often work with small committees. For instance, many states have convened arts assessment working groups. Involvement in committees, activities, pilots or any facet of the assessment tool development can be a tremendous professional development experience for educators. Not only do you help devise the accountability system for the arts, but you can then be called upon to be a resource for other educators.

Developing a sense of belonging: Participation in intensive learning communities associated with education reform approaches and their networks can help create a sense of belonging. Colleagues challenge themselves and each other, and an informal support system and accountability develops among the participants. *See A+ Schools*

My work in developing a professional learning community is really about building and sustaining meaningful relationships. I believe relationship building is key to our success. Every personality has a unique contribution to offer to the whole, so our goal is to honor those differences while finding common ground. Once quality relationships are built anything can happen. Improving teaching and learning is challenging – work with the willing and the rest will follow.

- Russell Granet, former Director of Professional Development/ Peer Exchange, Center for Arts Education (CAE)

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Cross-System Supports

Educators benefit from connecting with other educators working on similar practical problems and possibilities; together they can help each other find answers.

Education researcher Carol A. Mullen recommends a collaborative mentoring model that is “practitioner centered, experiential and research oriented, reflective, and empowering.” Mullen offers one such structure called the partnership support group: a collection of school and university educators coming together biweekly after school to share their action research. Together, they use storytelling and troubleshooting to help each develop leadership skills.

Developing personal connections across strategic points within the education system can help cultivate familiarity with the needs and possibilities that can arise as teachers increase their capacities in and through the arts. Take the time to identify school administrators with a background or interest in the arts. For instance, the continued support of Minneapolis Public School superintendents over the years has helped strengthen the continuity of its arts education learning community. At a different level, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee's own personal involvement as a band musician helped spur him to initiate a movement to strengthen state support of arts education across the country.

Arts-related professional development for education administrators dealing with arts, education, and arts-based education reform can make the difference between school leaders as partners or barriers. The literature and the field indicate that the principal sets the tone for professional development at the school level. Guided by the school board, the superintendent and assistant superintendents steer the direction for the district. Learning communities can connect with school and district leaders to find a place for arts in the overall educational picture. *See A+ Schools, Music Center: Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County, Ohio Arts Council.*

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Harness Technologies to Enhance Community

The education world has been methodically exploring how to help people learn through the use of more recent technologies, including the World Wide Web, blogging, Podcasting and other interactive communication. Learning communities involved in this investigation continue to grapple with the question, "How do we best use these technologies to enhance arts education?"

Clarify purpose, provide educational protocols. Harnessing new technologies can be easier for students than teachers. The detailed evaluations of [WEB Project](#), an early online arts and humanities education community, suggest the value of clarifying the educational purpose of the work. A safe space, such as a password-protected space with structured protocols that focus participants on student needs and student work, helps. By sharing works-in-progress for feedback, the educational community encourages students to become active constructors of the learning and benefits schools.

Create face-to-face opportunities for virtual communities. Online communities can build upon personal relationships developed from in-person interactions. The [Vermont MIDI Project \(VMP\)](#) provides periodic opportunities for teachers, students, artist-mentors and colleagues to come together to learn how to teach composition, use relevant technologies, and review and assess student musical compositions. Working friendships continue in the virtual space.

Address teacher needs. Many learning communities struggle with the promise of technologies. Virtual resources are available, but teachers do not take full advantage of the possibilities (Bateman, Bransford, and Moore) (Ohio Arts Council). Some insights into professional development structures that can help educators learn while participating in virtual communities are:

- **Hands-on learning.** Complicated or unfamiliar interfaces, protocols and technologies call for specific hands-on learning and practice to help educators develop understanding and, eventually, comfort. Intensive residential institutes can offer unrestricted practice time within a supportive learning community to help teachers pass the first hurdle of figuring out how it all works. *See Pennsylvania Governor's Institute for Arts Educators, Vermont MIDI Project,*
- **Offer significant access at home and school with time to explore.** Teachers need full access to technologies both at home and school to explore how the systems work, figure out questions, ask for help, and begin to integrate the potential into their teaching. Proactively addressing obstacles means anticipating barriers – such as limited computer or Internet access or not already owning the software – and finding ways to simplify the start up for very busy educators. Work with district personnel and teachers of technology to help secure access, broaden the understanding of the arts education needs and enhance the assistance support system.
- **Follow up guidance.** Strong professional development systems provide teachers quick and easy access to overcome hurdles encountered after learning to use the technology. *Vermont MIDI Project* and the other online arts communities provide technical support through more advanced teacher leaders, artist mentors, project staff and even advanced students, using e-mail and threaded discussion and in-person work at institutes.

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Promising Practices

The following grid helps school districts apply lessons from arts learning communities to district professional development. See associated profiles for more information.

Strategy	Sample Communities	Suggestions for Districts
<p>Develop regional networks with their own identity that are connected via a larger system network.</p>	<p>Arts in Basic Curriculum (ABC)</p> <p>Comprehensive Arts Education</p> <p>Empire State Partnerships</p> <p>The California Arts Project (TCAP)</p>	<p>In large school systems, connect smaller groups from your arts learning community so they can get to know, care about, and help each other; cultivate leadership for each grouping. Possibilities include: feeder patterns of arts educators, generalists, and partners; teachers in and through the arts in and out school in a particular neighborhood or town. Then, connect the smaller groups to the whole with services, opportunities to meet, share and examine practices in each others' schools.</p>
<p>Develop group opportunities to learn from practitioners, researchers and promising practices.</p>	<p>Minneapolis Public Schools: Arts for Academic Achievement</p> <p>Perpich Center for Performing Arts</p> <p>Rhode Island Arts Learning Network</p>	<p>When developing your arts learning network, either within the district or across districts or the state, provide regular opportunities for participants to share promising practices grounded in what happens with students. This could look like structured presentations on pedagogy and results, action research sharing and/or a journal club with each person digesting one piece of research for the group.</p>
<p>Learning communities refine school-based partnerships among classroom educators, teaching artists and arts specialists; focuses on student work; connects with broader network including researchers</p>	<p>Center for Arts Education (CAE)</p> <p>Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE)</p>	<p>Don't limit your learning community to school district staff. Work with your educators and interested partners to identify areas of need and interest to pilot partnerships. Prepare for significant planning time; it's the most important aspect. Stay focused on</p>

and experts.	Perpich Center for Performing Arts and Minneapolis Public Schools	students across different sectors. Purposes could include developing student assessment tools or learning community protocols, or expanding district capacity to teach dance.
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Lessons Learned

When rallying people to help with arts education professional development, consider the following strategies:

Teams. Small teams of people can help improve the close analytical work. Site-based colleagues, working groups of community-school members, teacher-artist collaborations and mentor/mentee relationships can help people translate larger ideas into practical applications.

Internal and External. Seek allies within your own system. In schools, move up, down and across the system to find peers, colleagues, administrators, policymakers, aides and support staff who can become involved in your learning community. Externally, seek content specialists, link across school communities, find powerful people with resources, and community and family members involved in arts, young people or education.

Link networks. Each individual in the learning community can be involved in multiple networks. Work with each other to identify gaps and thread related opportunities. The connections among networks and learning opportunities reinforce the learning and can open up possibilities.

Strategically connect with existing arts learning networks. Many national networks offer conferences and provide resources for developing arts learning communities. School districts can encourage teams of specialists and generalists to participate in multiple conference opportunities. Attendees can identify resource people and specific tools as well as share model work-in-progress and receive input and feedback from the field.

Link to existing national and state general education professional development associations. Groups such as the [Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development \(ASCD\)](#) and the [National Staff Development Council \(NSDC\)](#) provide access to general professional development resources, people, and gatherings.

Joint reflection. Don't forget to reflect on the quality of the relationship, partnership, mentoring, coalition, and learning community. The attention to that structure, even if it's fluid and changing, can help sustain the web of support.

Young people as professional development allies. Young people have much to offer when helping teachers learn to improve their practice. Consider current students in the K-12 system as

well as recent alumnae. See *The Arts Literacy Project*, *Hubbard Street Dance MAP Program*, *Rhode Island Arts Learning Network*.

Useful Tools

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

Arts & Learning Resources for State Leaders

State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS) Arts Education Assessment Consortium

State-based, nationally focused group developing and refining arts education assessment materials for large-scale, district-level, and classroom-based assessment and professional development around the National Standards in Arts Education.

Educator- Teaching Artist Partner Professional Development Resources:

Association of Teaching Artists

Dana Foundation

Teaching Artist Journal

John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Resources:

A Community Audit for Arts Education: Better Schools, Better Skills, Better Communities

An evaluation and planning tool for local education, community and cultural leaders to both assess arts education status in the schools and encourage community partnerships to strengthen it.

Kennedy Center Partners in Education Program

Designed to assist arts and cultural organizations throughout the nation develop and/or expand educational partnerships with their local school systems.

Links to education, arts, arts education, youth arts networks and service organizations:

The following national service organizations and their sister state organizations bring together single discipline arts specialists of all ages and types.

American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE)

National Association for Music Education (MENC)

National Art Education Association (NAEA)
National Dance Education Organization (NDEO)
The Music in Education National Consortium (MIENC)

Networks and Listservs:

Americans for the Arts Listserv

Subscribers receive weekly updates on arts and culture news, with an emphasis on arts policy and its effects on education.

American Symphony Orchestra League E-Mail Discussion Group

Provides online forum for orchestra leaders and music educators to swap ideas, discuss problems, and announce information.

Arts4Learning Discussions (My A4L)

Young Audiences' Arts for Learning (A4L) site provides registered users forums to develop and share lessons, curricula, and ideas with multimedia aspects; includes subcommunities based on geographic areas. See Arts for Learning.

Arts Education Partnership Listserv

Connects national network of arts education partnerships, practitioners, policymakers, philanthropies, and advocates with each other and the research, policy building, and national forum work of the Partnership.

Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) TeacherSource

A service provided by the Public Broadcasting Service, TeacherSource is an online community that serves nearly all areas of the academic curriculum providing special lesson plans and learning activities, as well as an array of professional development resources.

TeacherArtExchange

Hosted by the J. Paul Getty Trust, TeacherArtExchange provides a global network for visual art educators.

Your Turn

- What are your arts learning community's challenges? Where do you seek to build capacity?
- Who are the resources within your community that can support your goals, address challenges, and build capacity?
- Who is already teaching the arts or integrating the arts in your community?
- What key individuals or organizations outside your community have content knowledge or skill sets that could help?
- What specifically will these new partners help you to learn/gain?
- How can these key individuals and organizations be involved in professional development in your school system?
- What will planning and communication with these partners look like?
- What local, state and national networks are doing work in line with your goals?
- What lessons from these networks can you apply to our own professional development work?
- How can you use technology to support the work among the community?