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Passing the Torch: Preparing Teaching Artists through a First-Year ArtsBridge Program

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When my Dean first invited me to accompany her to the ArtsBridge America conference in Salt Lake City (2004), I hesitantly agreed, viewing it as yet another item to add to my already full schedule. Little did I know the impact that attending the conference would make on my college students' education and the experiences of 150 K-12 students and their teachers in our community.

At the Utah conference, which I attended with Dr. Jillian Campana, my drama education colleague, we learned about the successful arts partnerships forged among university professors, college students, and classroom teachers. These extraordinary projects were improving pedagogy on campuses while also providing a service to the community. Since Dr Campana and I had established similar community partnerships, we were intrigued and inspired to learn more.

ArtsBridge America, the brainchild of Jill Beck, began in California in 1996 as a response to the loss of arts funding in the state's schools. Distinguished university arts students, who were chosen to serve as scholars in the program shared their talents and skills by teaching youth in the schools. In California, an emphasis was placed on serving schools that had suffered budget shortfalls. Dr Campana and I had

long recognized a similar need in Montana public schools where there are no full-time dance specialists, and drama is underrepresented. We embarked on a journey to develop an innovative, standards-based program that would serve as a bridge between The University of Montana (UM)'s Department of Drama/Dance and the local education curriculum. Of utmost importance to us was that it enhance the collegial work of our advanced dance and drama students, further preparing them as teaching artists. This article describes the successes and challenges of our experiences piloting UM's ArtsBridge Program and outlines future goals and suggestions for other arts educators..

Beginnings

We examined the ArtsBridge America model, initiated at UC/Irvine and now includes 22 universities in 13 states across the U.S., and roughly fashioned our own program after them. We were assisted by staff at the ArtsBridge America office and consulted the ArtsBridge Toolkit. Because of our compatibility with the principal philosophies of ArtsBridge America, The University of Montana was soon added as a participating campus affiliate.

The ArtsBridge America model has two functions: to successfully partner advanced arts students with teachers at area schools where students have limited access to the arts; and to provide scholarships to university students in exchange for their work in K-12 schools. From the beginning, it was clear that our program had one major difference: scholarship money was not available. Instead, we developed a new, 400-level, service learning course open to advanced students by invitation only. Dance and drama students, who were hand-picked by faculty, earned three credits toward graduation for their participation and gained valuable experience in their fields. Service learning is defined as a "course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility" (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). Even without scholarship money, students had incentive to participate; they could add it to their professional resume or list it as community volunteer experience. The students we approached were enthusiastic, and we were on our way.

There were other major differences between UM's ArtsBridge Program and the national model. While UC/Irvine boasts 400 scholarships at 200 schools serving 15,000 students, our program would be much smaller. We began with five scholars serving in five classrooms with 125 youth. Beginning on a small scale seemed prudent and would provide a model on which to build.

I added this course to my already full teaching load and served as the faculty mentor for the project. Because of changes in faculty teaching loads, it became evident that Dr. Campana would not be able to co-facilitate the course with me. Instead, she helped select scholars, served as a faculty consultant, and assisted with end of the year evaluations and assessments.

With the support of our Dean, I began developing the new ArtsBridge course. I had been very active in community schools for many years in many different capacities, and the UM Artsbridge course seemed a logical extension of what I'd already begun. I regularly place my undergraduate students in K-12 schools for short teaching internships or in The Flagship Dance Program, after-school enrichment classes in jazz, hip hop or creative movement that are free to children in "at-risk" schools. These service learning opportunities usually last from

four to six weeks in duration and are held once a week. The prospect of preparing and placing my students in an in-school program twice a week for most of a semester was exciting and would offer a significant learning experience to my students.

Dr. Andrea Vernon, UM's Director of the Office for Civic Engagement coordinates service-learning opportunities for students on our campus. After learning about our new project, Dr. Vernon provided us with a service learning intern to provide staff support. Armed with our own 10-hour/week highly competent intern, the support of the Dean, our department, and the service learning community on campus, I proceeded.

Background

Before I became a university professor I supported myself as a dance teaching artist, offering classes in private studios, elementary schools and community centers. I taught credit-based professional development workshops in dance for classroom teachers. In addition, as a working artist, I choreographed solo performances, which I presented in hundreds of schools, and developed performance work for professional dancers to present in communities throughout the northwest U.S. Through networks with special education

professionals, I facilitated inclusive dance classes. In 1999, when hired by The University of Montana's Dance Program, I set out to enhance our teaching track offerings. I developed a new pedagogy course and several laboratory experiences to prepare my undergraduate students with the skills to be teaching artists within a variety of populations. I was, in essence, passing the torch to my students. UM's ArtsBridge course would serve as the capstone in our already thriving dance teaching curriculum and could easily become a student's Senior Project.

Pedagogical Seminars

The course began spring semester 2005 and was offered to advanced undergraduate students in dance and graduate students in drama. Together, Dr Campana and I carefully selected five UM ArtsBridge scholars from our upper division majors.

The semester began with approximately five-weeks of seminar meetings with my students (see Table A) and was followed by their community teaching. My college students were pleased to discover that they would be referred to as *scholars*. After our first meeting, the scholars were given a three-part assignment for the next meeting: to come prepared to discuss their own individual strengths (this took some coaxing as they were very humble individuals); to identify their

talents within their chosen art form, and to describe what and whom they most wanted to teach. These early sessions quickly became honest and deeply personal, as students spontaneously began to share their fears and insecurities alongside their strengths. Perhaps the most valuable part of this process was the insight that *reflective thinking* was fundamental to making the experience valuable to them. We discussed the philosophies of John Dewey, whose extensive work offer a philosophical foundation for experiential learning. Dewey specified four conditions that maximize learning through direct experience: (a) that the experience must generate personal interest in the learner; (b) it must be intrinsically worthwhile; (c) it must present problems that awaken new curiosity and create a demand for information; and (d) the experience must be capable of fostering development over a considerable amount of time (Giles & Eyler, 112). Dewey's ideas formed the underpinnings of UM's ArtsBridge course. My hope was that the active application of theory in the public schools would enliven and enrich these young adults' education, extending their learning further than a traditional college course could hope to achieve. I also hoped that the opportunity to engage in the community and solve problems that arose in real life situations would lead to personal growth in these young adults. I made it clear to the students that the burden of commitment to goal setting, accountability, and

evaluation would fall upon them. And, as Aldous Huxley wrote, “Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happened to him” (Huxley, 1959). Their ability to rigorously reflect upon their experiences would make or break their experience.

A collection of support articles accompanied our course materials (see *Suggested Readings*) with articles on service learning, community partnerships, National Standards for Arts Education, handouts on sample lesson designs and tools for reflective thinking.

Finding Host Classrooms

During the first few weeks of the semester, our service learning coordinator, Michael Parrish, began to seek classrooms for placements. She composed a letter of introduction accompanied by a compilation of ArtsBridge information and mailed it to targeted schools. Follow-up calls were made to partner each scholar with a host teacher. We targeted schools that had insufficient arts classes, where we knew there was interest from classroom teachers and principals.

Here’s where our challenges began. Our communication links with the schools were yielding a series of dead ends and crossed signals. We spent many frustrating days trying to reach busy principals who weren’t in their office. We followed the trail of interested teachers who

turned out to a) not have the time, b) not have the principal's approval, or c) had to back out after making a commitment to host a scholar because of testing priorities.

In one case, after some promising discussions with a teacher who'd expressed an interest in hosting a scholar, we were reprimanded for not approaching the principal first. In another instance, after several telephone calls that seemed to be yielding little results, Michael and I arranged a face-to-face meeting with a principal who, despite a phone call discussion with us on ArtsBridge and a packet of materials on his desk, insisted that he'd never heard of ArtsBridge and didn't know what we were discussing.

Taken aback by the difficulties, Michael, our highly capable intern, was scrambling to find five classrooms available to host a dance or drama scholar for eight weeks. We had thought the school placements would be easy! Finally, I phoned several principals and asked if I could address teachers at their weekly staff meeting. Finally, after nearly a month of effort, we matched a host teacher for each scholar (see Table B) in the grade area of their choice.

Preparing Teaching Artists

The preparatory college seminars were running smoothly, and scholars were getting ready to teach. We began the semester with a month of seminars addressing issues I identified as important for the scholars to know before going into the schools. These areas were supported with a guest lecture on service learning by Dr. Andrea Vernon, community placement updates by Michael Parrish, and my own pedagogical lectures that included scholar's specific questions and concerns.

Seminar topics included:

ArtsBridge Information

- History & Overview of ArtsBridge America
- The UM ArtsBridge Program Model
- Semester Calendar
- Syllabus and Reading Packet

Service Learning as Curriculum

- Your Roles & Responsibilities as a Scholar
- Interacting with your Host Teacher
- What it means to be a Professional Teaching Artist
- Confidence in One's Own Knowledge of their Art Form

Research in Dance Education/Drama Education

- National Standards for Arts Education
- Lesson Planning
- Interdisciplinary Learning

Teaching Tools

- School Cultures
- Child Development
- Students with Special Needs
- Classroom Management
- Reflection Processes
- Assessment Procedures

Individual Project Plan

- Host Teacher's Goal
- Scholar's Goals
- Content Standards
- Bridges with other Curricular Areas
- Assessment
- Documentation

The scholars expressed excitement and nervousness about their upcoming teaching experience, and seminar discussions were lively and animated. Over the first month of seminars I developed a strong rapport with the five scholars, and they bonded as a group. Their excitement about the school-visits was palpable.

Classroom Visitations and Project Planning

Students were required to visit the classroom twice before creating lesson designs. The scholars first met the teacher after-school to discuss the ArtsBridge project, hear about the class make up and the teacher's goals, learn about the curriculum, and mutually agree upon a teaching schedule. This was followed by a second visit to continue these discussions and observe the students during class. Scholars then began project planning. They wrote up their initial classroom reflections and designed a Teaching Plan. Here's where I deviated from my syllabus. My intention was for each student to present his/her Teaching Plan in the seminar prior to teaching. In fact, because scholars began teaching over a span of several weeks, each

scholar met privately with me to present their plan. In retrospect, although scholars didn't attend each other's teaching plan presentation, I was able to give each scholar one-on-one feedback about their ideas and answer individual questions that arose.

Informal Feedback

Each scholar conducted between 12-16 classes in their host classroom. When all the scholars began teaching, we suspended our regular seminars. Throughout the next month I was treated to many hallway conversations.

It was so strange walking into the high school today and remembering that loud bells ring and then suddenly the halls are filled with students. I was smashed against the lockers, petrified. I had forgotten about the commotion of a high school. When I first got there I wondered if I really wanted to do this. It was a relief to finally meet the 23 students I'd be working with. (JD)

Oh my God Karen, you won't believe what happened in the high school today. I couldn't believe it! This one boy performed a totally un-politically-correct depiction of a southern black man that made me so uncomfortable. At first I wasn't sure how to handle it, so I sat everyone down and we had what turned into a great discussion

about stereotyping a particular race or culture. I was so nervous at the beginning because I was really uncomfortable with how they were impersonating cultures. I didn't want to come down on them but this was not cool. We talked and by the end of class I felt like it led to some really useful discussions and let me talk more deeply about how I view the art of acting. (LDe)

Karen, I am having so much fun planning the lessons around the curriculum, but I feel like the kids are so giggly and hyper that I can barely get through even half of it. How do I get them to focus and take it seriously? (CP)

Since we were not meeting in weekly seminars, these hallway chats helped me know how things were going and allowed me to address a scholar's particular issues. I was also gaining useful information about the different classrooms before my site visits. For the most part, scholars were managing the experience brilliantly, but I soon realized that one scholar's planning was insufficient, needing more rigorous work. I required that she e-mail me her lesson plan several days in advance, so I could see that her planning was thorough, linking with the curriculum and content standards. We began regularly dialoguing about her ideas both electronically and face-to-face.

In retrospect, these off-the-cuff conversations were extremely valuable and were supplemented by a required Mid-semester Seminar Update and my (faculty mentor) Site Visit in each classroom.

Program Assessment Methods

An array of evaluation processes were developed, derived from the ArtsBridge America materials. Each scholar was required to evaluate each lesson in a Teaching Journal. Assessment checklists and written responses were completed by the scholars at mid-point and at the end of the semester. The scholars also provided responses by their K-12 students in their portfolio presentations. Each host teacher completed a survey, (adapted from the ArtsBridge America Teachers Survey) and wrote his/her responses to five questions about their scholar's work. The faculty mentor completed a site visit evaluation with written comments and suggestions for each scholar. These written materials, in conjunction with the student's Final Portfolio Presentation at the end of the semester, were compiled to make recommendations for the future. An end-of-year meeting with staff, faculty mentor, and the Office for Civic Engagement was the final step in the assessment process.

Challenges for Scholars

Written self-assessments revealed an array of challenges faced by the scholars throughout their 16-20 classes. One wrote about the need for verbal clarity.

My biggest challenge so far has been cultivating my verbal cues in a way that beginner students can fully comprehend. I am finding clarity of directions to be absolutely necessary, if I expect my students to respond to my prompts. This is definitely an area that can be redefined and honed. (AC)

Not surprisingly, a recurring challenge involved classroom management issues. While most were learning how to successfully manage children who were off-task or who displayed defiant behavior, one (male) scholar struggled with his host teacher's difficulties with classroom management.

. . . the students are not completely out of control, but I noticed immediately that she [host teacher] would take at least five minutes a session trying to get them to "calm down. I didn't have that problem quite as much . . . but because I was from "outside" and had "made it" (in a sense) the students respected me. (CP)

A common discovery by the scholars was the need for an enormous amount of preparation.

Teaching movement that was connected to the curriculum [was the most challenging]). I could have been more creative in my lesson plans. If I were to do this again I would spend more time preparing for the teaching, especially with my host teacher. (CP)

I feel I was always prepared for class, but now I am realizing I could have improved organization. And I wish my experience could have been more of a collaborative [planning] effort [between me & the host teacher]. (LDa)

Communication issues with the host teacher were challenging for the five scholars. College students in their early 20's are often hesitant to speak up when they have a conflict, or if they are confused about something. In many cases the host teacher most likely had no idea that the scholar had a problem. In the words of two scholars,

It was hard knowing how much I could say to Mrs. _____. It was her classroom after all and I'm just a university student. (LDe)

I didn't want to disagree with her or be perceived as contrary because I wanted her to like me and I wanted the project to be a success. (LDa)

The participation of host teachers varied greatly. Some actively participated in the lesson while others attended to other things or used it as a planning session. One teacher left the room entirely. In our teacher materials, we had specified our goal that the teachers be able to replicate these classes on their own in the future, suggesting that their participation and observations were necessary for this to happen. Clearly this was not emphasized enough. As one scholar wrote: "I would have liked my host teacher to have understood her role in the entire experience" (LDe).

Teacher Responses

The host teachers all expressed highly positive things about the scholars' knowledge of their art form, their creative ideas, and the value the experience held for their students. They appreciated the interdisciplinary focus of the lessons and the research that had been conducted. One described it as "an integral part of my curriculum rather than just a fun add-on" (MM) . A high school host teacher reported that the *program "expanded students' awareness of the*

depth of performance arts . . . and gave them confidence and new skills as performers” (SD). All the host teachers unanimously reported that their students were fully engaged and had learned a great deal from the experience. Several wrote that they’d been reminded of activities they used to do in the classroom.

Somewhat disappointing were the teachers’ overall response that they didn’t know enough about UM’s ArtsBridge. One wrote that he “needed more explanation up front” (BR). Another wrote:

When I was first approached about hosting an ArtsBridge student I was not aware of the program and how it functioned. I did not know what the host teacher expectations were or if the program was set up somewhat like the teacher certification program. I would like to have more information on the program and what the expectations are of the host teacher if I am fortunate enough to have another ArtsBridge student in the future. (CR)

Despite the fact that we had ensured that each teacher receive a packet of carefully chosen ArtsBridge materials, clearly they had not read through it or even glanced at it. Since teachers are busy and don’t have the time to peruse an informational reading packet, more

effective forms of communicating the specific expectations of ArtsBridge need to be established.

The teachers differed somewhat in their suggestions for the future. A 3rd grade teacher wrote that once a week for 45 minutes would be preferable to twice a week for 30 minutes. Others felt the session lengths were suitable. One felt the program should start and end earlier in the semester, while another recommended that it last for a full year rather than one semester. These suggestions seemed specific to teachers' grade levels, individual preferences, and teaching agendas.

Overall Impressions

Despite the issues previously mentioned, the ArtsBridge experience was quite favorably viewed by the scholars and host teachers.

Overall, ArtsBridge was one of the most valuable experiences of my college career; and it renewed my passion for dancing and inspired me with the love of teaching. (Scholar AC)

I learned a tremendous amount about myself as a dancer, teacher and person. I feel completely re-inspired in my passion for dance.

This was an incredibly fulfilling experience. (Scholar LDe)

For the first time I am considering the possibility of teaching.

(Scholar JD)

It has made me an advocate for dance in the public schools. (Host teacher CR)

The base of creative expertise was impressive and gave my students a great example of artistic striving and discipline. (Host teacher BR)

Surprisingly, neither the scholars nor host teachers complained that the paper work was burdensome, and all were in agreement that there are insufficient arts experiences available in their school. There was unanimous agreement that ArtsBridge serves a useful role by capitalizing on the artistry of college students and partnering them with public school classrooms.

Recommendations to Those Piloting New Programs

A year's sabbatical following UM's ArtsBridge has allowed me the time to reflect on the experience and make preparations for the future.

Following are recommendations for others who are starting up

ArtsBridge programs at their own colleges or universities. Many of these suggestions are already in place in other ArtsBridge sites and have been identified as important during our first experience piloting this program.

1. Establish clear procedures for setting up host classrooms. Begin the process of finding host teachers early. Contact principals first and invite them, with interested teachers, to an Introductory ArtsBridge Session, to describe expectations and answer questions. Bring food to these!
2. Set up a procedure for teachers to *apply* to host a scholar. This will ensure greater commitment on their part. Require that host teachers read and sign an ArtsBridge Agreement, specifying all expectations.
3. Facilitate lines of communication between teacher and scholar to help avoid common pitfalls. Empower college students to speak up when they have an issue or complaint. Provide examples of successful interactions.
4. Recognize all participating host teachers and principals publicly (in press releases, web sites) and celebrate their participation within their school. Establishing greater ArtsBridge visibility within the school and the community will encourage more teachers to apply to be part of it.

5. Recognize all participating scholars in their university department so the campus community is aware that the scholars are participating in civic engagement. This will also provide incentive to future university students to strive to be an ArtsBridge scholar.
6. Provide incentive to faculty to be ArtsBridge faculty mentors. Whenever possible, include ArtsBridge as part of a professor's teaching load and allow it to be used as criteria for faculty advancement and promotion.

Summary

The University of Montana, Department of Drama/Dance successfully began an ArtsBridge Program, modeled after those begun at UC/Irvine. Dance and drama faculty at UM piloted a small ArtsBridge program with five scholars in five K-12 classrooms. Instead of receiving scholarships, university students earned upper-level college credit and participated in a valuable service learning experience.

Outstanding dance and drama students were hand-picked by faculty to share their arts expertise with students in the K-12 schools.

The primary challenge involved teachers' unclear expectations and lack of knowledge about ArtsBridge. Overall, it was a highly successful

learning experience for scholars, host teachers and K-12 students. The author, who served as faculty mentor, identifies some areas of improvement for the future, including established procedures for setting up host classrooms; public recognition for scholars and host teachers; and attention toward improving communication between host teachers and scholars. Recognition of service learning toward faculty advancement will provide incentive for busy college faculty to initiate similar programs.

UM's piloted program significantly enriched student's learning and led to a high level of scholarly engagement and personal growth. The bridge between theory and practice—the essence of service learning and the ArtsBridge experience- was successfully achieved.

Suggested Reading: Conrad, D. & Hedin, D. (1987). Learning from service: experience is the best teacher-or is it? *Youth Service: A Guidebook for Developing and Operating Effective Programs*, Washington, DC: Independent Sector.

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Table A: Semester Overview

	Tuesday	Thursday
Week 1	Intro to Arts Bridge	Intro to Service Learning
Week 2	Guest: Dr Andrea Vernon Community Partnerships	Scholars 1 st school visitation
Week 3	Interdisciplinary Teaching: Curriculum Planning	Goal Setting for Program Outcomes (set up meetings with host teachers)
Week 4	Meet with host teacher	Interdisciplinary Teaching: Curriculum Planning
Week 5	Interdisciplinary Teaching: Curriculum Planning	Scholars Present Teaching Plan
Week 6	Scholars Present Teaching Plan	Scholars Present Teaching Plan or ArtsBridge Teaching
Weeks 7- 14	ArtsBridge Teaching	week 10 mandatory mid- semester reflection meeting
Week 15	Scholars/mentor post teaching discussion	Work on Final Portfolios
Finals	Present Final Portfolios	

Table B: Scholar Teaching Assignments

Scholars	Host Teacher	K-12 Placement	Arts Discipline
JD (female) Undergrad dance & drama performance major	BR (male) High school drama	HS fr/so	Creative Movement & Physical Expression
AC (female) Undergrad dance performance major	BR (male) High school drama	HS jr/srs	Contact Improvisation
CP (female) Undergrad-dance teaching major	MM (female) 3 rd grade teacher	3 rd grade	Creative Movement
LDa (female) Undergrad dance performance and teaching major	CR (female) Kindergarten teacher	Kindergarten (am & pm)	Creative Movement
LDe (male) Graduate student in Acting/Directing	SD (female) High school Drama teacher	Adv HS	Character Development