

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY: IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES IN ARTS EDUCATION

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Abstract

Arts education partnerships involving schools and community arts organizations feature artist-teacher collaboration and the integration of the arts across the school curriculum. Findings from an inquiry into the transferability of arts projects to new sites within a partnership framework of a national arts education program indicate that key success factors at the classroom level are artist adaptation, teacher willingness to collaborate, and a positive atmosphere; and key success factors at the organizational level are strong administrative support, commitment, and adequate financial resources. Obstacles to classroom implementation are inappropriate space, insufficient time, and large numbers, and organizational obstacles are incomplete project integration and lack of available, affordable artists who can teach. Participants observed that the arts raise student self-esteem, engage students in enjoyable and inspirational experiences, increase arts learning and cultural appreciation, and develop connections between the school and arts community.

Keywords: arts education partnerships, artist-teacher collaboration, applied dissemination policies

INTRODUCTION¹

Arts partnerships between schools and the arts community involving artist-teacher collaboration represent a significant approach to arts education (Fineberg, 1994; Ross, 2003; Shelby, 2008; Stankiewicz, 2001). In many jurisdictions, the arts are marginalized in the school curriculum, especially at the elementary level, due to a focus on standardized testing, the cost of arts resources, and the lack of arts specialist teachers (McDonald & Fisher, 2006; Pitman, 1998; Taggart, Whitley & Sharp, 2004). Arts partnerships enable artists and teachers to collaborate in the design and delivery of the arts education curriculum (Belshaw, 2004, Colley, 2008; Wilkinson, 2000). This article reports on the findings of an applied dissemination study of ArtsSmarts, a national arts education partnership program that supports artists and arts organizations working with teachers and school boards.² ArtsSmarts was initiated to improve arts teaching and learning in elementary and secondary classrooms and in the community, and to foster sustainable school/community partnerships. Throughout the duration of this inquiry, there were seven partners from seven of ten provinces in Canada involved in the partnership program: two not-for-profit arts organizations (Alberta and British Columbia); three community foundations (Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan); and two arts councils (Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador). Artists and teachers collaborated in the design and delivery of instruction and the arts organizations provided the schools with additional funding, logistical support and curricular resources.

The 120 projects involved in this inquiry focused on discipline-based learning in creative writing, dance, drama, film/video, music, and visual arts lessons, and also on arts integration across the school curriculum in accordance with provincial guidelines. Most of the projects occurred in urban elementary schools within time periods of less than a month. The majority of projects were undertaken in the primary/junior division (JK to Grade 6), gradually decreasing in frequency in the senior public schools (Grades 7 and 8), with very few projects at the secondary level. Among the arts disciplines, visual arts lessons were implemented most frequently, followed by music, drama, dance and film/video, respectively. Cross-curricular arts integration occurred predominantly in language arts and then social studies. The projects were organized at the school level by a project coordinator, usually the principal, sometimes a teacher but seldom an artist. The artists and teachers collaborated in the planning and delivery of the lessons, and the project coordinator administered the research protocol (outlined in Andrews & Harris, 2007).

EXPOSITION³

Related Research

Effective arts education partnerships between schools and their communities are characterized by a common vision – one that places student learning at the centre of the partnership (Arts Education Partnership, 2001; Doherty & Harland, 2004).

Parents, teachers, artists, school administrators and community leaders all share ownership in the enterprise and accept responsibility for its success (Dreeszen, Aprill & Deasy, 1999). Partnerships succeed where there is evidence of diverse resources effectively utilized, clear and consistent communications among partners, collaborative planning between artists and teachers, and a common vision based on curricular requirements shared by the partners (Arts Education Partnership, 2001; Stoloff, 1989). Effective partnerships employ a sustained, flexible infrastructure that promotes shared ownership and creative thinking among the partners (Smith & Walker, 2003). There is also evidence of multiple sources of funding, administrative coordination, shared goals and outcomes, and attention paid to several arts disciplines (ARTS, Inc. and Performing Tree, 2000). Implementation of a variety of projects over time increases opportunities to learn in and through the arts, and provides learning experiences that address a broad range of learning styles (Dreeszen, Aprill & Deasy, 1999; Harland, Lord, Stott, Kinder, Lamont, & Ashworth, 2005).

Arts partnerships survive when students' educational needs are the central focus of the partnership, partners problem-solve, learn and change, and when there is strong leadership and consistent program development, advocacy, documentation and evaluation (Colley, 2008; Seidel & Eppel, 2001). Partnerships fail when communication among partners is inadequate, time and funding are constrained, leadership is ineffective, and when there are substantive complicating factors, such as timetable conflicts, which mitigate against artist/teacher collaboration (Arts Education Partnership, 2001). The most vibrant partnerships actively engage students in learning (Meiners, Schiller & Orchard, 2004; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005), involve schools, universities and community organizations (Arts Education Partnership, 2002), allocate sufficient time and space (Wilkinson, 2000), provide a high level of administrative support (Doherty & Harland, 2001), and understand the unique nature of arts education (Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 1999). In the view of arts and educational leaders, arts partnerships can be sustained within the educational community when they improve students' overall academic performance, involve parents and families in student learning, enhance teacher expertise, and extend the influence of schools in improving their surrounding communities (Arts Education Partnership, 2000).

Partnership Benefits

Partnerships offer several benefits: the balanced exchange of expertise, implementation of shared decision-making, adaptation to inherent barriers, promotion of the interdependence of partners, and the establishment of enabling support structures (Jones, 1992). Partners provide expertise, funds and resources to educators that are not usually available to the schools (Irwin & Kindler, 1997; Upitis, Smithrim & Soren, 1999), and they foster mutual understanding of each partner's values, goals and organizational culture (ARTS, Inc. and Performing Tree, 2000). Artists and teachers working together can increase their political influence and expand funding for the arts (Arts Education Partnership, 2001), and learn from each other (Kind, De Cosson, Irwin, & Grauer, 2007; Upitis, 2005). Teachers' arts expertise improves and their willingness to teach the arts in their own classrooms increases when artist/teacher collaboration occurs in schools (Upitis, 2005; Wolf, 2008), teacher education (Addo, 2003; Andrews, 1999, 2006; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001), and professional development (Andrews, 2008a; Burnaford, Aprill & Weiss, 2001; Patteson, 2002; Upitis, Smithrim & Soren, 1999).

DEVELOPMENT

Purpose of the Study

Currently, the literature does not identify effective practices to successfully transfer arts education projects to new settings within a partnership framework. Indeed, arts organizations tend to be unclear about their educational role and how to evaluate their involvement in schools (Ross, 2003). For this reason, artists, teachers and project coordinators involved in ArtsSmarts completed an applied dissemination questionnaire.⁴ This questionnaire was designed to identify effective practices within the partnership projects. The major question was: "How can schools and arts organizations effectively implement arts education partnerships involving artist/teacher collaboration in their communities?" Secondary questions were: "What are the key success factors of arts partnerships?"; "What are the key obstacles to implementation?"; "How can arts partnerships be improved?"; "What are the benefits of arts partnerships?"

Methodology

In this study, Integrated Inquiry, a multiple perspectives methodology, was employed (Andrews, 2008b). This approach involves administering a protocol to different groups, or multiple protocols to an in-tact group of participants, and analyzing and synthesizing the different viewpoints.

The author has previously undertaken studies in arts education which employ this methodology (e.g., Andrews, 1999, 2004, 2005, 2008a). The applied dissemination questionnaire was designed by the principal investigator with reference to the research literature on arts partnerships (construct validity) and refined in collaboration with the partner organizations (content validity). The questionnaire solicited the perspectives of artists, teachers and project co-ordinators on their projects (Table 1). Questions focused on identifying key success factors, detecting obstacles, formulating improvements, and observing the benefits of arts partnerships. The questionnaire was pilot-tested by participants from 23 of 120 projects (19.2%) prior to implementation.

Table 1: Applied Dissemination Questionnaire

The following questions relate to whether or not this arts education partnership project could be introduced in other communities across Canada. Please be as candid as possible as you consider each of the following questions:

[Success Factors]

- 1. What are the key factors that made this project a success (maximum 5)?**
- 2. Of the key factors listed above, which do you believe are essential to the success of this project if introduced in another community?**

[Obstacles]

- 3. What were the key obstacles you faced implementing the project (maximum 5)?**
- 4. Of the obstacles listed above, which of them do you feel were generic (could happen anywhere) and which do you feel related to your local environment (school or community)?**

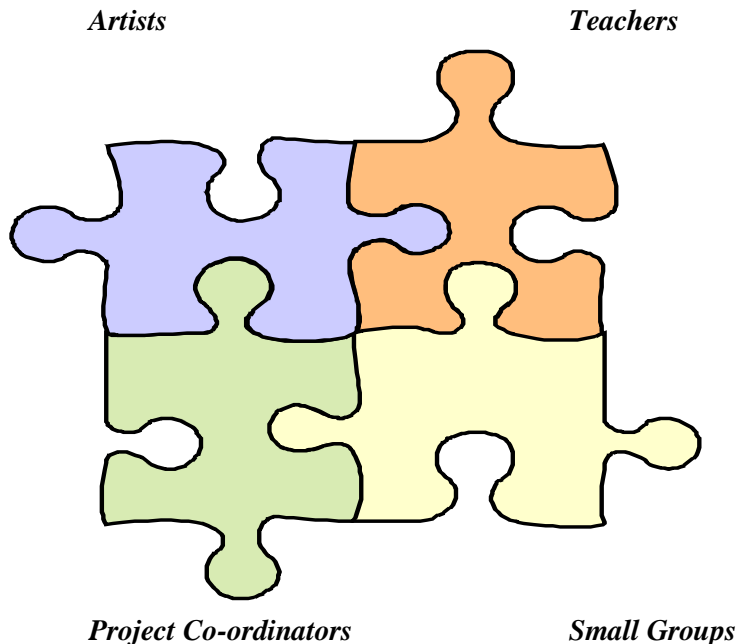
[Improvements]

- 5. If you were to undertake this project again, what would you do differently? What other resources would you require?**

[Benefits]

- 6. Would you recommend this project to others? Explain why or why not?**

From across Canada, 109 questionnaires (90.8%) were submitted to the principal investigator by 16 artists (14.7%), 24 non-arts teachers (22%), 48 project coordinators (44%) (artist, parent, teacher, principal, or arts consultant) and unexpectedly 13 small groups (11.9%) (e.g., artist/teacher/parent) (refer to Figure 1). There were 8 responses where participants did not identify themselves (7.4%). The data was analysed using the qualitative component of Sphinx Survey/Lexica, a quantitative/qualitative software program. Lexical analysis was undertaken on open-ended text to determine substantive convergence on each question, and quotations selected to support this analysis.

Figure 1: Integrated Inquiry**Data Analysis and Synthesis**

Analysis and synthesis of the data using Sphinx Lexica revealed effective practices at both *classroom* (micro) and *organizational* (macro) levels (Table 2). At the classroom level, the key success factors identified by the participants were: *artists' adaptation to the school culture* by demonstrating rapport with the students, instructional effectiveness, and understanding of the curriculum; *teacher willingness to collaborate* with the artist throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation stages of the project; and *positive classroom atmosphere* achieved through mutually respectful inter-personal relationships among artists, teachers and students.

The artist consulting and listening to teen-aged students is an important factor. This works extremely well with the students and they have a lot of respect for him and thus try to learn as much as possible from him. The artist is also very knowledgeable on ideas, events and people related to course content. Students' painting and carving what they are researching, reading and discussing in class gives a depth of understanding to the students.

At the organizational level, key success factors identified were: *strong administrative support*, for example, timetabling the project within the school schedule; *ongoing commitment to the arts*, for example, allowing for sufficient planning time throughout the duration of the project; and *adequate financial resources*, for example, sufficient materials and staffing to undertake an arts project by the school and/or arts organization.

I believe that the first and foremost there has to be support from the school administration and teachers for such a program. Without that support our program could not operate ... The financial support we received was the next vehicle to success.

At the classroom level, key obstacles to successful implementation of arts partnerships identified by the participants were: *large numbers of students* involved in the projects; *lack of space* to effectively deliver arts instruction; and *insufficient time allocated* to effectively implement the projects.

Lack of space - a separate room for each discipline would be better - noise and distraction was a problem.
Time - we had expressed to the teacher that more time was needed to accomplish both what they suggested and to present the final product in terms of class time, not artist time, but this was not allowed.

At the organizational level, key obstacles identified were: *incomplete integration of the arts projects within the school curriculum*, for example not scheduling artists' performances and workshops appropriately, inadequate monitoring of scheduling changes, seldom arranging meetings, and not assisting artists to adapt to the classroom setting; and *lack of artists* who were available, affordable and able to teach young people.

Deciding on which artist would be the best for our school in terms of curriculum goals. Finding an artist who understands and can teach young children. Time to get the proposal written and submitted.

Table 2: Findings

Classroom Level

Success Factors	Artist adaptation to the school culture Teacher willingness to collaborate Positive classroom atmosphere
Obstacles	Inappropriate space Insufficient time Large numbers of students
Improvements	Focus on a target group of students
Benefits	Raises student self-esteem Provides engagement in enjoyable and inspirational experiences that enhance the learning environment Increases student/teacher arts learning & cultural appreciation

Organizational Level

Success Factors	Strong administrative support Ongoing commitment to the arts Adequate financial resources
Obstacles	Incomplete integration of projects into school curriculum Lack of available/affordable artists able to teach young people
Improvements	Timetable larger time blocks for arts lessons Extend projects over longer time periods Schedule time for planning/monitoring/debriefing meetings
Benefits	Develops connections between the school & arts community

The participants indicated that they would predominately focus on resolving two major obstacles – insufficient time and the large numbers of students – if they were to undertake an arts partnership project again. To improve a partnership project, they formulated several recommendations. At the classroom level, they would *focus on a target group of students* rather than attempting to reach as many students as possible (e.g., gifted and/or learning disabled students, grade level or division).⁵ At the organizational level, they would *allocate more time* to the implementation phase of the project (e.g., timetable larger time blocks); *start the project earlier* in the school year and extend it for over a longer period (e.g., two months, a term or year); and *ensure adequate time* for meetings (i.e., planning, conferencing and debriefing of all partners).

I would like to do more planning earlier in the school year. For example, first a planning meeting so that we can integrate projects with school-wide themes. We need time at the beginning of the school year.

The participants indicated overwhelming support for the arts education partnership concept. Of the 109 responses, 101 (92.6%) indicated that they would recommend the project to others, and they used terms such as "Absolutely!"; "Definitely!"; "Yes"; "I recommend"; and "I highly recommend." Of the remaining responses, 3 (2.8%) offered recommendations conditional on first obtaining staff commitment and financial resources, and 5 (4.6%) were positive about the experience but did not answer the question directly. The tone of the responses is exemplified by the following comment.

It gives others access to resource people that could never be available otherwise. This is especially important in isolated communities and small schools ... It also gets the community excited about the arts and proud of their children's work. It also offers viable career options in a community where few role models exist. In spite of having obvious talent, it is not seen as a career choice for them because they know of no one (outside of television) who pursues it as a serious career.

In detailing why they recommended arts partnerships so highly, the participants explained that artist/teacher projects offer several educational benefits.

At the classroom level, partnerships *increase students' and teachers' arts learning and cultural appreciation* through hands-on involvement in artistic processes and connections to the overall curriculum; *raise students' self-esteem* by engaging them in age-appropriate, creative activities; and *provide enjoyable and inspirational experiences* that enhance the learning environment. Organizationally, partnerships *develop connections* between the school and the arts communities.

It's essential to make the connection between the arts community and the schools. Students' horizons are immediately expanded. Teachers develop enthusiasm for the lesson project and arts discipline. Artists examine their goals and develop an interest in the education system.

RECAPITULATION

Discussion

Arts partnerships are a viable approach to delivering the arts in elementary and secondary schools (Colley, 2008; Harland et al., 2005; Ross, 2003; Oreck, 2004). Such partnerships feature artist/teacher collaboration and the support of schools and community organizations. In this study, success factors were identified, obstacles detected, improvements formulated, and benefits observed at both classroom and organizational levels (Table II). Above-all, successful artist adaptation to the school culture is crucial for effective collaboration with the teacher in the classroom, and essential to the effectiveness of the partnership for improving arts teaching and learning. How this adaptation to school culture occurs (i.e., the adaptive process) has not been studied and will require further research. Teacher willingness to collaborate and a positive atmosphere, both key success factors identified by the participants, are consistent with previous research which confirms that collaborative planning (Arts Education Partnership, 2001), classroom rapport (ARTS, Inc. and Performing Tree, 2000) and mutual respect (Dreeszen et al., 1999) are central to effective partnering. Inappropriate space and insufficient time are common problems in arts partnership endeavours (Arts Education Partnership, 2002; Wilkinson, 2000). Many school classrooms are not designed for arts learning; for example, most do not have running water to clean-up paints, fans to circulate the air for creative movement, or acoustic tiles to dampen the sounds of musical instruments.

The increasing emphasis on standardized testing has made it difficult for the arts to receive adequate time to be taught effectively in the school curriculum. Teachers are hindered by pressures to cover the prescribed curriculum and prepare students to undertake standardized tests (Bresler, 1992; Oreck, 2004). The large numbers of students involved in some of the projects occurred primarily as a consequence of combining classes. This course of action reflected an attempt by administrators to provide an arts experience for as many students as possible. This was unfortunate as very few arts learning contexts involve a large number of individuals (e.g., massed choir). Indeed, arts learning is most effective within the context of individual or small group instruction where dialogue, feedback and reflection are possible (Burgess & Addison, 2007). At the organizational level, strong administrative support, ongoing commitment to the arts, and adequate financial resources were identified as essential for the effective execution of partnerships. Although these findings are congruent with the literature (ARTS, Inc. and Performing Tree, 2000; Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 1999), the expectation of an ongoing commitment to arts education by administrators may not always be feasible. Such individuals have, in most cases, stressful positions requiring considerable political, administrative and social skills. The arts represent but one area in the curriculum, albeit one that is often neglected. However, they also bear responsibility for instructional supervision of several subjects in accordance with provincial regulations, and there are times when they will be required to direct their energies elsewhere.

Incomplete integration of the projects within the school curriculum is a common logistical problem and one that is more challenging given the resource-intensive nature of arts teaching and learning (Seidel & Eppel, 2001). Lack of artists who are available, affordable and able to teach young people is a concern expressed from earlier attempts to introduce artists into schools (Dorn & Jones, 1988; Wilkinson, 2000). This is particular problem for arts projects implemented in small communities where access to professional artists is limited. Consequently, identifying and hiring those who are willing and able to instruct young people is quite challenging in these settings. To improve arts partnerships, participants recommended focusing on a target group of students in a particular grade, division or grouping (e.g., gifted, disabled, etc.), timetabling larger blocks for arts lessons, scheduling planning, monitoring and debriefing meetings, and implementing projects over an extended period. Such recommendations offer practical solutions to key obstacles to effective partnering identified in the literature - large numbers, insufficient time, inadequate communications, and irregular student contact, respectively (Arts Education Partnership, 2001; Stoloff, 1989; Wilkinson, 2000).

Moreover, their recommendations are congruent with the nature of effective arts learning; that is, distributed reflective practice (Green, 1986; Pitts, Davidson & McPherson, 2002). They are also consistent with the tenets of participatory-based classroom collaboration; that is, mutual involvement throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation phases of a project (Cousins & Earl, 1992, 1995).

Implications for practice

Arts instruction within a partnership framework offers several benefits for students, teachers and the community as observed by the participants: it raises student self-esteem, provides engagement in enjoyable and inspirational experiences that enhance the classroom environment, increases students' and teachers' arts learning and cultural appreciation, and develops connections between the school and arts community. These observations are consistent with previous findings (e.g., Arts Education Partnership, 2002; Meiners, Schiller & Orchard, 2004), and they provide useful direction for further study of the impact of arts education partnerships on student learning, teacher development, the classroom environment, and the local community. Historically, educators and their supporters have struggled to maintain a viable role in education for arts programs. The emphasis on standardized testing as a vehicle for accountability has further relegated the arts to a minor role in the lives of children and youth. Too often the curriculum is focused on those subjects that promote literacy and numeracy, that is verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences, respectively. Artistic disciplines that foster alternative ways of knowing and expressing oneself, for example dance which promotes bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence or the visual arts which promote visual-spatial intelligence, are not allocated sufficient time in the curriculum. Consequently teachers with the requisite artistic expertise are not hired, and young people lack a vital component of their education.

To address the obstacles that impede implementation of effective arts projects (refer to Table II), school boards must select project leaders (e.g., principal, curriculum co-ordinator, arts consultant, department head) to organize partnerships who are committed to arts education and willing to support artists and teachers working together in classrooms. Project leaders can develop institutional links with local arts organizations that can lead to effective arts partnerships. They can obtain sufficient time and the appropriate space and resources for artist/teacher collaboration by undertaking block timetabling, using their facilities for creative activities (e.g., the foyer for student and community arts displays), and allocating adequate budgets to the arts in their schools (e.g., monies to purchase portable risers for music performances). Similarly, artists and teachers must be carefully screened for their expertise and willingness to collaborate throughout the planning, delivery and debriefing phases of projects. Further, both parties should receive pre-program professional development workshops that involve knowledge of curricular outcomes and classroom management fundamentals for artists, and knowledge of artistic processes and arts assessment procedures for teachers. Finally, an arts partnership between schools and arts organization involving artist/teacher collaboration should clearly communicate to parents and the local community its impact on student learning. There are several ways of achieving this, through both traditional and contemporary media, such as:

- Regular arts newsletters to parents and the local community containing articles by students, artists and teachers, and pictures of classroom activities;
- Small-group student dance, music and theatre performances within the school and the local community throughout the year (not just the traditional large-scale performances once or twice a year);
- Visual art displays involving a variety of art forms, such as pottery, sculpture, painting and collage, throughout the school and within local businesses and public institutions (not just displayed in classrooms);
- CD's and DVD's that capture the richness of arts learning, both the development of artistic and social skills (not just a final production);
- The use of formative assessment procedures, such as reflective journals, rubrics and real-time video recordings, which are designed to describe arts learning, in addition to summative assessments, such as written tests (arts theory and history), performance tests, and arts criticism, which are designed to evaluate achievement.
- An annual report to the school board and the arts organization(s) detailing the progress of the arts partnership, including input from students, parents, artists, teachers and the local community, recommendations for improvement of the partnership, and plans for the future (i.e., how to implement improvements and/or a new direction if warranted); and

- A website that provides the public with information on the purpose and progress of the arts partnership, the roles of the various partners, and an archive of the history of the project from previous years, including reports, CD's, DVD's, etc.

Coda

Arts education partnerships offer an alternative and viable approach to supporting and fostering the teaching and learning of the arts disciplines in the school curriculum. Students and teachers need the expertise that professional artists bring to the learning environment. The high level of involvement by the participants in ArtsSmarts and their positive feedback to the principal investigator illustrate that a range of individuals working in the field, that is artists, teachers, parents and school administrators, are supportive of the partnership concept. The applied dissemination parameters detailed in this study can assist those in the education and arts communities who are developing similar arts education partnerships. Such partnerships are characterized by artists and teachers collaborating in the design and delivery of the arts curriculum in elementary and secondary classrooms, and they are supported in this endeavour by schools and community arts organizations.

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Notes

¹ This paper was presented in the Arts and Inquiry in the Visual and Performing Arts Special Interest Group (SIG) at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Conference in San Diego in April 2009.

² ArtsSmarts is a Canadian non-profits arts organization that encourages and supports “the engagement of artists, teachers, and students in collaborative artistic activities that are linked to educational outcomes” (www.ArtsSmarts.ca). Initially, ArtsSmarts was funded by the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation, Montreal, Quebec, and administered by the Canadian Conference of the Arts, Ottawa, Ontario. This paper reports on the findings of one component of a multi-year, multi-site evaluation of ArtsSmarts projects commencing in 2000. Additional funds for this study were also provided by the University of Ottawa, North America’s largest bilingual university, to support this study.

³ This article is written in sonata form; that is, Introduction (context of the study), Exposition (examination of partnerships issues in the literature), Development (organization of the study and analysis/synthesis of data), and Re-capitulations (discussion/implications of findings in relation to partnership literature, and recommendations). The study is monothematic, reminiscent of Josef Haydn’s earliest symphonies, in contrast to previous studies by the author using sonata form which have involved multiple themes (e.g., Andrews, 2008b).

⁴ “Applied dissemination” refers to the transfer of acquired knowledge to new settings. In this study, it refers to the program parameters that can be successfully applied to other sites within a partnership framework.

⁵ A division refers to a grouping of grade levels based on child/youth development; that is, primary division (kindergarten through to grade 3); junior division (grades 4 to 6); intermediate division (grades 7 to 10); and senior division (grades 11 and 12).