



Resource Exchange

Becca Barniskis

To cite this article: Becca Barniskis (2013) Resource Exchange, Teaching Artist Journal, 11:4, 253-263, DOI: [10.1080/15411796.2013.815550](https://doi.org/10.1080/15411796.2013.815550)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15411796.2013.815550>



Published online: 25 Sep 2013.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 63



View related articles [↗](#)

resource exchange



editor
Becca Barniskis



other

Making Art to Make a Difference: A Review of a Collaborative Project Between an Arts and a Social Service Organization

by Becca Barniskis and Jane Oxtan

The Resource Exchange design team¹ met in May 2013 to learn about and respond to a multifaceted collaboration between the Paramount Theatre & Visual Arts Center and Hands Across the World (HAW), a social service agency that serves the needs of new refugees and immigrants in St. Cloud, Minnesota. St. Cloud, the largest

city in central Minnesota, has a population of about 66,000 people. In recent years a significant immigrant population has settled in the area, primarily Somalis coming from refugee camps throughout East Africa. Their presence in the largely white community of St. Cloud has raised important questions about how St. Cloud wants to be defined as a community. There are many people in the community—including staff at the Paramount and HAW—who recognize the potential of working collaboratively to develop greater understanding among St. Cloud's longtime residents and its newer arrivals.

In deciding to review this project and offer feedback to its collaborators as they continue their work, the Resource Exchange design team considered the following questions:

- How might art making lead to greater knowledge and understanding among people with varied artistic and cultural traditions and backgrounds?
- What does it take to build and sustain an effective collaboration between an arts and a social service organization?
- What about the work in question is specific to the local context and what might be relevant to teaching artists and educators elsewhere?

Carol Weiler



A student working on her pinch pot as part of the Paramount-HAW collaboration.

Project Background

Paramount Executive Director Tony Goddard and Jane Oxtan, its Education Outreach Coordinator, shared concerns about how they could carry out the mission of the Paramount to meet the artistic needs of the community when they knew so little about the artistic traditions and needs of the increasing numbers of East African refugees now living there. In October 2011, Goddard and Oxtan decided to visit HAW, an agency located near the Paramount that serves the needs of new refugees and immigrants, to begin a dialog about how they might both learn and serve. Brianda Cediél, HAW Executive Director, welcomed them warmly and affirmed that the arts had been effective in their past programming as a means of teaching language, work, and social skills to her adult clients while also providing a means of relaxation and expression. However, working alone, she was not able to provide the rich experiences that she desired and welcomed the Paramount partnership proposal.

After securing an initial \$5,000 grant from the local Community Foundation, the Paramount and HAW sought additional funding from a range of local service organizations and foundations. Together, they eventually were able to secure more than \$26,000 to finance five different four- to six-week-long art classes for the clientele of HAW, a photographer to document the projects along the way, an independent evaluator, and a final exhibition of student work in March 2013. The exhibit was significant in that it would hang in the Paramount Theatre lobby for a month where hundreds of theater patrons would be exposed to the art and stories.

At our May design team meeting the five artists, Jane Oxtan, the photographer, and evaluator on the project Charlene Sul (brought in because of her expertise in multicultural and arts programming), presented their work to the assembled group. Brianda Cediél was unable to attend, but Jane was able to speak to HAW's vision and role, and two of HAW's volunteers were part of the group in the room, and they

had a chance to respond and clarify some things as needed. The goals of presenting the work at this design team meeting was for the collaborators to reflect on their work, for them to get feedback from a variety of perspectives, and to share with the readers of this journal both an example of an innovative project and a model for how to reflect on and develop complex, collaborative work.

Presenting the Project

The stated goals of this project to teach art to the adult clientele of HAW included

- To capture, preserve and share the immigrant story
- To build community
- To expand the Paramount's artistic/teaching skills
- To develop fine motor, work, social, language and expressive skills of new refugees and immigrants living in St. Cloud

Jane and Brianda selected artists who were able to lead workshops, who were willing to learn and be a part of a pilot program, and who could commit to a fair amount of additional planning and reflecting along the way (they had about ten planning sessions all told). Because one of HAW's major goals is to prepare clients to be

Carol Weiler



Artist Dan Mondloch presenting his portion of the project to the participants.

self-supporting within eight months of their arrival in the United States, Jane and Brianda also needed to select art forms that would help participants develop technical and fine motor skills that they could then transfer to potential employment opportunities. As it was revealed later in the meeting, many of the students grew up or spent many years in refugee camps and were not in schools or an environment where they had the opportunity to develop fine motor skills. Art projects that required participants to use a scissors, thread a needle, or manipulate a paint brush, all contributed to developing these critically important fine motor skills.

The teaching artists who were involved with this project included:

- Dan Mondloch – a visual artist who taught participants to paint landscapes in watercolor
- Lee Ann Goerss – a visual artist and writer who led a suitcase/personal journey project
- Jeri Olson-McCoy – an artist who taught weaving
- Solveig Anderson – an artist who taught them projects in sewing—both decorative and functional
- Melissa Gohman – a ceramicist who had the students create pinch pots out of clay
- Carol Weiler – a photographer who documented the project and whose photos were included in the final exhibition as part of the signage and visual artifacts of the project

To augment the slideshow that the team presented, Jane and the artists each said a few words about their own experience and the surprises that they encountered in their teaching. For instance, Dan Mondloch realized that he needed to establish some shared vocabulary between him and the students in order to talk about some of the subjects of their paintings and the techniques that he was teaching them. During the course of his six weeks with students, he created a list of terms in English and Somali, such as “brush, draw, paint, ‘good job,’ and water,” that he could also share with the artists who would follow him. He was interested, too, in the features

that emerged in their watercolors—mostly oranges and browns and lots of curvilinear shapes and animals. Lee Ann Goerss was struck by how quickly she connected emotionally and personally to her students who were all female—but without a shared language it was harder for her to actually teach them the visual art techniques that she needed them to learn because she did not always have an interpreter on hand.

Solveig Anderson and Jeri Olson-McCoy who taught sewing and weaving, respectively, both wanted their students to walk away with something functional. Solveig worked with them on sewing and was struck by how much they wanted to get their hands on the sewing machine. She was also surprised by the fact that the most eager and accomplished students were men. She also noted that lesson plans needed to be adjusted frequently or even abandoned to simply work in the reality of the moment. Jeri struggled with finding commensurate Somali words for some of the weaving terms she wanted them to know, but her students worked hard and caught on to the techniques and made some very high-quality pieces. One woman even taught Jeri a new twist technique for making the handles on the woven bags.

Melissa Gohman, the ceramicist, brought clay over to the HAW classrooms where students made small pinch pots, some of which incorporated designs and motifs from Somalia and their life there. She particularly enjoyed seeing how the students worked on their pots in small, tight circles, talking and laughing comfortably together. It is a side of them that she does not normally see when they are out in the community and tend to be much more reserved.

Carol Weiler, who photographed students and teaching artists at work, found out quickly that the women did not want their faces captured on film—the men did not care. Wanting to build trust with the participants, she had to rethink her usual documenting strategies and ended up with a lot of photos of hands at work. She also helped organize the final exhibit, including helping display the individual artist stories that accompanied the work. She noticed at the final exhibit (at the Paramount gallery)

that many visitors spent a great deal of time reading these one-page biographies. It was the combination of art and story that made the exhibit successful. Either alone would not have had the impact, as the art visually drew people in and the stories made emotional connections.

Responding to the Project

After their twenty-minute presentation, the presenters stopped talking and the rest of the people present were able to respond to what they heard and saw. They followed a protocol, using the first two steps of Descriptive Review (1. What did you notice? 2. What questions does it raise?). This portion of the meeting was facilitated by Barbara Hackett Cox, who made sure as many people in the room as possible had a chance to speak—even if it was just at the beginning when she had people turn and share an observation with the person next to him or her.

Some of the observations that emerged included noting right away the range of artists involved who each used very high-quality materials and professional techniques in their workshops in order to reach what most of them stated as their desired goal: to create something students would regard as

both beautiful and useful. Participants also noticed how many of the panel members mentioned the language barrier and how that presented various challenges—including a level of discomfort they felt as teachers because of their inability to gauge how much information students were absorbing in the moment. The artists had shared that they could relate that sense of disconnect to how it might feel to be an outsider immigrant in St. Cloud. But participants also observed that the artists used interpreters at times (an official interpreter and sometimes more informally using fellow students) and developed vocabulary lists as needed—including building vocabulary out of the art making itself—an interesting technique to the ESL teachers in the room. It was also noted that the students appreciated when the artists were also interested in learning some of the Somali language—a shared journey.

Responders noticed how the artists mentioned that they really had to pay attention to what their students were making and use their artwork as a guide to determine next steps. The tactile nature of the art forms underscored this hands-on teaching method, and the results showed up in many of the photos that Carol Weiler captured that had people's hands at the center. Another aspect of this project that came through in the presentation was the artists' desire to learn from their students—whether they were learning a technique or picking up on stylistic tendencies or particular personal stories, the artists were genuinely eager to learn from their students. Given that all the artists are white, as were the responders in the room that evening (another participant observation), the students' ability to make something and give back something to the project came across as a potential equalizing force—particularly in the context of a social service organization providing "services" and an arts organization providing "art."

When the protocol shifted to Step 2, it became clear that many of the questions were more challenging and offered in the spirit of moving the work along. The team was extremely open to this kind of feedback because they were also extremely open

Carol Weiler



Participants (from left to right): Char Ellingson, David DeBlicke, Sarah Drake, and Bettine Hermanson.

about how they are still learning about how to do this work more effectively. Some of the most pointed questions were about the role of the mostly Somali students. Participants wondered about the relative lack of student representation in the documentation and reporting on the project and at the final exhibition. What if we could have heard from students more directly? What would that take? What if someone from the Somali community was included more in the actual facilitation of the project? Or what about choosing art forms next time that are rooted in Somali culture and tradition or using a teacher from the immigrant culture?

In thinking about the language gap, one of the ESL teachers in the room wondered if it would have helped if the teaching artists could have had some training up front in how to teach across a language barrier, and what if the students had had some initial preparation about the given art form they would be learning but delivered in their native language? There were a lot of questions about the goals of the project, who set them, and how the art forms that were taught were selected. For instance, what assumptions about the students might be buried in having a goal that was about improving their fine motor skills and work and social skills? And regarding the goal about sharing one's story, did that goal and its outcome shift because of the lack of shared written and spoken language among teachers and students and project coordinators? How deep was the storytelling that happened? Finally, we wondered how much of how this project played out was specific to the Somali population and how might it play out differently with a different immigrant population.

Presenters Respond

After about thirty minutes of listening to the feedback, the artists, Jane, and Charlene Sul, the project evaluator, were able to respond to what they heard and share more of their insights. They sat in a group at the front of the room and had a conversation amongst themselves for about fifteen

Carol Weiler



The team listening to feedback and comments (from left to right): Jeri Olson-McCoy, Solveig Anderson, Lee Ann Goerss, Dan Mondloch, and Jane Oxtan.

minutes until Barbara opened the discussion up to the wider group.

Many really interesting points emerged as the team talked and addressed some of the questions raised by the larger group. For instance, from the inception of the program they hoped that a student might emerge from the refugees as a potential teaching artist, and they continue to keep their eyes open for that possibility. And they talked too about how the art forms were chosen. Charlene explained that Brianda from HAW had done some informal assessment based on HAW's previous arts programming and based on her analysis of the job market around St. Cloud and what skills and techniques might be most useful to immigrants seeking employment. Those include sewing as a business—that is why they think the men took to it so readily. Brianda had considered too how the fine motor skills of many of her clients were limited because of the long time they spent in camps. Understanding the potential difference in serving refugees as opposed to immigrants was also a learning curve. Solveig talked about one of her students, Osman, who had never handled a pair of scissors before and another who had a hard time because his hands had been injured in the refugee camps—but nonetheless he worked and cut out patterns in her class.

That was success for her—seeing the range of skills that students brought and having each one of them walk away having fully participated in the assignments she gave, no matter their technical proficiency.

Another issue that they discussed was how where the classes were held impacted attendance. As Jane put it, honorable intentions can be dangerous. She wanted students to feel a sense of ownership of the Paramount, and so classes began there. But Brianda let her know as the project unfolded that the students wanted to stay at HAW for classes, and so the project shifted. Jane is wondering if next time they might start all the classes at HAW and transition some of the art-making classes over time to the Paramount studios as students grow more comfortable with the artists and the process. Integrating the teaching artists into more of the up-front prep and planning at HAW would be helpful too. Melissa Gohman wondered how much her students knew about what she was going to teach and why before she launched. Now there are concrete examples to show and photos to help explain. And someone on the team wondered if offering fewer art forms in greater depth might help too. This first iteration of the project was about tilling the soil so that future efforts between the two organizations can be more fruitful.

Lee Ann Goerss talked about how the project's emphasis on storytelling being a through line for all the classes shifted the more they got to know who the different students were. For instance, for her project, where participants decorate a suitcase with symbols and language and drawings that depict their life journey, she realized early on that even using the suitcase as a metaphor was complicated since most of the refugees had never used a suitcase—they carried minimal belongings in bags when they traveled here. It made her stop to think about how different people want to tell their own story and why.

This thoughtfulness and curiosity about who the immigrants are prompted one of the participants who has a fair amount of experience and knowledge about the Somali population in St. Cloud to ask the team why they had not more readily accessed

local expertise when planning this project. Charlene Sul responded that the Paramount and artists involved in this collaboration relied on the HAW agency to provide insights needed and to have an "in" with the local Somali community but are realizing now that they need to expand to those in the immigrant community who hold respect and a certain amount of authority. What does it mean to sanction a program? Who are the people or cultural liaisons who have the respect and authority to do that?

Certainly Jane, as project director, now knows more about the Somali community in general and resources and people in the community who can support the project. Perhaps even more important, it took exposure to even know what to ask. For example, she was unclear in her understanding of whether human representations in artwork would be an appropriate expectation for the students because of religious strictures. Everyone involved wanted to be very respectful of religious and cultural traditions. By connecting with artists and performers who are working in different art forms within Islamic culture and getting permission from a person with authority in that culture during the project, students and artists felt more freedom to fully participate.

The exhibit posed another challenge: there was a need to retain student artwork for some time after it was created in order to have it on hand for the exhibit. Artists were concerned about building trust and were uncertain how everyone was understanding the concept of lending their art for an exhibit. The artists had no Somali word for "exhibit" at the time, and so until the students actually saw their work on display, they could not know why their work had been kept. The learning curve was steep for everyone involved.

Concluding Thoughts and Remaining Questions

Through this process, the Paramount and the artists learned a great deal about meeting the artistic needs of a broad and

diverse community. The exhibit shared the people, the process, and the product of these classes while celebrating the power of the arts to address social change. The community was invited to take time to read the student stories and view their art work while imagining their way into the classes that not only created the items but also wove all of these participants together. Those who came to the exhibit were asked to consider, "How might you, your workplace, your social connections be able to participate in a process of positive change?"

And so this project, indeed, had multiple levels. Perhaps foremost, it provided a role model for other long-standing community businesses, agencies, and resources to think about how they might consider their role in the change that is happening in St. Cloud. As a community changes, how does that impact mission statements, marketing, assumptions, resources, purchasing, needs, all of which need to be addressed together, as a whole community. The Paramount had no assumptions that they would do this perfectly but felt they couldn't wait any longer. Was it not better to do something and build on whatever success might be experienced? In talking with others prior to launching this project, a common fear was that of accidentally stepping on a cultural land mine because of misunderstanding a need or value or perception. But that didn't happen, in part because the participants never contended to have a flawless plan, only commitment to doing what seemed important, honorable, and essential. Being open to feedback and being willing to modify and adjust through experience provided a trust and safety that helped to defuse those concerns. And so it began, and it left a mark: front-page articles in St. Cloud's local paper, presentations to funders, stories that have filtered through the



Participants at the meeting listening to the team discuss what they heard. In foreground (left to right): Nadja Reubanova, Mary Jo Thompson, and Char Ellingson.

Carol Weiler

artists into each of their personal networks, and through HAW students into each of their families. Other stories:

- The high school daughters who came to the exhibit with their Somali mother to see her painting hanging in the exhibit who were hugging her and telling her how proud they were. They then offered to be interpreters in a new session!
- Having two Somali women feel comfortable coming to the opening of the Paramount's new gallery and then seeing their own picture in the paper.
- Providing a scholarship to a student who excelled for one of the Paramount's mainstream classes.
- The Somali elder who affirmed publicly that the project had been important and appreciated.
- Being invited now to participate in a MN Council of Non-Profits conference panel on how non-profits can work with refugee agencies.

The stories go on and on. But they would not have happened without the courage of the two organizations and amazing new refugee clients who risked stepping out of their comfort zone to learn together. This is just a beginning, but important nonetheless.

As of this writing, the project is left with many more questions than answers. But that, in itself, is success for as it began, it was hard to formulate even the questions. How will the Paramount and HAW measure success ultimately? In terms of attendance? Jobs filled? Relationships forged? Ethnic artists revealed? New courses offered? New business and agencies getting involved? Yes, all that, and more. It did take courage on the part of the Paramount, HAW, and their refugee clients to work together in this way and not pretend to be experts but be willing to risk, to learn, and to create a "third thing" that is not just about art and not just about developing social and economic skills. There are times when change requires risk rather than perfection, and a willingness to be vulnerable for a greater good. Art is a powerful tool to that end.

Becca Barniskis edits this section and is a co-author (with Nick Jaffe and Barbara Cox) of *The Teaching Artist Handbook: Tools, Techniques, and Ideas to Help Any Artist Teach* (available from the University of Chicago Press).

Jane Oxtan works as the Education Outreach Coordinator at the Paramount Theatre & Visual Arts Center in St. Cloud, MN. Among many other positions she has held in arts education, she served as vocal music teacher and Fine Arts Coordinator for Jefferson Elementary in St. Cloud, MN for sixteen years where she helped to develop an exemplary program of arts infusion in a fourth- to sixth-grade setting.

Notes

¹Present on May 2, 2013:

1. Heather Allen – Central Minnesota Arts Board program officer present as partial funder of the project
2. Solveig Anderson – textile artist
3. Becca Barniskis – editor, poet
4. Lori Brink – independent teaching artist; coach
5. Therese Cacek – teacher of elementary art
6. Barbara Cox – Arts Education Partnership Coordinator at Perpich Center for Art Education, *Teaching Artist Journal* editorial board member
7. David DeBlicke – dance artist and educator
8. Sarah Drake – artist who has worked with immigrants and refugees for many years
9. Char Ellingson – science teacher interested in integrating arts and science
10. Lee Ann Goerss – visual artist
11. Melissa Gohman – Visual Arts Director at Paramount and ceramicist
12. Karen Henneman – teaches ESL; volunteer at HAW
13. Bettine Hermanson – independent arts education coach
14. Alison Holland – independent teaching artist
15. Debra Hunt – member of Artist to Artist network
16. Jeri Olson-McCoy – weaver; teaching artist
17. Dan Mondloch – visual artist
18. Nancy Oestreich – teaches ESL and science; volunteer at HAW
19. Jane Oxtan – Education Outreach Coordinator at Paramount
20. Nadja Reubenova – independent arts education coach
21. Charlene Sul – lead evaluator with Sul and Associates, Inc, and adjunct faculty in ethnic studies at St. Cloud State University
22. Norma Taylor – educator
23. Mary Jo Thompson – veteran teacher; poet and a longtime collaborator with Artist to Artist network
24. Carol Weiler – photographer and web designer
25. Megan Wright – jewelry artist

For more about this project, including the slideshow presentation and raw notes from the meeting, please visit <http://a2anetwork.org/latest/>

books/publications

Creating Balance in the Classroom

A Reason to Read: Linking Literacy and the Arts

by Eileen Landay and Kurt Wootton

Harvard Education Press, 2012

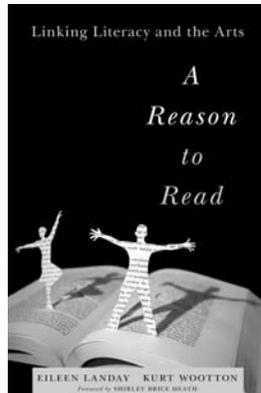
ISBN: 978-1-61250-460-5
Paperback, \$29.95

Reviewed by
Corinna Di Niro

Based on the work by the Arts Literacy Project, formed in 1998 at Brown University and now responsible for various initiatives throughout the United States, Mexico, and Brazil, *A Reason to Read: Linking Literacy and the Arts* presents a series of introductory principles supported by classroom activities that aim to engage a full range of learners in literary learning via the arts.

A Reason to Read breaks down the main curricular framework of the Arts Literacy Project, a flexible model known as "The Performance Cycle" (15). This is a method involving a series of seven creative elements that aim to integrate the arts into literacy learning practices in schools. This central idea is discussed and analyzed through an explanation of each of the seven elements: Building Community in Schools and Classrooms, Entering Text, Comprehending Texts, Creating Texts, Rehearsing and Revising, Performing Text, and Reflection.

Every chapter first gives an account of a real-life experience of each element in the classroom offering teacher and student perspectives as well as theoretical aspects to underpin and support the strategies. Suggested student activities show how to introduce the element into classroom settings. While the examples may imply a performance outcome, it is useful here to note that the examples provided in each



chapter discuss only the components of that particular element of the performance cycle and not the performance cycle in full. Therefore, readers may not necessarily be given a full account of whether a performance was successful or not if does not closely relate to the chapter's main idea.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that *A Reason to Read* does not prescribe suggested texts or state which art forms are better to use over others. Rather, it is full of examples and suggested activities taken from the Arts Literacy Project and from teachers and artists across the world that can be used as a springboard for readers to implement and adapt to their own contexts. While *A Reason to Read* explores and examines predominantly how drama and visual arts can be integrated in literacy learning in both early primary years as well as in secondary schools, readers would be capable of applying these models to all arts subjects. There is a natural connection between texts and bringing those texts to life through drama. For example, learning a Shakespeare play can be more successful if students play out the scenes through drama games and activities or through a well-mapped-out performance-based project, as opposed to sitting at their desks reading the text.

A Reason to Read continually calls for a balance on how learning is measured. In one chapter in particular, "Creating Text," the authors argue the value of learning through engaging in the arts:

... when we integrate the arts, we create something new. Students' minds, bodies, and spirits become active as they work to transform the text into a new medium. This approach differs from the way we traditionally ask students to respond to text in classrooms: by answering comprehension questions, defining unfamiliar vocabulary words, taking quizzes or tests, writing papers, or participating in classroom discussions. Each of these activities has value, and we are not suggesting teachers avoid them. We are arguing, instead, for a balance to engage students' full capacities and intelligences. (128)

I have read widely in the field of performing arts, the pedagogy and practice of performing arts in schools, and literacy

learning; *A Reason to Read* stands out. In my own experience as a teaching artist through a range of artist in schools initiatives, I have worked with students from varying social economic and culturally diverse backgrounds including refugee students and those with special learning needs. As such, I see a strong comparison with how Landay and Wootton have developed a structure that supports the engagement of the community in arts practice with similar activities I have used to engage my students in developing a sense of place within their own communities.

Landay and Wootton draw on experiences from many communities in Brazil, Mexico, and the United States giving the text a multicultural connection; they identify that the arts too can greatly assist with learning English as a second language. The authors argue that the performance cycle model is as beneficial for students learning English as a second language as it is to students learning the Elizabethan English of Shakespeare's plays.

In one particular case study, two teachers worked together to find new and interesting ways of developing English language skills and confidence in speaking English (as a second language) for one of their students at The Centre for Language and Culture in Merida, Mexico. The teachers identified that a student (Flor), while knowing many English words as learned through a series of textbooks that include various games and activities, struggled to put the words together to form sentences. The result in class was that Flor would retreat, sit by herself and lose herself in drawing. One teacher picked up on Flor's drawing ability and that she liked to draw birds, and decided to make her birds the central characters of the Friday performance. "I wanted to find a way for Flor to bring her birds to the classroom, to make them part of what we are doing," the teacher said (141). The students painted Flor's birds after the teacher had enlarged and photocopied them onto cardboard, and their paintings were part of a performance about urban spaces, a topic they were learning in class. To further support Flor's literacy learning, the two teachers steered Flor away from completing activities in textbooks and "designed an

experience that mattered to Flor and the rest of the students" (142). Through participating in a project that was structured using the performance cycle, Flor was a valued member of the classroom community who actively participated like the other students. It was "a project that lasted three months, involved significant revising and rehearsal, and provided space for the students to try things, make mistakes, and work to achieve a substantive result" (142).

While the chapters at times do offer stories regarding difficult situations or reluctant students, on the whole each chapter offers examples of experiences where communities and schools were fully engaged in the project, students were mostly willing participants, and teachers were very giving of their time, and as such, the experience was successful for all involved. One may question, though, with the current trends in schools and demands on teachers, that this notion of all stakeholders participating holistically is not representational of the majority of community, school, or classroom settings. Of course readers want to read what works, but inexperienced teachers and/or artists may find themselves slipping into a false sense of security that this model is easy to implement. Landay and Wootton do not describe what type of teacher their methods would suit, as the reality is that all teachers have the capability to implement such a model. Rather they acknowledge "that the practices [they] describe require time and preparation to implement successfully. Learning to teach well is the work of a lifetime. A teacher's skills develop as the result of millions of interactions within a community of learners, both peers and students" (212).

Therefore, teachers will need to allocate ample time to developing strategies for implementing such a model. However, teaching using the performance cycle has the ability to evoke a team spirit, with teachers and artists joining forces to work collaboratively to engage students in literacy learning and consequently sharing the dual role of designing, implementing, monitoring, redesigning, and so on. Community theater groups working with participants outside the traditional school setting would also find the performance cycle beneficial to develop a

piece of prose, or a music, dance, or theater performance with their participants.

In the epilogue the authors have included e-mails sent to them from two teachers who use the model, one of whom is struggling to engage her students in some of the suggested activities:

Have been teaching my 10th-grade students some performance exercises. I really love these ideas and they really give me something to work on. However, the class is loaded with behavioral challenges. There is a lot of oppositional defiance, side-taking and they are loud. Are there any strategies that you found successful with an unruly classroom using integrated performance art? This has been a real struggle. (212)

In response to this e-mail, Landay and Wootton set out the best conditions to implement the performance cycle to the classroom. They suggest it is ideal to have time for planning and responding to student work, be in a supportive teaching and learning environment, have role models, teaching artists, supportive partners and collaborators and interested colleagues, ongoing professional development, and so on and so forth. And while they also acknowledge that “the current climate and present circumstances” may not reflect having the ideal situation, they do “encourage you to start where you are most comfortable and begin with approaches you know will work for your particular groups of students” (213).

Perhaps in addition to this, readers could benefit from more e-mails embedded throughout the text with their corresponding replies advising how to work through each element when teachers are not “getting it.” Also, if suggestions from teachers who have tried and failed a few times before succeeding were included, this could reassure readers that introducing and utilizing the performance cycle in classrooms with various dynamics is constructive even if time consuming. The authors invite readers to learn more and join an online conversation at www.artslit.org (214).

While arts curriculum is changing and developing in some countries (Australia has recently embarked on a new national arts curriculum), there is still an underlining struggle among many to see the arts as important as other “traditional” core disciplines. A shift in view no doubt needs to happen ... and sooner, rather than later. And as teachers battle with conforming to standardized testing, mainstream learning, and pressures from funding agencies, *A Reason to Read* is a practical guide available for those ready to accept the challenge of seeking a balanced and more engaging method in learning.

Corinna Di Niro is currently completing her PhD in Commedia dell’Arte in Australia at the University of South Australia. She also works as an artist in schools and as a community artist practitioner across Australia.