

Arts in Education Alumni Event

On November 29th 2007, more than 30 AIE alumni from the northeast gathered to re-connect and talk about current issues in the field of arts in education. Alumni attended from graduating years as far back as 1999. Representatives from Alumni Services & Career Services also attended.

The event included opening remarks by Steve Seidel, current director of the Arts in Education program; small group discussions on current issues in the AIE field; and reflections from alumni.



Alumni Survey Results

AIE alumni attending the event said that they would like to have future conversations about the following topics:

Arts Teaching & Learning:

- museum learning & arts learning;
- teaching in the AIE field;
- how to foster and support artists' talents, work, and outreach.

Current Issues in the AIE Field:

- current issues & research in the field;
- arts & resilience; art & social change/ social justice;
- art as a healing modality
- teaching;
- AIE policy;
- quality;
- disciplines;
- creating frameworks for the future of arts education;
- best practices in the field;
- bringing AIE theories and practices into non-traditional spaces (corporate, anthropology, etc.);
- talking about big issues in the field with an eye to creating ideas and programs to implement immediately;
- youth as assets.

Career Development:

- cross-sector career paths;
- AIE & business fields.

Alumni Connections:

- continued dialogue with colleagues;
- meeting, talking, and networking with other AIE alumni;
- current activities of other alumni;
- brainstorming/imagining sessions that can be applied to the real world;
- talking about issues we are having at/with work and brainstorming with people in the field but outside of your work.

Leadership:

- leadership discussions;
- reframing leadership in the field;
- leadership/future directions;
- mentoring;
- the role of Vision in addressing problems.



*M*ost valuable part of the event according to attendees:

- feeling reconnected to the AIE program/the HGSE community
- opportunity to engage in substantive small group discussions about AIE-related topics
- seeing fellow faculty and alumni/seeing old friends
- feeling that others are concerned about similar issues in the world of arts, education, youth, etc.
- strategizing with fellow alumni
- talking about current experiences and issues in the field/sharing ideas
- learning about current work at Project Zero
- being in an intellectual, reflective, questioning space in which to talk about AIE issues

*S*uggested format for future events:

Electronic (AIE alumni website; virtual events or conversations; virtual book/article review groups)

Conversations (events similar to 11/29 gathering, with in-depth small group break-out sessions; regional events; focused conversations on current issues; “Open Space Technology” conversations; in-person book/article review groups; talks with artists and leaders in the AIE field; events around NYC Career Days, with AIE dialogue and chances to connect and visit arts settings)

Work Sharing (research/paper/work project presentations where people can share current work & ideas; lecture/panel on new ideas to research; national conferences that bring arts education to the “next level”;

Informal Gatherings (informal conversations at local venues; free-form networking & social opportunities)

HGSE Connections (gatherings around current talks at HGSE; connections with the Project Zero Summer Institute; attendance at events put on by current students)

Art Interactions (group artmaking; group experiences in the arts--gathering to see a play, exhibit, etc. and debriefing together about the experience)

*I*deal role for the AIE alumni community:

- opportunities to get out & do something arts-related
- chances to explore new thoughts about AIE-related issues
- chances to engage in AIE-related dialogue and continue reflective practice
- opportunities to connect/re-connect with AIE alumni
- chances to network and collaborate
- connection to a supportive intellectual/artistic community
- chances to connect researchers and practitioners in the field
- opportunities to build mentoring and provide inspiration
- a better understanding of how the arts are being made accessible to the community



Alumni Advice:

Contact these AIE alumni for advice about the following AIE-related topics:

- **Advocacy work** (Eyenga Bokamba '07: bokamba2024@yahoo.com)
- **After-school education** (Melina O'Grady '02: melogrady@gmail.com; Lori Eisenberg '04: lori.eisenberg@gmail.com)
- **AIE alumni study** (Alison Rhodes '03: AlisonMRhodes@gmail.com)
- **Arts administration** (Barbara Palley '07: bepalley@gmail.com; Andrea Sachdeva '07: andreasachdeva@yahoo.com)
- **Arts & culture** (Alison Rhodes '03: AlisonMRhodes@gmail.com)
- **Arts & globalization** (Alison Rhodes '03: AlisonMRhodes@gmail.com)
- **Community music school management** (Rachel Schechter '03: rayschechter@gmail.com)
- **Development** (Andrea Sachdeva '07: andreasachdeva@yahoo.com; Sara Cofrin '06: Saracofrin@gmail.com)
- **Early childhood education** (Keon-Ryeong Park '07: HGSE2007@gmail.com, bluecrystal99@gmail.com; Rachel Schechter '03: rayschechter@gmail.com)
- **Fine art** (Caleb Neelon '04: Calebfunk@hotmail.com)
- **Grantmaking** (Andrea Sachdeva '07: andreasachdeva@yahoo.com; Sara Cofrin '06: Saracofrin@gmail.com)
- **Grantwriting** (Andrea Sachdeva '07: andreasachdeva@yahoo.com; Sara Cofrin '06: Saracofrin@gmail.com)
- **Interdisciplinary education** (Alison Rhodes '03: AlisonMRhodes@gmail.com)
- **Leadership development** (Eyenga Bokamba '07: bokamba2024@yahoo.com)
- **Media** (Jenny Meyburg '06: jmeyburg@yahoo.com)
- **Museum education** (Keon-Ryeong Park '07: HGSE2007@gmail.com, bluecrystal99@gmail.com; Lori Eisenberg '04: lori.eisenberg@gmail.com; Paula Lynn '07: paulalynnster@gmail.com; Barbara Palley '07: bepalley@gmail.com)
- **Museums** (Simone Monique Barnes '07: simonemonique@post.harvard.edu)
- **Museum Research** (Paula Lynn '07: paulalynnster@gmail.com)
- **Music** (Jenny Meyburg '06: jmeyburg@yahoo.com; Andrea Sachdeva '07: andreasachdeva@yahoo.com)
- **Music Education** (Rachel Schechter '03: rayschechter@gmail.com)
- **Native American museums & cultural centers** (Simone Monique Barnes '07: simonemonique@post.harvard.edu)
- **Non-profit endowment investing/business** (Ali Kelley '06: Ali.Kelley@gmail.com)
- **Non-profit management** (Ali Kelley '06: Ali.Kelley@gmail.com)
- **Politics** (Eyenga Bokamba '07: bokamba2024@yahoo.com)
- **Policy** (Eyenga Bokamba '07: bokamba2024@yahoo.com)
- **Program evaluation** (Andrea Sachdeva '07: andreasachdeva@yahoo.com)
- **Public relations** (Simone Monique Barnes '07: simonemonique@post.harvard.edu)
- **Publishing** (Caleb Neelon '04: Calebfunk@hotmail.com)
- **Reggio Emilia pre-school arts teaching** (Lori Eisenberg '04: lori.eisenberg@gmail.com)
- **School partnerships/School-Art Organization Connections** (Barbara Palley '07: bepalley@gmail.com; Jenny Meyburg '06: jmeyburg@yahoo.com)
- **Spanish education** (Laura [Schicko] Keenan '03: lrkeenan@gmail.com)
- **Staff training** (Barbara Palley '07: bepalley@gmail.com)
- **Teaching (general)** (Anne Armstrong '03: aarmstrong@belmontday.org; Victor Young '05: vly@mythicaspect.com)
- **Teaching (preschool)** (Rachel Schechter '03: rayschechter@gmail.com)
- **Teaching (7th-12th grade)** (Eyenga Bokamba '07: bokamba2024@yahoo.com)
- **Theatre** (Melissa Ruopp '06: melissa.ruopp@gmail.com)
- **Urban culture** (Caleb Neelon '04: Calebfunk@hotmail.com)
- **Visual arts** (Anne Armstrong '03: aarmstrong@belmontday.org)

Opening Remarks from Steve Seidel

Steve Seidel, Director of the Arts in Education Program:

I'd like to share some thoughts about what the field of arts education looks like to me these days. I don't know if it will sound like the same field you are in, as we all come from so many different corners of the realm we call arts in education.



In thinking about the state of our field, I think about A Tale of Two Cities and Dickens' characterization of "the best of times and the worst of times." I can easily spin out a vision of what is happening in this field as the worst of times, and I'd start with the explicit and implicit impacts of NCLB on arts education in public schools. But, it's also an incredibly interesting time—the best and the worst are usually related, right?

But part of what that's meant is that people—people like you and your predecessors in this realm of activity—have had to get on with the business of figuring out how we're going to make it possible for young people in this country to have access and opportunity to have powerful, sustained, high-quality arts learning experiences in their lives. This has led to a lot of creative, entrepreneurial, innovative work.

There was a wonderful comment by Lynn Brown, one of the current students in the program this fall, when some of us were lamenting about the marginalization of the arts in education. She suggested that, on the one hand, this was a terrible situation, but, on the other hand, powerful innovation usually comes from the margins, not the center. I think there's a lot of truth to that, not just in arts education, but in a lot of domains, and that's my point about the worst of times and the best of times. The creativity and innovation that I saw happening when I was traveling around was not only in the classroom where it was very strong, but also in out-of-school settings. It was also in the ways people are figuring how to put money together to fund that work and the partnerships they are creating. There's a level of sophistication and entrepreneurship around partnerships and who you get involved, public and private, that's just better and more opportunistic, in the best sense, than things that were familiar to me from 15-20 years ago.

So I want to say a couple of words about what I'm going to call challenges/opportunities. I see these as simultaneously challenging and promising areas for work and innovation.

Quality. The first is Quality: I think we've known in this field for a long time that a lot of the work that goes on in the name of arts education is not nearly as good as we want it to be. We have a hard time acknowledging this. (It's a hard thing to acknowledge when you're fighting for your life.) I think the field has been a little ambivalent about how public to make a conversation about quality. And in truth, I think there's been a tremendous amount in the past 25 years of school reform that people in arts education have done by jumping into work and conversations about standards, assessment, frameworks—which are *all* about quality, really. Having standards and assessments and frameworks can't *guarantee* quality, but they *are* about trying to talk about what we're trying to achieve in terms of the quality of arts learning experiences. Arts educators have taken a "let's jump in and be part of that conversation" attitude. There's been terrific work that's gone on, but I also think we're at the place where we're ready for the next level of work to be going on about quality—and in that context I'm hopeful that the Qualities of Quality¹ study can contribute to taking this conversation about quality to a next level.

¹ **The Qualities of Quality: Excellence in Arts Education and How to Achieve It** is a current Project Zero study aiming to synthesize what is currently understood about the critical elements of high quality arts teaching and learning and to identify effective strategies for creating those experiences for school-age youth in diverse settings. <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/Research/Quality.htm>

And I'll say just two things about it. The first is that we didn't try to define what quality arts education is, per se. Rather we asked, "What's a high-quality arts learning *experience*? What's the nature and the multi-dimensionality of the experience in the room when it's actually happening?" This focus on experience feels important to us and seems to have been important to those we interviewed. They seemed to really appreciate that our questions focused on what high-quality looks like when you walk into an arts learning environment. These questions gave them a chance to sort through all the myriad things going on when you enter a really wonderful arts classroom or workshop, rehearsal or studio.



Another realization we've come to is that being obsessed with quality is actually really important for achieving it. To be obsessed with quality means to ask questions about it all the time. You could also call this "rigorous reflective practice", in which you're always asking and questioning, "is this as powerful a learning experience as it could be? What else should we pay attention to? How else could we improve it?" So, quality is a big challenge and presents lots of opportunities.

Access. The next is Access. When you look at the amount of time young people are getting on the arts in public schools right now it's *abysmal*. I just saw some figures earlier today, which I wish I'd brought, because it's worse than you might imagine—and we don't know anything about the quality of the experiences children do have in public school art education. But the issue of access I think has really begun to shift to be a question of not just "Do you have access to it in public school?", but "Where are all the *other* places in your life where you might have access to arts learning experiences?" And there are lots of emerging "other" places and I'll just give you one example of it. In Massachusetts, we have the Extended Learning Time Initiative which is expanding the school day in some schools, in part to make time for the arts and other studies that have been eliminated in recent years. Others are investing in innovative after-school programs, some of which feature arts learning opportunities. There are a lot of people shifting their focus from what can happen in the school day and in the school building to what can happen in the other hours that young people are awake. So again there are tremendous challenges and tremendous opportunities.



Understanding. The third of the three challenges/opportunities is Understanding, which is another way of talking about research. One of the things that has been particularly impressive to me in going on the site visits for the Qualities of Quality project is the degree to which learning theory and other ideas from research on learning has been influencing the way arts educators think and teach.



This feels very different from when I was a high school arts teacher twenty years ago. But there's a huge amount more to do in understanding learning in the arts, and I'll just name a few things really quickly:

One is the role of imagination in arts learning. Another is about the relationship between formal and informal arts learning experiences. When you look at a young person's life and the arc of their artistic development, how much do we understand about the relationship between their *formal* arts learning experiences like classes, etc., and their *informal* arts learning experiences, including what they do on their own, what they do with their friends, what they do out-of-school—not classes, but putting on plays, making up dances, etc., and how do those experiences interact to create a fully developed young artist? So those are a couple of things that we could learn much more about.

To finish up these remarks, I'm going to put out three more ideas—slightly different in character from quality, access, and understanding—that you might want to talk about when we break into small groups.

Sustainability of Long-Term Work. The first is health benefits, which for me is kind of code for the whole larger question of the sustainability of long-term work in this field. Of course, it's not *only* about health benefits, though that's not a small piece. One of the things that Alison [Rhodes, researcher for the AIE alumni study] knows well is that when we looked through responses from the alumni survey we were really struck by two things: 1.) how satisfied people seem to be with their current work in arts education and simultaneously; 2.) how they do not know how they're going to sustain this work and life style for 5 or more years.

Leadership. And here's another one, this is a field that is going to have a major leadership vacuum in not very many years. If you look around you at various kinds of organizations—arts at the national level and the local level—except for the very new, emerging organizations, people are going to be retiring. Who will be the next generation of leaders? And particularly, not just who's going to take the top jobs, but who's going to say, "This is where this field needs to be going." And who will create the organizations and innovations that don't now exist to take the field to a whole other level of sophistication and achievement.

Networks & Conversations. And the third idea is to do with networks and conversations. There's a lot of concern I hear that there isn't a healthy *national* conversation, but also that there also is a lot lacking in local and regional conversations. So how do you build local, regional, national conversations that are substantive and supportive and build a sense of being part of something bigger than yourself or your particular work?

I'm wondering if there are any other topics that you would like to nominate for small group discussion this evening?

Identity. *Alumna:* I don't know how to articulate this, but I was thinking something about one's identity in the field, because I think we often wear so many hats... we're artists, we're administrators. I don't think that people outside of our field understand that, conceptualize that, so I guess the word would be identity.

Steve: Great. So feel free to organize into groups by interest and we'll come back together in an hour.



[Alumni attendees then broke out into smaller groups to discuss topics suggested by Steve's opening remarks.]

Thoughts from Small Group Discussions

Quality

- Concerns about exploring quality in the field: expectations for quality; lack of support in the pursuit of quality; how quality can change over time; which vocabulary and language to use with those outside the field; freedom vs. structure in the search for quality
- Issues of “fragmented quality”—how do you integrate quality throughout a program in all of its different aspects? How do you teach quality in a non-quality environment?
- How do you assess what is “good programming”?
- Role of politics in assessment and evaluation
- Importance of support in evaluating and assessing—role of advocacy, making connections with others in the pursuit of quality.
- Relentless nature of quality and assessment; constant need to check and assess quality and stakeholders’ goals
- How do you decide what to assess? What are your goals? What are the goals of other stakeholders?
- Need for personal understanding and relationships in the evaluation and assessment process.
- Assessing process and product

Access

- Unevenness in who has access: wealthy public schools still have art and parents who thrive on extra opportunities
- Complete lack of access to arts for poor
- Issue of providing access not just to kids who have talent
- Lots of stories about kids who the arts matter so much for kids that can’t plug in otherwise to school
- Important opportunity for catharsis and self-development
- Pressures to take academic courses over arts courses
- Lots of stress on kids – need for an outlet
- Everyone needs the arts
- AIE connected to larger social problems
- Unevenness between schools
- Absence of arts and other experiences
- We value what the arts can do but let’s not discount FUN
- NCLB hurts access in poor schools
- Quality or access
- Art as core subject
- People aren’t well rounded
- Fun for kids with tough lives – hands-on art
- After-school is an opportunity
- Artists aren’t paid well
- Patronage – why do sports heroes get so much?
- Access not in schools also museums are foreign and stuffy to some cultures

Understanding

Understanding

Topics – Broad

- how to create deep quality understanding experiences in the classroom
- professional development –how educators can keep up with learning theories while working in the field
- making sure researchers understand what’s happening in the classroom
- understanding in non-class settings – not just product but process
- out-of-school settings, professional development
- how teachers understand the students’ understanding; how they can use that understanding to deepen other experiences

Professional Development

Challenges – What’s going on now?

- abstract understanding to implementation
- if one person goes to a conference – how do we get everyone to know about it?
- Time to read articles, etc.
- Sharing knowledge is tough!
- How do you get teachers, etc. to change their ideas of teaching and learning?
- Missing the language to talk about understanding
- Standards

These are opportunities:

- missing in education field – time and culture of reflection
- put in place a way to share knowledge (website/a non-threatening, non-personal way of sharing)

Opportunities for Professional Development

- Room in organization structure to shift not total change, but flexible change
- Defining understanding
- Set-up understanding goals in classroom, program, etc.
- Change ideas of what assessing looks like when measuring understanding
- Looking at teacher education programs (teach understanding, new ways to assess)
- How to deal with making strides in understanding and then teachers go into public schools where they are given a script
- Feeling that teachers are more aware of the theories but can’t implement them (they become watered down/there is a disconnect between theory, need, and implementation)
- The AIE program has made us reflective more than other teachers!

Out-of-School Settings

- Communication – how can you explain the understandings so I can explain it to funders?
- How can we reflect – especially in larger organizations?
- Museums do a lot of the research to share with teachers and schools
- Systematic support is needed in order to implement!
- Issues of time, money, creative structures

Leadership in the Field/Sustainability of Long-Term Work/Identity

- **Concerns:** How do we bring young people into leadership positions? How do we get access to positions and how to get people in power to open doors? Communication is lacking, many are not hearing the “full picture”. Question of how to create programs of mentoring within the field to continue to foster upcoming leaders. Question of multitasking vs. multiple identities. Issue of how to gain legitimacy as an arts educator. As arts educators – a voice/leadership for education on the national level to put a vision out there.
- **Mentorship roles:** Who is involved and how does everyone become involved? More often than not leaders in the arts field are business people, not artists. How do we find mentors in the field, and how can one utilize a mentor in the “best” possible way? Need to identify the strengths of individuals and match their strengths to your own interests.
- **Arts in Education as its own field:** What would a singular field look like? What would a singular goal look like? Is that what we want/need?
- **The creativity factor:** There is a disconnect between what’s needed and what we end up teaching in the schools. Is the field too scattered? Is the field ready to say “We know what to do!”? Is the dialogue intergenerational?
- **The vacuum:** demographics – basic breakdown; Lots of opportunities in the future will open up; This is the same conversation in other fields!
- **Non-profit/non-profitable fields:** “Founder’s syndrome”; the arts have a derogatory connotation; Is it a voice to win over the public?
- **What is the leadership we’re talking about?:** Local leaders; Grassroots; National
- **What is your vision for arts in education?:** The broadness/diversity is its strength; Professional organizations and connections; Teaching, researching, writing, the academic world.
- **Skills:** How do we develop leadership skills if the opportunities are not there? Importance of the broad base of knowledge – developing other skills that are needed.
- **Trust:** Needed from current leaders to younger generations; makes us question how to prove ourselves.

Networks & Conversations

- Concerns about having the energy to do art and be creative in teaching after the parent/teacher conferences and school-related requirements.
- Potential ways to connected include e-mails, word of mouth.
- Potential ways to make/expand networks are through other people and through online resources such as Facebook
- Need for AIE alumni to stay connected
- New ideas for creating networks and connections: creation of an alumni ambassador position; creation of an open space for ideas (example, inviting co-workers, etc.); connections to be made through HGSE Career Services or online



At the end of the alumni gathering, each alumni attendee chose one salient aspect of the event on which to make a comment. Many of the comments reiterated thoughts from the small group discussions on the previous pages. Others commented on the overall importance of the gathering for them:

Importance of Support.

Several alumni commented on the importance of feeling support, and of having the opportunity to support each other through the AIE alumni community. For them, being able to give and receive supportive and constructive feedback about current issues in the field with others currently pursuing arts in education work on a daily basis was a powerful source of strength and affirmation. One alumna commented that this supportive environment is a natural fit for the AIE alumni group, as art is often a community-building and group-strengthening pursuit.

Continuing the Conversation.

During the event wrap-up, many alumni talked about the importance of creative and continuing conversations in the field. For some, the event provided a much-needed opportunity for open dialogue about current AIE issues. Others expressed the need for continued reflection and the importance of talking to both like-minded and non-like-minded members of the community. The need to have AIE-related conversations across generations, drawing advice and wisdom from veterans in the field, was also addressed. One alumna commented that this dialogue, 'keeps the door open in the back of our minds, and out in the world, and that to me is a very great part of our work'.

Staying Connected.

Finally, numerous alumni attendees expressed the importance of the alumni event in terms of re-connecting and feeling the need to continue that connection on a regular basis. Some talked about the need to stay active in the alumni community after graduation, taking advantage of opportunities for continued involvement.