Canadian Art Partnership Program in Finland

In the UNESCO's "Wow Factor" a global research compendium on the impact of the arts in education, Anne Bamford suggests that Finland has a special relationship to the arts. According to her, the arts account for 80% of teaching time in Finnish schools, while all subjects are learned with "education through the arts." This interesting fact, she claims, is probably culture specific (Bamford 2006, 60). Although the hypothesis sounds intriguing and Bamford actually does not explain how she draws her conclusion, there is evidence that the claim is truthful. Indeed, the arts are embedded within Finnish culture and education – the reason for this can be found from history.

Since the first Elementary School Statute 1863 the arts have always played an essential role in Finnish school system. Uno Cygnaeus (1810–1888) "the father of the Finnish folk school" visited several countries in Europe and even in Sitka, Alaska, in order to develop the Finnish model of education, took Pestalozian ideas and arts and crafts into the school curriculum. Cygnaeus's unique approach was that none of the arts would be conducted as a means of trade but more as an intellectually stimulating and mentally satisfying activity on their own. He saw the need for schools where balance among students' body, mind and spirit would be emphasized. Following his guidelines and suggestions the Senate of Finland decided that the arts and crafts would become part of the curriculum in then newly established teacher-training institution in Jyväskylä by 1866. This decision was far-reaching, and even today, every ordinary comprehensive school in Finland provides all arts, including music, handicrafts and fine arts lessons to all children from first grade to sixth and even in upper seventh and ninth grade classes. The tradition of music, fine arts and handicrafts (both sloyd (=woodwork) and needlework) lessons is thus long and strong enough to enrich and reflect other areas of education as well. In Finnish comprehensive schools, arts are learned not just *about the arts* and *in the arts,* but also *through the arts*. This became evident during the project that delivered the Canadian program to the ten schools in Lahti and Helsinki, Finland.

Background of the project

In Finland, the Ministry of Education is divided into the educational division (Minister of Education) and the cultural division (Minister of Culture). The cultural division is active in supporting arts education outside of the schools while the educational division is responsible for the core curriculum in the schools. The same kind of division at the university level is found between university teacher education departments and polytechnics (presently called universities of applied sciences). While the teacher education departments take responsibility for the arts education of teacher candidates, the artists and future teachers of public music and art schools get their authorization from the polytechnics. The division is awkward, as to certain extent, both parties are doing the same things independently. It is obvious that both teachers and those working outside of the schools would benefit from cooperation with each other. The question, however, is how to combine these two approaches. At the same time, it had to be decided, what kind of form the co-operation would take. The organizational setting where these questions were solved was an R&D forum at Lahti Polytechnics – a new venue for innovation, and research in applied studies.

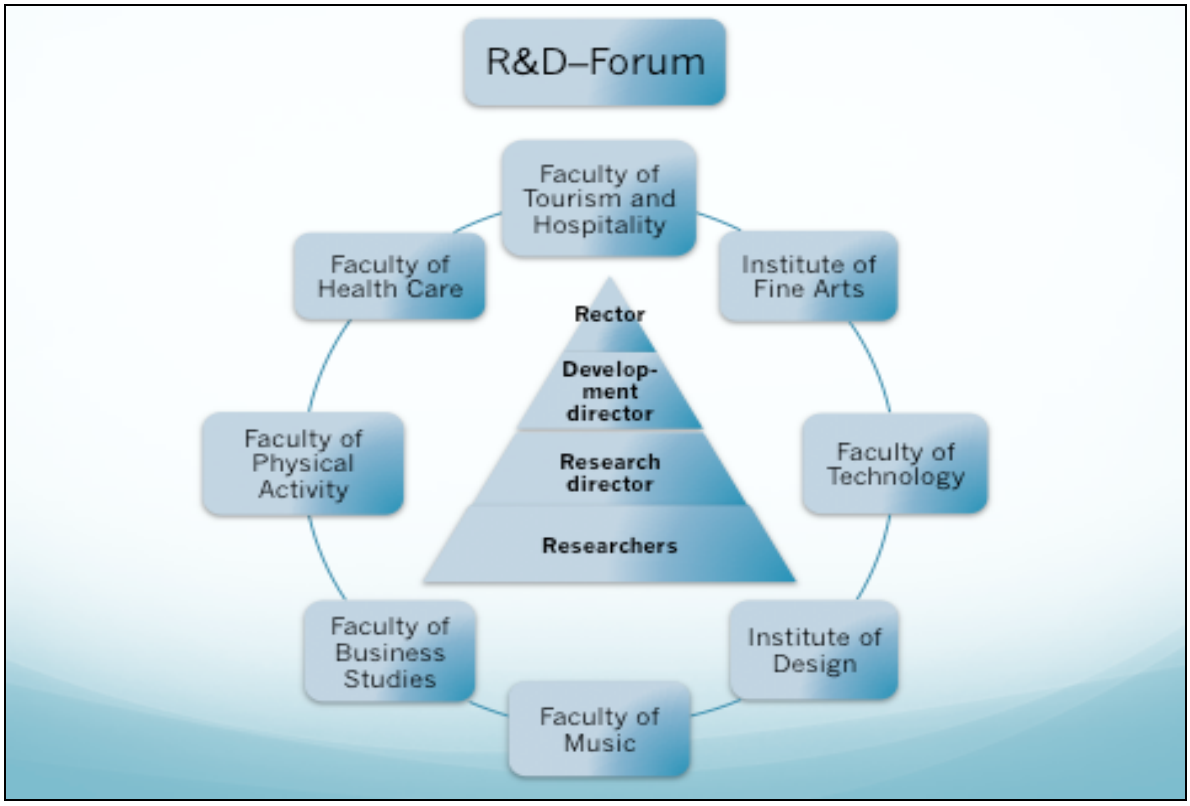

Figure 1. R&D unit at Lahti Polytechnics 2002–2004

The multidisciplinary research and development unit consisted of eight researchers, one research director and one development director, reporting directly to the Polytechnics Rector. While the eight researchers were coordinating and doing research in their own departments, all of them had a relatively independent position for creating new approaches, launching projects and finding new and innovative ways of doing things together. As a representative of the Faculty of Music, I was able to negotiate with the Institute of Fine Arts, the Institute of Design and the Faculty of Physical Activity (dance) to find a model that would benefit the welfare and cultural life in the Lahti area. At the same time, the task was to test multidisciplinary cooperation with various quarters and adjust the needs of every participant into one project. This idealistic, and initially vague, objective resulted in surprisingly specific form – the idea of art partnerships was benchmarked in Toronto – the Learning Through The Arts program from The Royal Conservatory of Music. Established in 1995,[i] the LTTA is the second largest arts educational initiative in Canada. It involves over 100.000 pupils and 240 elementary and secondary schools. Other countries that have undertaken LTTA projects include Italy, the UK, Australia, Portugal, the United States, Singapore, Japan, Malaysia and Sweden. However, the program has had its' greatest success in Canada, where it has a natural niche in the field of arts education.

The core idea of LTTA is "to transform the goals, culture and methodologies of public education." It does this through integration of the performing and visual arts into the school curriculum through wide variety of methods. The children learn math, science, language, history, or social studies by making images, creating dances, telling stories, and singing songs[ii]. Before artists and teachers begin working closely together, the teachers receive both the training and tools related to using the arts in different subject areas, while the artists are given training in educational principles and classroom dynamics (Wyman 2004, 56). When the necessary formal decisions for launching the pilot project in Finland were made at Lahti Polytechnics the researcher negotiated with Royal Conservatory of Music about bringing the Canadian team to Finland. Still, there were also other partners to negotiate with, as indicated in following picture:

Figure 2. Key players of the LTTA-project in Lahti

When told about the idea of LTTA, the school board of Lahti was willing to give space for the Finnish–Canadian experiment and to pay the wages of substitute teachers who would be needed during the course. The actual training was to be based on two equally important modules:

1) The intensive one-week teacher and artist training (40 hours), provided by the international LTTA team from New York and Toronto

2) The program for developing artists' pedagogical skills, provided by the University of Turku's teacher trainers from Rauma. This included 49 hours of lectures, 120 hours of distance learning, and 100–160 hours of field practice in the schools

While the project was promoted in many different quarters (including the famous Lahti Symphony), the major funding was appropriated from the Employment and Economic Development Centre for Häme, where one of the main interests was in promoting new ways to update workforce professional skills and improving people's expertise. In many cases, the artists, even if, not totally unemployed, still fit to the criteria of the Centre's policies. This was an exploration of new ways to use arts and their expertise in society. The LTTA program offered a model where artists could do their own artistic work beside work at schools and, additionally, could be used as partners with teachers to promote children's learning in different subjects. This kind of approach was something never seen in Finland before. In November 2003, 25 teachers and 14 artists representing different art forms were gathered together in the Polytechnic's music department to learn, how to cooperate in teacher-artist pairs.

Course objectives

The objectives of the course's international component for the teachers and artists were written as follows:

At the end of the course, participants will be able to:

- Identify the skills unique to each art form
- Understand the concepts being developed in these art forms
- Make connections between various parts of the Finnish school curriculum
- Use various art forms to help students to understand concepts in other subjects
- Plan an interdisciplinary lesson
- Critique and assess the effectiveness of the lessons

During the course, the teachers and artists explored classroom strategies that could help the children grasp concepts by using music, dance and visual arts. The arts were connected to math, language and social studies; simultaneously, the idea of the arts focused on the classroom and its continued development was considered with the participants. After the first week, the teacher–artist teams were created, and the planning of the field period began. The field practice for the course (100–160 hours) took place in 10 schools, both in Lahti and Helsinki, with guidance from two lecturers from the university in the spring semester of 2004; meanwhile, the lectures and the tasks assigned to the artists by the university teacher educators consisted of:

Didactics, learning, and evaluation 7 h + 20 hours
Sociology and school culture 3 h + 40 hours
Planning the work in schools 4 h + 20 hours
Communication and interaction 7 h + 20 hours
Different learners and learning styles 3 h + 20 hours
Learning and teaching skills 4 hours
The school laws and the goals of curriculum 7 hours
Group tutoring during the field practices 14 hours
Total 49 h + 120 hours

The artists were selected through interviews at the local job center. In order to participate in the course and get a small salary provided by the Employment and Economic Centre, the artists had to meet the following criteria:

- Be a practicing artist or, have a degree in the field
- Demonstrate an interest in, and affinity to, children
- Be willing to learn about education and the integrative approach to the arts
- Be available to participate in all of the training included in the course

Only the musicians from the Lahti Symphony Orchestra constituted an exception to the last criterion. In their case, the program was tailored for their own project, called "Hey, We Are Composing!" an approach that was originally created by the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London that represents a typical orchestra community program for educating future audiences. Departing from the source idea, the musicians had modified the model in the way that it served the schools in the instructional setting, i.e; the musicians could actually teach geography through music. For example, when children were composing their own version of the Blue Danube by Johann Strauss, they also studied the map of Austria and along the Danube.

It was obvious that the LTTA and the project of musicians' objectives overlapped each other perfectly!

The teachers from Lahti were all invited to the course, since all of the lower elementary schools were given an equal opportunity to participate. However, since the invitation letters and course information were sent to the principals during summer vacation, the most motivated schools and teachers were those who responded and applied. The teachers were willing to attend even without knowing what to expect from the project. They were just told that they would be doing arts with artists from the LTTA program. Even I, with having had the opportunity to follow the LTTA program at work in Canada in advance, was not able to predict how much the Canadian teaching methods would eventually differ from the Finnish. In fact, the experiment was actually more about what happens when different kinds of expertise and cultures are mixed together. In that sense, the learning experiences participants gained in the course was both means and goal. For the researcher, the goal was of course more structured, with much effort toward the formal assessment. From the very beginning, it was made clear that the experiences and ideas generated during the course would be evaluated, and that criticism would be welcome in order to develop and explore the practices involved. Evaluation was done in the following ways:

1) Every artist and teacher kept a diary throughout the course.
2) A student from the teacher education department interviewed artists and sent a questionnaire by e-mail to teachers, as later reported upon in a master's thesis (Talvo 2006).
3) The employment authorities employed their own computer-based questionnaire among the artists.
4) The teacher education department's lecturer followed to provide guidance in the schools during the actual field period of training.
5) Observations were made by the researcher (project manager).

The diaries (N= 25) were to include ideas about the content of the course and its suitability for the participant's professional use as a teacher or artist. The artists were to describe their duties and lesson plans during the field practice, as they were also asked to reflect on whether they succeeded in their artistic teaching methods in classroom. Every participant in the course was also asked to include conclusions on the course as a whole. The themes analyzed afterwards were:

1) Opinions on the use of arts in education and its importance, potential, and disadvantages.
2) Cooperation between artists and teachers.
3) Experiences and opinions about the whole course.

The chosen thematic structure served for comparing cases and groups and gaining an overall picture of the pilot. Since the evaluation was done by several stakeholders, the results could be verified for future validity. In the same manner, the interpretation of the diaries was intersubjective and more specific in nature.

Blurring the professional roles

In view of the fact that LTTA had never been previously introduced in Finland, the planning of the intensive week had to be carefully strategized. Since it was obvious that some aspects of Canadian/US working methods would be familiar to well trained Finnish teachers, the core idea of the course was that those methods would be used in a new environment and in a

multidisciplinary way. Quite often Finnish teachers work alone, and although they teach the arts, the question was whether professional artists would have a positive impact on their teaching. The goal was to create a new kind of thinking, as well as a new attitude toward working together, exploring and tolerating uncertainty. A practical and simple example related to this was that the nametags were not given to participants at the beginning of the course. In the invitation letter, it was emphasized that the participants were not to tell each other their occupations. The idea was to provide creative tension and to blur the stereotypical occupational roles among the participants. How often do we categorize people and label things before we actually "know" them?

As one might guess, it didn't take a long time for the teachers and artists to know each other. However, irrespective of whether one was a teacher or an artist, all of the participants were doing the same things – dancing, painting or thinking about the lesson plans. The doubts concerning the method were still in the foreground in the first few days, but after awhile the idea of cooperation with the teachers and the artists was taken positively. Examples of the transformation of attitudes among teachers were captured in diaries:

First day comment from teacher:

Underestimating of Finnish teachers' education? Uppermost it reminds us that in the course single ´tricks´ are learned.

At the end of the week same person:

The artist might have something to give to a school class through not just the artistic skills but through his/hers attitudes in life. Also 'the madness of creativity,' which includes tolerance of uncertainty in a process (when doing something where you are not sure about the outcomes,) would bean important life skill for students to learn. (That is something that seems to be lacking from the teacher.)

First day comment from teacher:

What would that artist do in the school? I DON'T GET IT. I have my own ideas, and different views. The artists have only expertise of their own field.

At the end of the week same person writes:

So many ways to think, different directions… where to collect the ideas, different approaches. Oh, oh – so many thoughts!

Just as there were clear examples of transformations of attitudes among the teachers, there were also those teachers who had already a strong artistic background themselves. In many cases, these teachers had the most realistic, but, at the same time, the most positive attitudes toward cooperation. In many cases uncertainty of one's own skills reflects to the negative attitude towards art in education. It is thus most important that teachers also have artistic capability and the arts integrated in their university training programs.

What about the artists? To ensure that the Finnish educational standards and school culture would become familiar to the artists, the program for developing pedagogical skills delivered by Finnish teacher educators was given a lot of responsibility for the project as a whole. The

lectures by professors, school principal and senior lectures were spread over a longer period of time. The tasks assigned by them (mostly essays and curriculum plans), as well as the number of lesson hours in the schools, provided an efficient environment with which most of the artists had not been previously familiar. The Finnish artists raised thoughts analogous to those of the previously quoted teachers in relation to the Canadians' work:

First day comment from artist:

The beginning of the course was good, but in the afternoon the main thread disappeared. (Tiredness?) Do we have more concrete knowledge? What is the method? Am I in a right place?

Another comment:

In my case the problem was that I have never studied this field before and some of the concepts were totally unfamiliar to me. I had to really concentrate in order to be able to follow things.

While after a few weeks same persons write:

I've gotten some ideas of the issues handled in lessons, or more like loose images, but now those issues were clarified in considerable when you were given them into your hands in written form. Overall, an interesting and surely useful lecture. The examples given were good. The model lesson plans were also useful. I will definitely use them.

And another artist:

In the lesson, it be came clear the RESPONSIBILITY of the task given to us! Important are giving correct instruction, planning, the maintenance of the written form of the plans, and evaluation with the written reflection!!

The transformation among artists was seen as an adaptation to the given tasks and in understanding the role they were taking at the schools. Sometimes the formal writing tasks given by the university educators aroused irritation among artists, as indicated by the following example:

The teacher training department seems not to be any more aware of the LTTA than we are, and the tasks they are giving to us... sometimes seem impossible and unessential, partly because they are planned for traditional teacher's training?!? When you look at the LTTA Web sites and the lesson plans there, they seem to be more from the angle of the artists themselves, and I would like to know whether they have to study "educational science"; it feels as if the LTTA spirit has disappeared somewhere in between the lines – freedom, spontaneity, creativity, and art doesn't work in Finnish educational style!

Since, it was indeed clear that the teacher education department wasn't aware of all details of the Canadian LTTA program, that wasn't its exact duty either. Being a teacher is different from being an artist. The integration of the two worlds, artistic and educational, was represented in the pilot programs in two separate teams, and the integration, if achieved, would be seen in the field in the cooperation between the artists and the teachers.

Reflections from the classrooms

After the training, teachers and artists were ready to go to the schools. Every artist had to commit to two three weeks periods each with a different teacher and class in the same school. During the training, they were assisted by the lecturer of didactics from the university. Since teachers did have their own share of training, they were willing to give a lot of responsibility to the artists in a classroom. In most cases, the reported outcomes were most positive and children were enthusiastically working with the artists:

> *I just wonder whether we were just lucky to get such a wonderful teacher and class. It felt great to work there! The Children did seem to really like our material and seemed thrilled with the exhibition of their own images.*

> *The feedback from the pupils and their actions in class enthusiasm etc. has been very important for me. Their reactions have been the most valuable way that I know whether my ideas are working.*

The lecturer of didactics reported significant progress in the artists' abilities to coordinate and handle the classes as well as cooperate with the teachers. The overall assessment done among teachers showed that they were pleased with the project. There is no doubt that Finnish artists were successful and the principals and the teachers happy to have them in their schools. However, more complex questions remain: "What were the benefits of the program compared to the case of normal schooling in Finland? Was the evidence of the positive atmosphere and enthusiasm enough to yield accurate judgments of the whole approach? At the least, it was clear that in the course of the project, teachers had more opportunities and specialized professional help to do things in the classroom. The arts, as a normal part of the school curriculum, were easily accepted as tools for learning other subjects. The initiative held the premise that cooperation, different learning styles and eventually the arts would change the way classes had been previously operating. Could the artist bring something new to schools?

The results showed that the artists were able to change some of the routines in the classroom, but that the change didn't come from the fact that the methods they used would be something new. In fact, many of the teachers said that they had used similar ways of teaching in their classes. The difference, of course, was the way and the level of specialized professionalism that the artists themselves could bring to children. Many teachers said that they could learn a lot from the artists. On the other hand, many of the Finnish artists were surprised at how capable the teachers were in the arts. The cooperation itself was a structural change that – when carefully planned – had a positive impact on students' learning attitudes. However, it is important to note that the project was not about the learning results, because the interpretation of what is considered as result is often vague, always context-related and heuristic in its nature. In other words one has to comprehend and explain how the context affects the interpretations and explanations of certain program. This takes us from the methods to examine the concept of cultural differences.

Comparing Finnish and Canadian arts education

Although the idea of art partnership programs is no longer new in North America (Colley 2008, 9), the approach is still not widely used in Finland. One of the main reasons for this is that the Finnish government has long supported the network of public music[iii] and art schools, which teach specialized art education to large numbers of children and youth. Additionally, numerous

private music and art schools and especially, folk high schools provide arts education for those with an interest in arts and music.

This is prevalent among citizens, so that almost everyone has some art experiences as part of their general education. Another Finnish characteristic (that is shared among the other Nordic countries too) is that laws secure the position of arts education. According to welfare-state ideology, social, economic, and cultural rights, as well as education are secure, since the existence of these rights is considered characteristic of the modern welfare state. These rights presuppose active intervention by the state, which is obliged to provide, among other things, educational facilities for its citizens (Heimonen 2006, 121). In Anglo-American societies, such as the United States and England the law usually leaves the content of education more or less open – in this sense No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy is an exception while it defines the arts as "the core academic subjects" with accountability for the results (Purnell 2004, 155).

Canada, with its vast area, interest groups and policies, has its own characteristics. Unlike many other western countries, it does not have a national ministry of education. Therefore, Canadian education is not easy to speak about as one entity. However, in its liberal attitudes and Anglo-American culture, it is similar to the UK and United States, while the educational policy in Finland is clearly more continental and European. In other words: Finnish policy is more centralized than its Canadian counterpart, as indicated in following table:

Finland	**Canada**
• Idea of Nation • National core curriculum • Homogenous school system • Arts in all schools • Masters level teacher education (Including studies in all arts) • Learning through arts historically and internally integrated in education	• Cultural diversity • Independent educational policy in provinces/territories • Heterogeneous schools • Art partnerships • Bachelor level teacher education (Mainly without/ little studies in arts) • LTTA innovation as trade mark

Table 1. Differences in art education in Finland and Canada (Ketovuori 2007, 142)

It is well known fact that Finland has succeeded remarkably well in the OECD's PISA Programme for International Student Assessment test. Canada, in its turn, has done equally well. The surveys, which have taken place in 2000, 2003 and 2006, have included tests in areas of reading, mathematics and science literacy. The arts education has not so far had similar testing. Still, we can draw one conclusion: if we are trying to seek the transfer of arts to other areas of learning, we are looking in the wrong directions. Canada with little arts in school curriculum, does not differ from Finland, since pupils in both countries do equally well in math, reading and science. Arts education and its importance rest in a socio-political context with value choices made for different reasons. Arts and education are historically important in Finland because of the process of building the nation and its citizenships. However, Canada's history has never been formed around a single centralized idea of nation. The arts have different meaning in these cultures. Another factor is the level of teacher education: In Finland teachers are a highly valued professional group with M.A. degrees. To begin a teaching career only 10% of candidates in entrance examinations are accepted into the University. Many of the teacher candidates have been engaged in some artistic hobby during their school time, and when they enter the university, are taught fine arts, music, and crafts. At the Canadian B.A level teacher education does not offer

similar opportunities, although it is suggested that more of the arts should be added to these programs (Foote 2008). In this respect, the difference between Canada and Finland is clear.

The cultural context and understanding of the role of the arts between the Finnish and Canadian society became clear during the course of the project, even the methods used in the LTTA did not differ from the ones used in arts education in Finland. This was best seen in practice, particularly in how the program was delivered in Lahti compared to Toronto, where I visited three times. In Finland the co-operation between the teachers and the artists was secured by having both vocational (polytechnic) and teacher education (university) institutes involved in the project. In Canada, the Royal Conservatory of Music offers the program directly to school boards without involving the teacher educators. While Canadians are struggling for the sake of arts with the program, the Finnish do not have that problem. Finnish teachers were ready to expand their knowledge and use of arts in their classrooms, as well as willing to open it to the artists. The pedagogical freedom that is allowed to the Finnish teachers and the schools (despite the core curriculum) allows the free use of various methods such as dialogue, dance, and music. This means that Finnish teachers can use the material and methods they prefer as long as the substance in the core curriculum is learned. Maybe Canadian teachers would like to do the same, if they could provide enough arts in their teacher education?

Conclusions

Why did we try the idea of partnership while having decent and functioning art education structures of our own? There are two good reasons:

1) It is necessary from time to time check your own ideas.
2) The interaction among different partners can reveal important lessons.

It is clear that the occupational roles of teachers and artists are different, with the latter, reflecting the expressive side of the curriculum and the former the cognitive side. However, in order to cooperate, both sides have to know what to expect from each other and be acquainted with the way the other one is thinking. Both the cognitive and expressive sides of the curriculum have to be in balance. It is, important to comprehend that the skills that art teaches you can be indirect (Winner, Hetland 2008, 29–31), and, thus, meaningful responses to the question of outcomes of certain projects can be questionable (Colley 2008, 9–10). However, if we think of the meanings the arts carry, and the ways of thinking that involves, there ought not to be any question of its importance[iv]. In Finland we still believe that the arts are an essential part of one's civil education.

What did we learn from our project? One thing for sure was that the cultural differences are not insuperable when communication between the stakeholders is ensured. Still, when planning cooperation cultural differences have to be taken account. What does art mean in one's culture? Do we speak the same language? What do the differences mean? In this project, these matters came gradually to be seen. It takes time to know each other well.

What could program like LTTA offer to Finnish schools? Let us look this issue through the SWOT- analysis:

Strengths – Multidisciplinary approaches provide synergy as well as new ways of doing things. Thinking of both the material and ideal resources that can be combined with vocational

(art schools) and academic (teacher education), there is no doubt that both sides could benefit from the development of these types of programs.

Weaknesses – Making structural changes in a system is always demanding. At the same time it has to be clear what the aims and standards of the particular program are.

Opportunities – Art partnerships can bring the culture and the school closer to each other.

Threats – If, the proper balance between the artist and the teacher is not found, the whole idea might be endangered.

The attitudes, willingness and culture of doing things among teachers are the most important factors in bringing artists to work in schools. These things do not happen by themselves, but they are feasible in an environment, where the arts are taken seriously, and teachers are allowed to practice them. “Ownership” cannot be limited to skillful individuals or artists alone. Sharing common goals and processes leads to a profound realization: the meaning of the arts is founded on communication and participation that can provide us, not just learning experiences, but also the ability to comprehend and grasp reality together in different ways. The arts are thus not just a matter of imagination, forms, facts or skills but the essential part of human experience, knowledge as well as the world of human relationships.

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[i] See program details from Elster (2001).
[ii] LTTA lesson plans are found from http://www.ltta.ca/lesson_plans.html
[iii] With the Sibelius Academy at the pinnacle of higher education in music, see more on issue from Cori (2003).
[iv] I am thinking here for example Venezuelan El-Sistema.