

## How does School Reform Happen Through the Arts?

**LARRY SCRIPP, NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATORY:**

*How does your model for A+Schools apply to public policy funding for education?*

**VINCENT MARRON:** *That's a hard question to answer because it is so localized, state by state. One thing I would say about public policy funders, and government at the state level, or certainly at the national level, is that I have never seen, in my experience of thirty years in this country, a really promising reform movement start within government. I mean, think about the civil rights movement; think about the total change in attitude in this country around drunk driving; think about the huge change in attitude which has taken place concerning smoking—and I speak delicately about that, coming from a "Right to Smoke" state. Those movements did not originate in departments of education, in general assemblies or even in governors' offices. They originated in the real world, at the grass roots level, or in drawing rooms; and they were supported in their origins, particularly the civil rights movement, by a lot of financial support and moral support coming from quiet funders, individuals particularly, but also foundations and other people, who did the research and who funded the research. I don't think such movements, often or ever, find their origin in government offices.*

### How to identify schools with strong portfolio arts programs

**QUESTION:** *If I understood you correctly, you said the challenge is to demonstrate how schools with strong portfolio arts programs can respond to some of the issues that you hear being raised by funders? In your program, how do you find schools with strong portfolio arts programs?*

**MARRON:** *We were working solely with public schools, so we were sort of at the mercy of whatever the funding levels at the schools were, and whatever*

*prior choices had been made. One of the things that happened over the life of the program with relatively small investments, was that the schools which had the preexisting sentiments that brought them to be part of the 25-school group had demonstrated some extremely entrepreneurial approaches to strengthening their arts programs. One of the findings that our researchers have pointed out quite clearly is that four years later, every single school that is in the program has much stronger presence of arts educators in the school than they had when they started, and they've done it in a thousand different ways. Now that's relatively easy to do when you're in an urban setting, because that's an environment in which artists can meet each other and work with each other and collaborate with each other. You get out in some of the rural counties in North Carolina—and I can take you to counties where there is one stop sign and no fast food restaurant—and imagine what it is like to be an arts instructor or an arts teacher when you're a hundred and fifty miles from the nearest major town. It's very hard to get arts teachers in those schools. And that's a puzzle which higher ed is trying to grapple with: How do you get quality arts instruction in a rural school where there is no community of support for artists? One way, which is being investigated and thought about a lot, particularly for elementary school teachers, is to take arts teachers who are certified in an art form and also provide them with an elementary certification, so they have a dual certification and can serve two purposes. That way they're integrating the arts within themselves, but they're also integrating it into the rest of the school.*

**FOLLOW-UP:** *So one criterion that defines a strong arts school is the presence of arts specialists? Is there anything beyond that?*

**MARRON:** *Well, in a rural school setting, what you're hoping to have is a regular visit by visiting artists. By regular, I mean that the artists are in the school for a few days or a week at a time or stay within a single school*

district for a period of weeks. That's not the same as having the daily arts instruction, which you would hope to have for every child, but it is certainly a lot better than nothing. It's a different form of presence, and it does a lot of other things in exemplifying the role of the artist to of children, which can be very powerful.

**GERRY HOWELL, A+ SCHOOLS:** *The other very important piece that we look at is the extent to which the regular classroom teacher is able to integrate the arts into their regular instruction during the day, whether it's visual art or it's music used for various kinds of things. We actually have several conditions that we look at in a school. How supportive is the administration? How much faculty buy-in do we have? How are resources being used in a school? For instance, in another rural part of the state, there was one school that was completely flooded out, and a new school was being built. Now, without any question they are building a music room, a dance studio. These things did not exist in these schools before, and we've seen that in two different counties. So it's not just a little short list that show you can do this; we see these things as they're happening.*

**MARRON:** *One of the other effects, which I think is significant, is that five years ago when this program began to be implemented, there were deep questions everywhere about What on earth are the arts being taken seriously in schools for? I mean, why are we doing this? After five years of this program, it's basically taken for granted now that the arts have a very strong legitimate role in any school. There is no question that if a school wants to undertake this program, in the full knowledge that it requires additional arts resources, that that's a legitimate thing for a school to do. That's a big change.*

*Also, we worked very hard over the first four years to make sure we had some general assembly support, some state support in terms of dollars, as well as technical support. For the first four years we were in what's called the Expansion Budget, struggling each year to make sure that we were heard and present. But in the fifth year of the program, with bipartisan support, the*

*program was given its own line in the base budget of the state, which is another form of legitimization. The other thing that has happened is that this program has been identified by the state board of education as an appropriate strategy for whole school reform. Again, these are correlates of legitimization in the central sense, but I think they're important, and certainly politically they send a very loud and clear message to legislators and to other people at the local level in school districts and county offices.*

### *Respecting the indigenous music of the community*

**COMMENT:** *Something you were saying really struck me as a classically trained musician and music scholar—namely, that there are many ways to get at the teaching of music, and that this depends a great deal upon the community in which the school is located.*

**MARRON:** *Yes, exactly. Music has a very strong presence almost every where that we go. Particularly in North Carolina and particularly in the western part of the state, as I'm sure you know, there are indigenous traditions, which are very deep in those communities. Now, traditionally trained music educators have not always seen that as legitimate music, but to the people who make that music, and play that music, it is their music. So I think we have to look very carefully at whatever situation we find ourselves in, and realize that there is music in that community. There is music in the churches, there is music in the garages, there's music in the halls, and there's always music in the school.*

**JEAN STACKHOUSE, NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATORY:** *I think one of the implications of what you said is this: people learn in many ways. This applies to more than music. When you were talking about organizations and their internal capacities, we have to think also about persons and their internal capacities. They need to be appreciated and developed. For example, think of some kids who are good at fixing things but are not always good at school, or learning the classical traditions. Someone who is not good at learning in the*

ways that the members of the Boston Symphony learned might be very good at making a steel pan for a Caribbean steel band. What would a classically trained musician think of that? A broader view of education might take account of the knowledge these kids have, and then think about how that relates to what they do in school. This raises questions that we have not paid enough attention to. It's a matter of discovering what kids already know and building on that rather than imposing what we think they ought to know and how they ought to learn it.

**MARRON:** *And even worse than that, telling them that what they're doing is not art and not legitimate.*

**STACKHOUSE:** *Which is exactly what will turn the kids off from school*

**MARRON:** *Absolutely.*

### *High-level policy development and classroom practices*

**JAMES CATTERALL, U.C.L.A.:** *Sitting in an educational leadership classroom at UCLA a few years ago, I thought to myself that there's really only one theory in educational leadership or in educational policy which you can really say is a confirmed and a valid theory, and that is that participation matters. You can't find other ones, I don't think, in a textbook on educational leadership. They have principles and guidelines and all of that, but that's the theory that matters. And so this idea of "buy-in" is absolutely critical. For a policy or a program like Arnie Aprill's Chicago Arts Partnerships, or yours in North Carolina, to work, you absolutely have to start inside the classroom, or inside the music instruction facility, or in the practice room with the teacher, and grow policy from the inside. Otherwise, they're not going to have any probability of ever getting back into the classroom, which is the only place educational policies really matter.*

**MARRON:** *I agree with you to some extent, James. I would say, though, that the politics of education at the state level particularly in this country is very complex.*

*We seem to be beginning to discover a role for institutes and for other types of neutral organizations that stand almost as brokers between the high-level policy development at the government or department of instruction level, and the classroom practice. And the two, if kept in separation from each other, I don't think are ever going to achieve very much. There has to be that connection between the two. I've seen examples over the last few years—for example, a couple of the Annenberg projects—creating cross-site collectives and networks. We find the network is a very powerful form of development, both at connecting the school to the school and within the school. But there may be roles for higher education—there may be roles for places like Larry's organization here—which in addition to doing what they do in terms of training, and education and music education, can play that brokering role between the top down policy activists on the one hand and what is actually happening in the classroom on the other. I think what you're saying is absolutely correct. A colleague of mine upsets teachers all the time by saying to them, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have some bad news for you. Teaching in no way causes learning." What causes learning is the deep desire of the child to learn. We need to keep that also in our minds.*

### *The art of persuasion*

**QUESTION:** *When you were approaching the North Carolina legislature with requests for support in the interest of the A+ Schools project, what were the key arguments that were most persuasive in bringing people over to the project—especially those who may not have been predisposed to see the value of a project like this?*

**MARRON:** *It was partly the arguments, but it was also partly the people who made the arguments. We were extremely fortunate. I don't think the program would have occurred without the strong support of a venerable educator in North Carolina, Bill Friday, who was the Chancellor of the university system for thirty years. At the time we started the program, he was the president of the Kenan Charitable Trust, and he and Frank Kenan together had a lot to do with making sure that this program was articulated to the highest levels, from the*

## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION



Gerry Howell recreates an A+ School music activity on the stage of New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall.

Governor and the General Assembly onwards. Also, the schools themselves became very clear in their ability to attract the attention of legislators—and were horrified to find how few of them had ever been inside a school. I think what we did politically was to work at every single level, from the Governor's office down to the classroom, and have many, many spokesmen, speaking to this program at those different levels and in their own communities. As you can see from the story of the steel pan band, it became a really key issue in that community. Interestingly enough, the principal of that school went on to become a county commissioner the moment he retired as principal. Which is unheard of.

**CATTERALL:** I'd like to build on the last comment about "What arguments matter?" There are a lot of arguments, and often different arguments matter to different people. One time I got an SOS call from the head of the parent's association in the Boulder, Colorado, school district. The music program in Boulder was showing all the hallmarks of the Titanic, and they were looking for ships in the area to come help. It was just after the Champions report, which had seven different studies including one that I participated in about involvement in instrumental music. I don't know what they did with that report—they might have hit the board members over the head with it physically—but a board that had announced publicly that it was going to cut the music program out, reversed itself, and kept it.

**MARRON:** And I'm sure a lot of that had to do with who carried the message. Parents are incredible advocates, and incredibly persuasive with legislators. Unfortunately, teachers have been put in a position in North Carolina of being considered a special interest group, and therefore no longer have a real voice in the General Assembly.

**CATTERALL:** The real problem with advocacy and policy making is that it often leads to the creation of a "framework" in music at the state level or the district level. It may lead to a music course requirement for admission to the university, which is terrific because then something has to happen in most places. But many of the responses, "the arts framework" models, are not evaluated. They're not followed up on, no one cares; the board goes on to the next issue and says we've treated the arts, we created a framework. And you go out in the school districts and schools, and they practically haven't heard of it. They've never been told they have to do anything with it. So that's one of my pet peeves with policy makers, is that they do things that are symbolic, and don't follow up with real action.

**JOHN KNOWLES, COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME:** In Nashville, it was the head of the school system that approached us to develop partnerships with music world professionals to help the music program here. And now that we have that group of advisors put together, it has a lot of key people, who have musical

and educational clout in the community. Recently the mayor has even put together an education advisory committee, so that we are now sitting at the table with the mayor. It does make a difference to have that level of support; it almost felt like getting permission. I feel like I still have to go back and do the work. But you're right, sometimes that permission does not translate into action back at the ground level.

**COMMENT:** *I also had the privilege of going to a little two-room schoolhouse in Colrain, Massachusetts, for the third, fourth and fifth grade, and I am much appreciative of comments from rural North Carolina. I think that the annual Christmas play was attended by all of Colrain. And so my question is, how do you take the kind of organic model of education which Colrain represented in the 40's when I was in elementary school, and make it work in urban areas? In Boston, where I do a lot of work in high schools, we have found that when you're going to construct community, even where you think there would be a natural community between high schools and employers and students working, it really makes a big difference if you have somebody who's in the "connecting activities" business. In fact Connecting Activities is the name of the outside section that we've got in state law to provide five million dollars toward School to Career, statewide. Those connectors, economically speaking, are essential. I think they're just as important in urban areas in linking the arts communities and the teaching school community, as you have mentioned. Everything feeds into, builds on, is based on, actual community: face to face people, talking and reflecting over and over and over—all kinds of other people facing the same circumstances, struggling to do better. I think that what we need is to have the graduate schools of musicology specifically training people who can be connected in the communities when they go to them.*

**ARNOLD APRILL, CHICAGO ARTS PARTNERSHIP IN EDUCATION:** *I'd like to build on that. I think that we collectively need to pay more attention to this mediating role. I'm thinking of Michael Fullen's work on successful school change, which points out that a lot of the*

*research on successful school change has to do with an external organization that mediates between the resources of school and the resources of communities. That's what CAPE attempts to do. We had arts organizations, art teachers, music teachers, and classroom teachers who didn't know how to talk to each other. There was a lot of desire, but there was no pathway to develop a good discourse. Something we are exploring is what role universities can start to play. Where the knowledge base and the intellectual assets of the university, and the pre-service teachers, and the emerging studio artists and musicians, can play some sort of role in this mediation—not where the schools are the object of university of research, just for the researchers' sake.*

**GERRY HOWELL, A+ SCHOOLS:** *I'd like to clarify something about the criteria for the level of the arts and the presence of the arts in a school. Any kind of criteria, or list that we have, is more a guide for conversations with a school than a checklist where we check "yes/no/maybe/not ready yet." As intermediaries, we see ourselves more as facilitators of that conversation. In response to the comment about the role of the arts in the community and the school, I think context is crucial here. Both Vincent and my work come out of some intensive study in systems theory—Vincent through looking at organizations, and me through my past history as a family therapist, looking at families as systems and organizations. One of the things we know is that you cannot make anybody do anything—no matter how many checklists you make and no matter how much you try to tell people what to do. If we could do that, change would be so easy. But change is very difficult and very messy and very slow. So one of the things we know that we have to do is spend a lot of time listening in a community—and listening for clues of the context in which individuals exist, such as the schools in the rural part of the state and the western part of the state, where they have a definition in their minds, and experience of music. We do not see our job as to go in to tell them now what that needs to be and how that needs to change, but to explore how we can meet them where they are and sort of do this dance together. ¶*