

Issue Introduction

By Sonia M. Rosen and Rashmi Kumar, Editors

Urban environments are abundant with vibrant opportunities to create and consume art, yet educators are not always able to tap into these opportunities. It is in this context that Volume 6, Issue 2 of Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education explores the role of the arts in urban education. The articles and video in this issue touch on an array of ways in which the visual and performing arts can be used in urban elementary and secondary schools as they engage in critique and put forth new visions for arts education. We have deliberately selected articles that both span a range of forms of artistic expression and emerge from a variety of institutional contexts – including elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools and out-of-school learning environments – and these articles speak to the importance of partnerships between schools and out-of-school organizations. Together, these pieces make a collective call for revitalizing the arts to promote communication, engagement, and empowerment among young people in urban communities. In this issue, we are also pleased to include multimedia texts.

In the past decade, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has been the driving force behind federal- and state-level education reform, placing a heavy emphasis on math and literacy as focal subjects for instruction and assessment. In underfunded, highly bureaucratic urban school districts, administrators have had to make difficult choices about how and where to allocate their resources. Unfortunately, this dilemma has often resulted in the elimination or paring down of arts programs around the country, leaving millions of students with little or no institutionalized access to arts instruction. Gertrude Spilka and Meg Long's *Building Local Capacity to Bring Arts Education to All Children: Lessons Learned from the First Half of the Ford Foundation's National Demonstration* offers a look at a recent Ford Foundation initiative

aimed at increasing school districts' and communities' capacity for integrating arts instruction. The preliminary findings from this study highlight the need for effective administration, partnership development, arts advocacy, and programmatic integration in order to make such programs successful. While Spilka and Long consider the effectiveness of top-down initiatives, Allen Trent and Jorge-Ayn Riley discuss bottom-up arts integration. Their article *Re-Placing the Arts in Elementary School Curricula: An Interdisciplinary, Collaborative Action Research Project* details an action research project involving the implementation of an art-integrated curriculum in a 4th grade classroom, a curriculum that was eventually adopted and implemented in other classrooms in their district.

Several articles highlight the important role of collaboration. In *A Perfect Murder: An (Imperfect) School Theater Program Model*, Nicole S. Simon and Andrew Grosso recount the successes and challenges of a partnership between a New York City theater group and a public high school. In the end, they claim that this kind of collaboration can benefit a range of stakeholders, not the least of which are the students themselves.

This issue also emphasizes the relevance of arts education beyond the walls of elementary and secondary schools. *Removing our masks: Using the Visual and Performing Arts to Promote Deep Reflection in Pre-service Teachers*, by Patricia Alvarez McHatton and Erica D. McCray, highlights the critical niche that can be filled by arts education in order to prepare pre-service teachers for engaging with urban youth. We would like to draw our readers' attention to the video accompanying their short article to understand the intertwined relationships between context and goals in this effort.

Other articles in this issue frame arts education as a vehicle for social justice. Joyce Millman outlines the use

of arts to develop young people's critical literacy in her article *Critical Literacy and Art Education: Alternatives in the School Reform Movement*, and Yolanda Medina discusses the arousal of critical consciousness in youth by embedding arts in everyday curricula in her article *Art Education Programs: Empowering Social Change*. Similarly, Sheri Hardee and Amanda Reyelt's practitioner research, discussed in *Women's Well-Being Initiative: Creating, Practicing, and Sharing a Border Pedagogy for Youth*, employed a "border pedagogy" in which adolescent girls examined and critiqued their social world using a toolkit of various visual and performing art forms.

Amanda Gulla also touches on this theme in her article, *Changing Things as they are: Promoting Social Justice through Encounters with the Arts*. She points to the contradictions with which youth in this society grapple and reminds us that many teachers and students who live in cultural hubs across the U.S. are not likely to access these institutions. In *Resources for Effectiveness: Collaborative Arts Partnerships in Schools*, Lee Ann Norman echoes Gulla's call for drawing on the wealth of resources available within cosmopolitan areas to engage schools and communities in arts exploration and appreciation. Likewise, in *Learning from Objects: A Future for 21st Century Education*, Dorothea Lasky recasts museum learning as having the potential to afford young people the space to interact with artifacts, making a strong case for the value of objects as educative texts. Carolyn Chernoff's commentary entitled *On Culture, Art, and Experience* reflects on three of these articles and engages with issues of power, agency, and legitimacy that emerge in the authors' discussions.

Closing our issue is a review of *The Art of Placemaking* by Ronald Lee Fleming in which Chris Steinmeier discusses another aspect of arts in urban areas—the subtle knowledge that is ac-

quired by viewing and processing large works of art placed in publicly accessible urban locations. Steinmeier emphasizes Fleming's concerns regarding the authority behind decisions that allow for the use of open areas for displaying visual arts in urban environments.

Collectively, the articles in this issue of our journal raise some power-

ful questions about the arts: Should the arts be engaged primarily as separate content areas (i.e. theater, dance, music, visual expression), or should they be used as a point of entry into other, "academic" subjects? Who gets to make these choices, and why? How might art educators conceptualize their roles and the possibilities available to

them in an educational environment in which the standards for success are increasingly narrowing? Moving forward, what would it take to reintegrate the arts into urban public school curricula? The articles in this issue and the questions that emerge from them frame a critical discussion that is likely to continue for years to come.