

Engaged in Learning

The ArtsSmarts Model



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Engaged in Learning: The ArtsSmarts Model

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About ArtsSmarts

ArtsSmarts was founded in 1998 by The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, on the premise that engaging young people in artistic activity is critical to their evolution as creative thinkers. Since its inception, ArtsSmarts has been demonstrating the effectiveness of integrating the arts into the school curriculum as a way of making core curriculum more relevant and meaningful to students. The program invites professional artists to collaborate with classroom teachers, infusing art throughout the provincial curriculum, teaching, for example, history through drama, math through dance, and science through music.

ArtsSmarts inspires collaboration among arts, education and community agencies, and invests strategically in creative learning networks at the local, regional, provincial and national levels to build capacity for arts and education. Projects capture the imagination and build the confidence of disengaged young people and create an enthusiastic atmosphere of active learning among students, teachers, and artists.

With this report, we add the weight of numerous research studies to our observations, and propose a model for learning that grows from the evidence they have provided.

About the Author

A twenty-year educator, author, professional workshop leader, and keynote speaker, Karen Hume draws from her wealth of experiences and extensive knowledge base to provide focused, practical and inspiring support to teachers and administrators. Karen also has an extensive background and keen interest in educational research.

As a teacher of young adolescents for much of her fifteen years in the classroom, Karen is passionate about meeting the academic and developmental needs of all young people. In her most recent role as Education Officer with the Durham District School Board, Karen witnessed the benefits of ArtsSmarts firsthand, particularly as it impacted at-risk and struggling students.

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1. Engaged in Learning: The ArtsSmarts Model

Learning from Experience

Approximately a dozen internal research studies into student learning and program effectiveness were conducted during ArtsSmarts' first eight years. In the spring of 2006, we compiled the results of those studies, along with a like number of reports by outside researchers, to create a synthesis of possible directions for future work.

Although we used a small sample of available outside studies, it was immediately and glaringly evident that the arts and educational communities are hungry for research that will "help us understand what the arts learning experience is for children, and what characteristics of that experience are likely to travel across domains of learning" (Deasy, 2002:99). It was equally evident to all ArtsSmarts partners that, while future ArtsSmarts research could be taken in any number of directions, it made the most sense to identify and build from ArtsSmarts' own strengths and successes.

We also felt the need to align the research direction and the methods of data collection with our intended audiences. Different groups would find different aspects of ArtsSmarts compelling, and distinctly different types of data would be required for each.

Partners identified educators (teachers, administrators, and senior Board office personnel) as the audience they most wanted to reach. With that in mind, the decision was made to develop a theory of learning that would serve the dual purposes of explaining ArtsSmarts' impact in Canadian classrooms and framing the research work of the next few years. We felt that establishing an ArtsSmarts theory of learning would help to answer the question, "If ArtsSmarts didn't exist, what would be lost?" Further, a theory of learning would assist teachers, artists and partners in identifying key, essential components of the ArtsSmarts experience, and would also prevent ArtsSmarts from being viewed as a pleasant but unnecessary add-on to classroom activity.

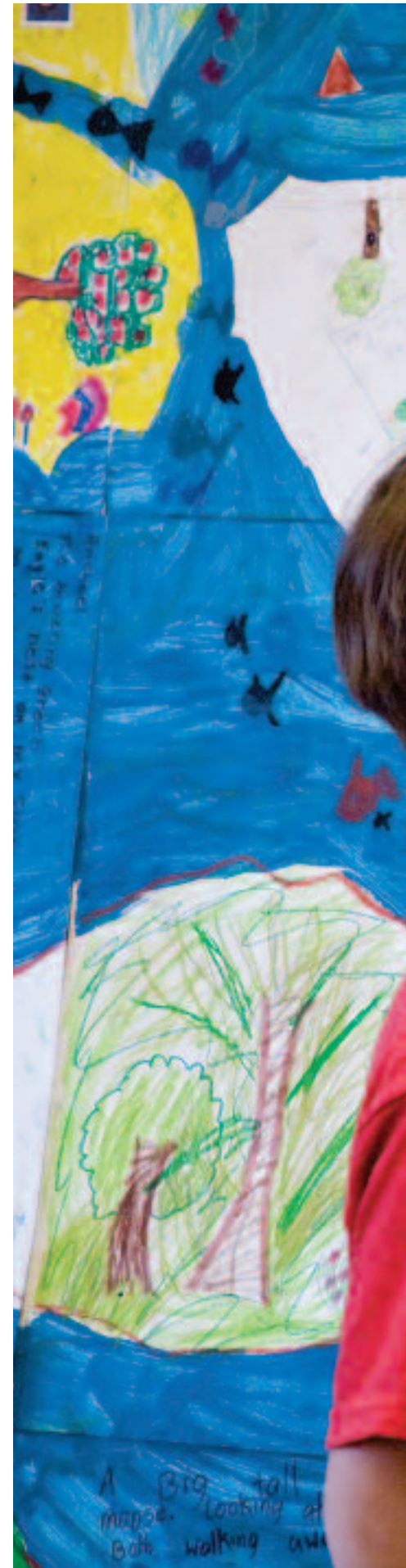
The paper that follows develops an ArtsSmarts theory of learning centred on the concept of student engagement.

What is Engagement?

There are two kinds of student engagement: school process and learning task. The first simply means that students are compliant; they keep their pencils moving, submit work on time, and follow their teacher's directions. If there is a relationship between compliance and learning, it is uncertain what that relationship might be, and few researchers are interested in searching for it.

Learning task engagement is another story. It is observed when students are engaged in learning activities, and simultaneously seen as a sign that learning is taking place. Characteristics of high levels of engagement in learning, for children and adults, include:

- Demonstrating enthusiasm, curiosity, and interest in the learning.
- Interacting with self, teacher and learning environment in an active, emotionally connected manner.
- Persisting in the face of difficulties.
- Expending effort to get the job done well, not looking for shortcuts to simply get it done quickly.
- Making independent connections; sometimes continuing with work after the assignment is completed.
- Taking pride in one's work.







Why is ArtsSmarts Studying Engagement?

Many educational researchers, including those who work in the fields of resiliency, motivation, and learning, are taking a keen interest in learning task engagement, seeing it as the root of successful learning, and disengagement as the source of many learning problems. Arts researchers, too, are focusing on engagement, not only because the arts are routinely perceived as generating high levels of student engagement, but also because they see it as a possible transfer mechanism to embed the arts as a way of learning in our schools. (See Deasy 2002:157 for a discussion of three possible transfer mechanisms, one of which is preparation for learning.) In fact, all twelve ArtsSmarts research reports make reference to engagement, suggesting that it is widely recognized as a central strength of the ArtsSmarts initiative. Consider the following examples:

- The ArtsSmarts activity, and the skills of the teacher to sustain the enthusiasm it had engendered made a difference to the students' general enjoyment of and *engagement* in school (Mason, 2006).
- 93% of respondents at all sites remarked how attendance was higher during the projects and students were more motivated and *engaged* than usual (SAEE, 2006).
- The teachers interviewed from Vancouver, St. Lambert and Moncton described very strong and positive impacts on the participants. Some of the greatest impacts were described as increased *engagement* of all students but with a particularly strong influence on some students who were on the verge of failing or suspension. The projects *re-engaged* at least a few students, resulting in successful completion of courses and possibly school (Meredith, 2003).
- There was a definite increase in student *engagement*. My kids were more focused, cooperative, and openly communicative (teacher).
- One of my personal high points from the program: Students *engaged* in their work while carving, painting, drawing, videotaping, dancing (assistant principal).
- 96% of respondents said there was a high level of active *engagement* (Patteson, 2002).
- 92.7% of respondents reported a high level of active *engagement* (Andrews, 2000).

Where engagement promotes learning, disengagement or disaffection has the opposite effect. "Disaffected children are passive, do not try hard, and give up easily in the face of challenges ... (they can) be bored, depressed, anxious, or even angry about their presence in the classroom; they can be withdrawn from learning opportunities or even rebellious towards teacher and classmates" (Skinner & Belmont, 1993:572).

Disaffected or disengaged students have a greater tendency to use drugs, become pregnant, demonstrate violent behaviour and drop out of school. These are the students employers see as ill-prepared for the collaborative, problem-solving, innovation focused workplaces of the 21st century.

Research shows that “by high school, as many as 40 to 60 percent of all students – urban, suburban, and rural – are chronically disengaged from school” (Klem & Connell, 2004:262). Drop-out rates are alarmingly high in parts of both Canada and the United States. But the numbers are even higher and the problem significantly greater if we take into account the number of students who ‘drop off’ rather than out through chronic lateness and absenteeism.

Drop-out rates, violent behaviour and drug use are the problems society hears about, the problems the media bemoans on the six o’clock news. Classroom teachers recognize these problems and deal with them to a greater or lesser extent depending on the age of their students and the location of their school. However, the larger issue for most classroom teachers is less newsworthy, but just as damaging: they are despairing of ever reaching the growing numbers of children who are apathetic, indifferent, bored, uncaring and – adding insult to injury – feeling entitled to success without effort.

Many teachers feel they have limited choices and inadequate training when faced with these disengaged students. Typical responses include:

- Ignoring the problem and focusing on the students who want to learn.
- Tightening the rules for behaviour and work completion, and upping the consequences for disobedience.
- Increasing the entertainment value in the classroom by adding free time or special events, often as a reward for work completion or appropriate behaviour.
- Lowering expectations, based on an assumption that the student is intellectually incapable of succeeding or suffering from low self-esteem.
- Seeking external professional help for the student, either learning assistance or counseling.

But these responses are, at best, a cast applied to a broken arm that hasn’t been reset. The disengaged students have been immobilized and rendered more compliant, but the fix is temporary and the cost to the student, the teacher, the classroom community, and ultimately society, is unacceptably high. The student has not learned either the content of the subject area or how to learn. The teacher has expended so much psychic energy in out-maneuvering the student that precious little is left to create the meaningful work and the open, honest relationships that will engage the entire classroom community. And some parents are reinforced in their belief that school will always be as mind-numbingly boring and soulless as it was in their day – that students simply need to endure it until they are old enough to escape to the ‘real world’.

Glimpses of Possibility

In the past, researchers studied illness in order to understand wellness, failure in order to understand excellence. The burgeoning field of Positive Psychology, attributed to Martin Seligman, dismisses that idea with the argument that the two terms are not opposites, that excellence can only be understood by studying examples of excellence.

Research studies and year-end reports by ArtsSmarts partners and participants not only provide examples of such excellence, but confirm the fact that actions can be taken to reset the broken arm, to turn disengaged students into engaged learners.

The 130 early childhood to Grade 9 students at Caslan School, near the Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement in northeastern Alberta, spent an entire year focusing on the theme of self-control. The Grade 5's were described as 'bouncy,' 'high energy' and 'needing to be kept busy.' In their science study of clouds, they sketched and used watercolour pencils to create various formations. The artist comments, "It was so refreshing to walk into a class, hand out the paper, give the assignment and have the students settle into absolute quiet, so quiet you could hear a pin drop, as they became absorbed and were not aware of what was going on around them."

A stormy sunset scene, the students' hands-down favourite, was painted by the class as a large mural occupying an entire wall by the school's lunchroom. All of the students participated, cooperated, and willingly designed and created with their classmates. There was no division between the academically strong and the weak. The students were quite lost when the project was finished.

A French literature teacher from Moncton High School in New Brunswick had a Chinese artist help her students create Chinese lanterns and paintings based on a novel the students were reading. The class was described as fully engaged in the project. The teacher estimated that 90% of students read the novel, compared to a norm of 50%. During the project with the artist, there were no absences from class, compared to an average of 20% on any given day. The teacher found that students were more willing and better prepared to participate in class discussions around the themes being studied in the novel, and that marks on tests reflected a deeper understanding of the novel than did marks on other novels studied.

Students agreed – "For the majority, (my fellow students) admitted to being surprised by the hidden talent they had for being able to express an idea so clearly through art.... Many also mentioned that this project motivated them to read the assigned novel, *Que cent fleurs s'épanouissent*, and to want to understand it better. We were able to learn a lot about the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and we also gained a better understanding of Chinese art."

Grade 8 students in Oshawa, Ontario were taught poetry using T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, becoming characters in a dramatic production in order to understand how the author created character and mood, and then using that understanding to write original poetry. The teacher said that, "All students were excited and motivated. They were all always on task!"

The parent of one at-risk, consistently late thirteen-year-old reported that her son woke up early every morning the week of the class performance and could not wait to get to school. Several other parents reported that their children practised at home in front of mirrors and talked constantly about their work. When the students performed, they were "glowing with confidence and excitement."

What is the Difference between ArtsSmarts and Special Events?

Many teachers engage their students in interesting activities that students remember and speak of for years. While teacher memories of those events include the pleasure of the experience, they also include the amount of time taken from the curriculum to mount the holiday play, the limited learning that took place on the field trip, the organizational headaches and long hours required to assemble the art exhibit or arrange for the guest speakers.

What are the distinctions to be drawn between these 'one-off' events that are in most school classrooms at some point during a year and initiatives, such as ArtsSmarts, which claim to foster engagement in learning tasks? We believe it lies in the totality of an experience that integrates content, context, process and product through a collaborative relationship that includes the teacher, the artist and the students.

ArtsSmarts Research Questions

We speculate that the litmus test of learning task engagement is twofold. First, does it result in new learning, where learning is understood as a change in the behaviour, attitudes or knowledge of participants? And second, can high levels of engagement be sustained and transferred beyond the experience that created it? Applying these tests to our own programs, we ask whether the ArtsSmarts experience has created a change in the attitudes and behaviours of the participants. Do students and their teachers, artists, parents, and school communities think differently about school and, more importantly, act differently in or toward school as a result of ArtsSmarts? Are students or entire classes that were formerly disengaged now expending effort in learning, persisting despite difficulties, taking pride in producing quality work, and demonstrating enthusiasm, curiosity and interest?

After eight years, a number of small research studies, and a few dozen year-end reports, we believe that we can answer the first question in the affirmative and that we have indicators, if not definitive answers, to the second. Stories such as this one from a research project in Manitoba suggest that we are on the right track – that we are, in fact, contributing to new learning:

Three classes of elementary students were interviewed between four and ten months after they'd completed their ArtsSmarts activities. Despite the lengthy delay, students had remarkably detailed recollections of what they had done. They were at least enthusiastic about the experience, and in one case the classroom of students could be considered passionate about it. The product they had made still was on display in the school. Not only did they eagerly talk about the part they had made personally, but they could talk about the parts contributed by others, including expressing what that classmate was trying to communicate and what the piece added to the whole product.

After some students had stated what they really liked doing in the original project, they were asked if they had been able to do stuff like that recently. Each of them quickly said yes, even though some of them couldn't think of a particular example... For instance, because the original artistry product had incorporated 'found objects' such as materials obtained in a school-yard clean-up, the students saw their ongoing school recycling project as a continuation of the original project.

Some of the students connected the samples of their work that were on bulletin boards as displays of excellence with the display of the original art product –whether the displays were of art activity or of subject-area activity! There was no gap for these students between the original activity they valued so highly and what they were doing in class many months later.

As a consequence, they did not differentiate between the excitement with which they viewed the project and what they did on a daily basis in class, whether it was artistic or content-based, group activity or seatwork, teacher-led or with a visitor. (Mason, 2006)

The Manitoba report offers a good example of new learning, but it is not the only one. A review of partners' and teachers' experiences and research in classrooms from Grades 1 to 12 in urban, suburban, rural, and isolated, remote parts of Canada leads us to suggest that there may be four essential components to any activity intended to create high levels of learning task engagement. The balance of this paper describes the ArtsSmarts Model of Student Engagement and provides examples of changes in attitude and behaviour that result from the four components of the model, proving new learning and pointing to the likelihood of transfer and sustainability.

2. ArtsSmarts' Model of Student Engagement

The model we propose is based on an analysis of research and the experience of ArtsSmarts participants – teachers, artists, and students. When all four components – content, context, process and product – meet the criteria suggested below, we see an increase in task engagement and learning. Although we focus here on the ArtsSmarts program, we believe this model could be applied to any program.

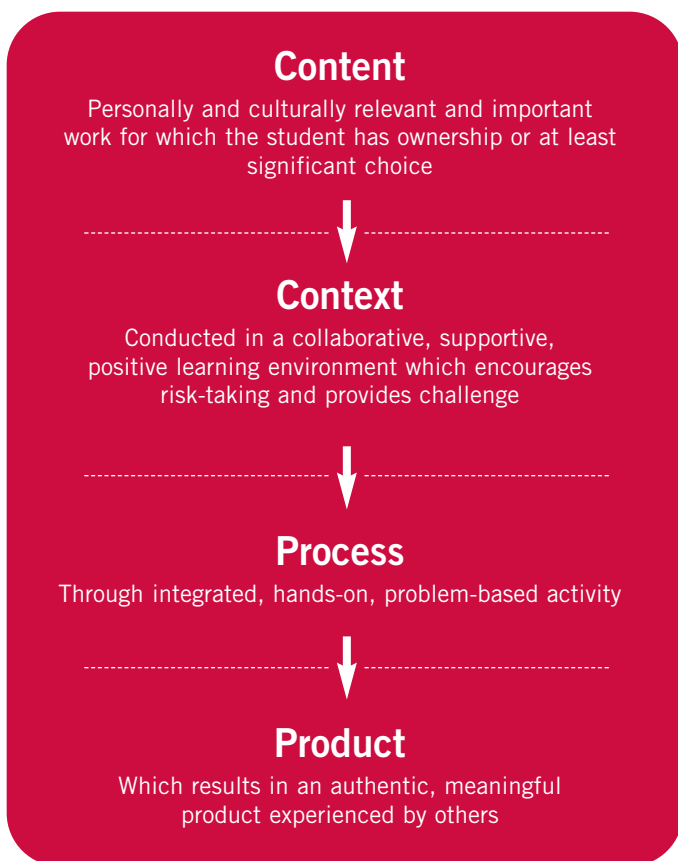
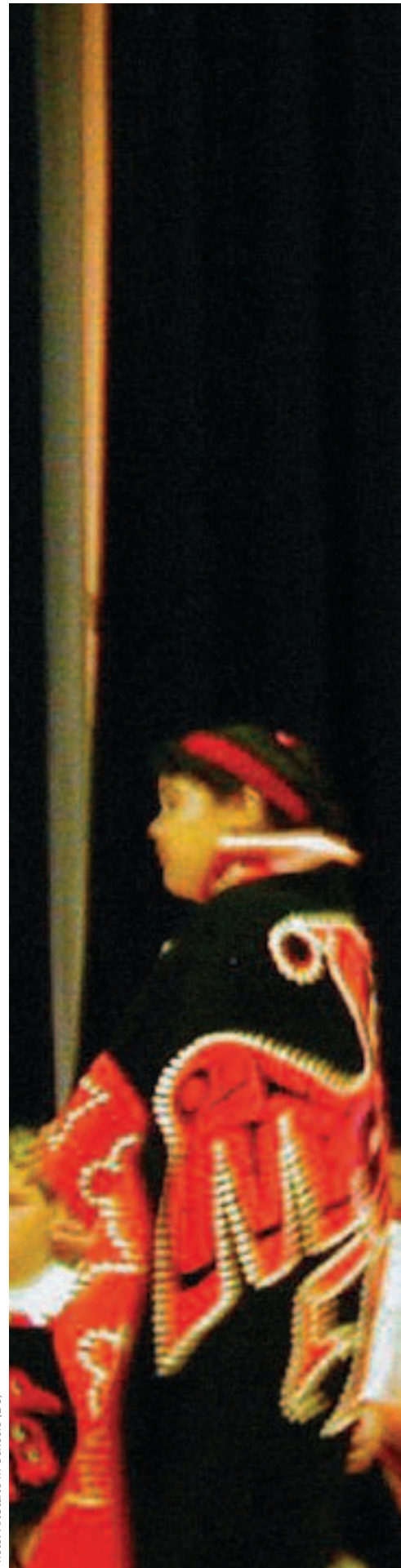


Photo: ArtStarts in Schools (BC)





CONTENT — CONTEXT — PROCESS — PRODUCT

ArtsSmarts projects, which can be applied to any discipline or grade level, draw their content and objectives from the provincial curriculum. ArtsSmarts provides an artist to work with the teacher to teach the core curriculum concept through an artistic medium.

The success of these projects depends on their ability to engage students on several levels.

Personal and Cultural Relevance

Reading and writing are not a part of every culture, but there has never been a culture, past or present, without art, song, dance, stories and performance (Bamford, 2006:19). By drawing on students' own cultural experiences through artistic representations, ArtsSmarts activities allow students to claim a personally and culturally relevant knowledge base from which they can speak.

Aboriginal culture centred projects worked because Aboriginal students found the content and processes more relevant to their lives. Projects in Aboriginal schools that reflected the Aboriginal cultural contexts of the students were far more likely to succeed than those projects that did not. Overall, art forms and project content must be relevant to the local context of the students at the school. (SAEE, 2006)

Research on learning supports this emphasis on relevance, which it explains as connecting new knowledge to something that is already known. New learning “must activate a learner’s existing neural networks. The more relevance, the greater the meaning” (Jensen, 1997).

Thus, when ArtStarts in schools (ArtsSmarts’ BC Partner) held its annual Artroom=Classroom exhibition, it was a sign of student engagement that the highlights included hand-painted books from Bridge Lake in the Cariboo, a quilt investigating Salt Spring Island’s rich heritage, a traditional Tuk’ten reed tip from a Penticton cultural school, and a series of stunning hand-painted floor-cloths from the Northern community of Chetwynd. It was also a sign of engagement when Glen Dhu Public School in Whitby, Ontario welcomed its first African Americans to an otherwise all-white school and took pains to deal with issues of bias, prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping through storytelling. The decision to use culturally relevant content helped ensure that 92% of the students in the school felt the school community valued their race, as compared to 72% before the storytelling.

Sometimes relevance isn’t about culture so much as it is about surroundings. One teacher writes,

We wanted students to connect with their immediate surroundings and use their strong feelings to fuel creative writing. Students were given disposable cameras and encouraged to take photos of their hometown. Each student could choose their images based on emotions, memories and interesting shapes. These photos were then developed and critiqued. The students then chose ten photos that followed a similar theme, and mounted them on a storyboard. This storyboard was used to inspire a copper etching and an anthology.

Students realized that writing is more than just English class. They could use words and certain formats to express their emotions and thoughts. Some discovered that their surroundings were important to them and impacted their lives directly. This new connection to surroundings created a need to preserve and celebrate – even a sense of local pride.



When you are an artist, you make who you want to be known as. I think I realized this when we made masks, and even now I think I can remember every mask the others made, and whose is whose, and why they made the one they made. You don't just (generate art) for yourself, or for your audience, for the people who will pay you for it. It has to make something better, or make them think about something important.... Yeah, that's what we learned with (the ArtsSmarts artist). If it's about something that we care about, we can make others care about it. (Students in final year of high school, Manitoba)

Importance

To be fully engaged, students also need to feel that their work is important. That sense of importance can emerge from students' freedom to express their own ideas, their own voice through their art.

This sense of importance arises from the need to leave our mark, our legacy, to decide 'who you want to be known as' and share that message with the world. The team that invented the Macintosh computer signed their names inside each machine, their way of "laying claim to a tiny piece of the new world they had created" (Bennis & Biederman, 1997:28). Students from Crescentview in Oakville, Ontario, and from Fort la Reine and École Prince Charles Schools in Portage, Manitoba, left a legacy for their communities in a series of stained glass pieces and mosaics. At Riverside School Board in Québec, "a student used her own difficult life situation to create a painting and used many symbols to express the importance in life of the love and support of family. She did a brief write up on the back of her painting which, combined with her painting, brought more than a few tears when read by others." And many of the murals created at Tsolum Elementary School on the east coast of Vancouver Island included photographs of the student artists.



The questions that students asked during the project matured...Instead of asking 'What should I do next?', the questions translated into more specific ideas about their projects – How would I work with this material? What is the best way to hold a motor to a piece of wood? How do I create the strongest fastener for my materials? (Teacher)

Student Ownership or Choice

When students' work is personally and culturally relevant, when it is important and allows them to express their own ideas, it follows that they will feel a sense of ownership of their work because they are constantly engaged in making decisions and choices. And these are not simple yes/no decisions. Students engaged in ArtsSmarts projects are problem-solving at a very high level of reasoning and critical thinking.

Brain research shows that learning is maximized when the problem-solving involves various sections of the brain at the same time. Pairing discussion with creation develops multiple neural pathways and enriches learning. In these terms, ArtsSmarts encourages an ideal problem-solving environment.

CONTENT — **CONTEXT** — PROCESS — PRODUCT

While content is a crucial component of student engagement, the context in which that content is delivered is equally important. While the two components overlap in some significant ways, the following suggest elements of the ArtsSmarts learning context that we believe contribute to student engagement and learning.

Collaborative

Unlike other arts integration initiatives, ArtsSmarts is a sustained collaboration between a practicing artist and a classroom teacher. The artist and teacher plan together, work together in the classroom, and modify their actions based on joint reflections and assessment. From the beginning, the structure of this relationship provides a very different experience for the classroom teacher and his or her students because it introduces collaboration with an 'outsider' to an environment where teacher independence and solo work is the norm.

Work with an artist, or any outsider, requires collaboration, as distinct from cooperation. Whereas simple cooperation involves individuals working side-by-side to a variety of ends, collaboration depends on a common vision and goals and the willingness to work together to achieve those goals. Cooperation makes the classroom a nice place to be; collaboration creates the climate for a learning community.

In *The Brain-Compatible Classroom*, Laura Erlauer (2003:136) tells us that collaborative work is brain compatible, therefore ideal for learning, for the following reasons:

- An innate function of the brain is to search for meaning. Collaborative learning provides the brain with the means to explore new information, typically in a problem-solving situation.
- The brain is social and, therefore, likes to learn from and with others.
- Working with other people tends to elicit stronger emotional responses to the work. Emotionally laden information is the easiest to remember. Therefore, work in a group should be more effectively remembered.
- The brain likes to contemplate varying viewpoints. Multiple viewpoints tend to occur regularly in collaborative learning.
- Working toward a common goal is ingrained in collaborative teamwork. The brain functions well with the challenge of a goal, and students like feeling success after reaching a goal.
- Brains can understand a large, general concept while simultaneously working and learning with related specific details. Group work is based on this principle and is therefore logical to the brain. The task of the group is understood and dealt with as a whole, but individuals are each contributing different parts.
- Collaborative groups are designed to be supportive and non-threatening. The brain works best under these conditions because it can focus on high level thinking using the frontal cortex, rather than the 'fight or flight' response of the reptilian brain.

In ArtsSmarts all of these benefits to collaboration exist, not just for students, but for the classroom teacher and the artist as well.

Supportive

Collaboration is challenging, but it's made easier for students when it is modeled for them in the working relationship of teacher and artist. When supported with this modeling, teachers note high levels of interactivity among their students, and a greater degree of participation and engagement by all students, including those who don't usually work well with others. They also hear respectful language and constructive criticism. As one teacher suggests, "The common goal motivates a desire for a successful work, rather than a successful mark for the individual."

Two Grade 7 students from different schools also have profound insights to share:

The first day of building construction was the hardest thing I had to do in my life. Working with people that are not even considered friends or even acquaintances was totally different. I learned about how everyone needs to cooperate, and participate.

I find compromising challenging because sometimes, to find an idea that works, you have to give up your best and favourite ideas.

It is important to note the connection between content and context here. Common goals for the work bring a collaborative group together and keep it grounded and focused. If the work isn't relevant and important, there isn't much point in collaborating to achieve it.

The artist plays a critically important role in keeping the collaborative group grounded and focused by bringing expertise in the art form and demonstrated passion for the work. Students and teachers benefit from seeing the products of knowledge and love modeled for them. "When a person is intrinsically motivated in what he does, chances are that the curiosity of others will be aroused" (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984:216).

Because of their expertise, artists are able to provide students with the focused and accurate feed-

back needed for improvement and continued engagement with the task. In a review of thirty-five years of educational research, Marzano (2003) tells us that feedback like ‘good job’ doesn’t do a thing for student achievement. Students need feedback that is prompt, specific, multimodal, and coming from a variety of people, including themselves.

Positive

By virtue of the work they do and their personalities, artists tend to be good at making visible their own experiences of personal growth, providing students with encouragement to persist, and reminding teachers that the growth to become fully human usually involves some struggle. The tone of the classroom changes when the adults in it are taking the time to talk with students about life and are treating them with respect... and everyone in the school notices.

He (the artist) doesn't look at us like little kids, but as responsible young adults. Maybe that's why I listen better to him than to anyone else. (Student)

My image of artists has changed in terms of the different perspectives they can bring to the subject matter, curriculum, and the slant they can put on it. Also the combination of their perspective and being a different person in the classroom means they can draw different things from the kids. (Teacher)

The kids welcome me like a favourite aunt when I go there; some of them still e-mail me. (Artist)

Providing time for an artist to work in a school will provide an educational highlight for the students in that school.... We, as educators, are quite good with the long-term in the school, but we need a different kind of energy blowing through the hallways occasionally. (Superintendent)

Challenge

Although disengaged students will deny it if asked, human beings tend to prefer tasks that are cognitively challenging and somewhat ambiguous. It is a mistake to minimize expectations for disengaged students in the hopes that they will receive needed boosts to their self-esteem through experiencing success, even if that success is faked. All students need a real challenge, and support in meeting it. By providing students with meaningful tasks in a context that encourages engagement, ArtsSmarts projects increase the probability that disengaged students will tackle challenges and learn to deal with ambiguity.

Risk Taking

When they’re asked to create art, the almost universal first response of both students and teacher is “I can’t”. This response always changes over the course of an ArtsSmarts project. Not only do students start to see their own and others’ strengths in making art, they also become more fearless risk takers in other aspects of the work as well.

At Dr. F.J. McDonald Catholic School in Ottawa, the 150 JK-Grade 6 students came together from countries around the globe. Many were from blended, low socio-economic families. None of the students had any opportunities outside of school to participate in the arts. The artist and teachers provided students with a dance program. “Some children wanted to stick to their known genre of dance that they listen to or see on MTV. Others were able to break out of the typical dance of this area of the city and try something completely new. Some students wanted to join dance classes. Even the shyest students participated and gave ideas.” (Teacher)



Students ... became more proficient at solving their problems through other means than simply having someone show them. They became more fearless in attempting things with their projects (mechanical sculptures) that may or may not work. (Teacher, Whitby, Ontario)

And that same class of students extended their risk-taking behaviour beyond ArtsSmarts:

Students are more willing to take risks in the completion of their work. Geography maps have a little extra flair, explanations are accompanied by diagrams, students seem less afraid to take that extra step. (Teacher)

Once again, the overlap of content and context is obvious. The willingness to risk, the willingness to accept a challenge is inextricably linked to the relevance and importance of the work, and to the existence of a collaborative, supportive and positive learning environment.

Emotion is thought to be the strongest force in the brain. When a learning environment prompts negative emotion, it literally shuts down the possibility of thought and of risk-taking. A positive and supportive learning environment is critical to both and a prerequisite to genuine engagement.

CONTENT — CONTEXT — **PROCESS** — PRODUCT

Learning relevant and important content in a supportive and positive context enhances engagement. A learning process that is integrated and hands-on further contributes to the overall level of student engagement.

Integrated

ArtsSmarts is based on a model of arts integration, or what one partner refers to as ‘arts infusion’. Core curriculum concepts are taught and learned through the arts, not because of any opposition to art for its own sake, but because integrated learning turns out to be a particularly effective way to learn. Integrated curriculum gives students multiple connection points between past learning and new learning. The more connection points, the more likely that students are able to make sense of the learning and give meaning to it, and therefore the more likely they are to retain it. As a further bonus, learning through multiple senses – as is the case with all forms of art – substantially enhances recall.

As one teacher suggests,

For the kids it was an entire experience... instead of parts just being all patched together, it had a lot of unity, it just flowed together nicely. I don't think they (the students) realized that at one time it was more social studies, this time it's more art technique, this time it's creative writing. It was just one big project for them... They got to see the big picture.

Hands-on

A study of adolescents' self-perceptions of motivation, attention and affect in various subject areas found that strictly cognitive subjects such as math, English, some social sciences, and foreign languages received the lowest scores. Classes such as art, that required more than intellectual skills and involved students in some form of physical and sensory participatory activity, received higher scores on all three measures (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). This research supports our experience, that it makes good sense to combine the arts with other disciplines.

This artist found a hands-on way to help students and an art teacher understand algebra –

We had them do algebra tiles... then they created collages and they had to come up with the algebraic expression based on how many of the different squares they had. I got some glass paint and they painted the algebraic expression on it. Some of the kids who don't get math got it because it was so visual. This art teacher, who struggled with algebra, got algebra. I could have been taught algebra this way.... We found a way to really explain math.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi makes a useful contribution to our argument for problem-based, integrated, hands-on learning in his work on flow. By flow he means the experience of being so caught up in an enjoyable activity that one loses track of both time and self. Flow occurs when challenge and skill are perfectly matched. Too much challenge without enough skill results in anxiety. Plenty of skill without enough challenge results in boredom.

An enjoyable activity with an appropriate match of challenge and skill results in flow, but the challenge-skill mix is never static. As skills develop, challenge needs to increase. In ArtsSmarts, that increase in challenge comes gradually from the goal of the collaborative group, the instructions of the artist and classroom teacher, or the student's opportunity for choice and ownership in his or her work.

Flow is not limited to art activities, but Csikszentmihalyi says that they do offer a special opportunity. Art, he argues, provides unique experiences – sensations, feelings and thoughts that are ordered and predictable, yet quite different from the mundane activities of everyday life.

CONTENT — CONTEXT — PROCESS — **PRODUCT**

Robert Marzano (2001) describes a class of students doing different things as a new lesson is about to begin: some are pulling everything out of their desks, looking for materials; others are talking to friends, or staring out the window; still others are tapping a beat with a pencil. Within seconds of the start of the lesson, what Marzano calls each student's 'self-system' makes the decision about whether to engage in the new learning or to continue with the current action.

Marzano says, "If the task is judged important, if the probability of success is high, and a positive affect is generated or associated with the task, students will be motivated to engage in the new task. If the new task is evaluated as having low relevance and/or low probability of success and has an associated negative affect, motivation to engage in the task will be low."

This theory supports the ArtsSmarts model of engagement in content and context, perhaps even indirectly in process. What is missing from Marzano's theory and others like it is what we see as the critical importance of product.

Authentic

Product is the tangible result of a goal. It is what differentiates important creative work from endless experimentation. As Steve Jobs frequently told the staff that built the first Apple computers, "Real artists ship."



Last year we had an artist at our school that was trained in the art of papier maché. I was able to look through the social studies curriculum and connect the mapping skills the students needed to learn to a more hands on approach. Using papier maché, the students created a topographical map of Alberta. We used the map the entire year to continually refer back to. The different regions were represented both topographically and through colour so we were also able to use this map to compare the regions and predict what the land may look like in the different regions as well as what wildlife may inhabit different areas of Alberta.

I have even found many opportunities this year (with a different class) to refer to the map, but I believe that the process the students went through to create the map was what helped them to connect the learning to the memories of the fun they had in actually creating the map. (Teacher, Caslan School)



Photo: Durham District School Board (ON)

Experienced by Others

Product is a visible symbol of contribution and a demonstration of personal responsibility.

When opportunities for participation incorporate opportunities for contribution, and youth are able to ‘give back’ their gifts to their families, schools, and communities, they no longer see themselves as simply recipients of what adults have to offer... but as active contributors to the settings in which they live. Giving back is a powerful ‘hook’ for all youth, especially for those not used to thinking of themselves as successful. (Benard, 2004:47-48)

Contributing something to others seems to be especially motivating, hence the increased interest among educators in providing students with service learning opportunities. ArtsSmarts offers similar results through products.

Product is also how a student demonstrates capability – often capability beyond the expectations of adults. Product is how real artists work.

Product is so important that if students can’t envision it, they won’t stay with the work to accomplish it, no matter how enticing that work may be.

Grove School in Oshawa, Ontario is a lock-down facility for segregated at-risk students. A group of these students, grades 5-7, were studying native history as part of a social studies program and were introduced to the legend ‘Seven Grandfathers and the Little Boy’. The students created puppets and masks to use in a black light theatre production of the legend.

Early discussions with students revealed that they had no vision of what the end product might look like. In a segregated facility and with a history of problems in previous schools and communities, none of the students had ever had the opportunity to participate in a production or to see one take place.

Even though each element of the puppet and mask work could be considered inherently appealing, students started strong, then interest waned and they wanted to move on to the next thing. It wasn’t until near the end of the design and creation of the props, when students could see what they would look like under the black light, that their excitement piqued. It wasn’t until that moment that students began to express their desire to be included in the final production and were willing to do the work to get there.

An interesting exception was when the students made plaster masks of their faces. Although they’d never done or seen anything like this before either, they immediately considered the masks their own personal property and were driven to complete them. It seems that product is important even when there isn’t an opportunity to share and celebrate it with a larger audience.

Finally, a product encapsulates the content of the learning along with memories of context and process.

In a regular school day, students move from subject to subject and it's all little bits of time... Life is not living in one hour time slots. Life is connecting one's work to goals or an end product. (Artist)

3. Engagement for Change

The differences between an ArtsSmarts activity and ‘one-off’ events should now be clear. Bringing an artist into a classroom for a single day or even a few days of painting lessons, even if the paintings are going to be about the current science topic, won’t allow for the enactment of the four components of student engagement that have been described. Painting lessons may indeed be worthwhile, but if the goal is to sustain high levels of learning task engagement, no single activity, in isolation, will achieve it.

When students are highly engaged, the classroom is a rewarding place to be. But the components discussed here represent a lot of work, a very different way of being in a classroom, and a considerable risk for any teacher whose teaching has always followed more traditional forms.

For the work and the risk to be worthwhile, we need to demonstrate how these components lead to changes in the attitudes and behaviours of students and adults. Those changes matter because learning is change – change in beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and ideas. Education is the process that encourages and nurtures those changes.

The next section provides evidence that ArtsSmarts projects change all participants – students, teachers, and artists.

CHANGES IN STUDENTS

Objective measures of student change are difficult to come by, but students and teachers involved in ArtsSmarts projects report increases in both content learning and personal feelings of worth and competence.

Understanding of Content

Consistently across Canada we were told that ArtsSmarts projects increase the depth, breadth and retention of learning by students to the extent that it far surpasses the normal learning experiences of many students. (Meredith, 2003:16)

Evidence of positive changes in content knowledge comes from students’ self-reports:

I think it was really good because we did skits and we talked about it (conflicts facing Acadians prior to the outbreak of the Seven Years War), so now it’s imprinted in my head.

Before it was just facts and stuff that happened, and then it became people and their opinions and emotions. When you put yourself in their shoes, you have a much better understanding of it.

I like the mural because it describes the Métis culture. It will help me remember.

The video helped me in class because now I understand point of view.





And from teacher reports:

An artist and an elementary principal from Labrador used Criterion Reference Test scores (standardized provincial test) pre and post a unit on poetry and media studies with a Grade 3 class of 25 students. There was a dramatic increase in both areas. In poetry, for example, the increase was 70%.

Students worked in teams to build mechanical sculptures for their Grade 7 structures unit. There was a noticeable increase in science marks from the ArtsSmarts project as compared to units in the previous term. Report card marks in science increased by 4-6%.

Student achievement on subsequent assignments on the subject matter covered in the drama was significantly higher than in other subject matter in the same unit.

After a few weeks, I saw a real shift from the stereotypical understanding of First Nations culture and issues to a real, informed understanding.

When students presented their scenes in front of the class, it became apparent that they were better able to describe the events from a particular character's point of view. Their writing became more detailed and incorporated realistic descriptions. The students were better able to envision the surroundings and feelings of the characters. The pivotal moment came in the students having to teach the subject matter to the Grade 4's. They started demonstrating analytical, synthesizing and evaluative perspectives on the subject as evidenced by the questions they posed to the Grade 4's and the answers they gave to questions from the younger students.

Rarely has evidence of learning content knowledge been provided through positive changes in standardized test results or even through the more subjective report card marks. This is a point of concern for all who attempt to prove the value of arts integration. As Ben Levin, Deputy Minister of Education for the province of Ontario, says, "To be believable, a research report has to have numbers. But to be memorable, a research report has to have stories." ArtsSmarts, like others, has evidence that is memorable, if not necessarily believable to certain audiences.

There are a variety of theories about why improvements in test scores are difficult to obtain:

- We're measuring too quickly (the 'weighing a pig won't help him to grow' theme)
- We're measuring the wrong things (the 'when all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail' theme)
- We're measuring something unmeasurable (the 'art for the sake of being human' theme)

Our viewpoint in ArtsSmarts is that an increase in learning task engagement will prove to be the prerequisite for improvement in measurable achievement scores. Low achieving students who are not identified as special needs are, we suggest, low achieving because they are disengaged from learning. Our thesis, therefore, is that teachers who make effective use of the ArtsSmarts model in and beyond the ArtsSmarts activity will witness an increase in their students' engagement in learning and a corresponding increase in student achievement.

Awareness of Strengths

ArtsSmarts activities level the playing field in a classroom.

It gave a lot of my students with low reading and writing skills an opportunity to explain themselves, explain feelings, explain memories. Through the pencil-crayon, the pastels and the paintbrush, it gave them a voice without talking. (Teacher)

When students have an opportunity to share their strengths, rather than continually display and remediate their weaknesses, we witness a sea change in the atmosphere of the classroom. Students, particularly those most vulnerable and at-risk, realize that their talents are being valued, that they have a contribution to make. Their classmates realize it too.

One of my at-risk students worked in the group that created a catapult. He was extremely excited and motivated by the project. He spent a lot of time on the computer examining catapult design. He used this knowledge to assist his group when creating plans. This is the first time that I have witnessed this student truly contributing to group work in a meaningful manner. He was also fully involved in the building of the project. This is one student that other group members often complain about. There were no complaints during the course of this project with regards to his contributions! (Teacher)

I saw kids who were very uncooperative become group leaders... I think it upset the pecking order a bit. It allowed kids who were not normally heard to be heard. The arts changed how things worked within the classroom. (Artist)

Confidence and Pride

In several of the ArtsSmarts research reports, teachers cite ‘increased confidence’ or ‘improved self-esteem’ as the most significant student gain. We should recast both of those terms as ‘self-efficacy’. Self-efficacy is a person’s confidence in his or her own ability to be successful. Unlike self-esteem, it is based on past experiences; past successes create confidence in future successes.

Self-efficacy is a more powerful construct than self-esteem because the locus of control is with the learner. Experiences usually teach that success is linked to effort. An important step in working with a disengaged learner is to reinforce that link by creating situations where making an effort will result in success. Once again, ArtsSmarts is an ideal structure for this since collaborative work, student ownership of content, a hands-on process which students enjoy, and artist expertise all go a long way toward guaranteeing that effort will lead to a successful result.

That successful result – a product of some kind – leads to expressions of pride in the student’s effort and work. The product acknowledges the success and makes it public, thus giving students the increased confidence that success can be repeated.

I feel a huge improvement in all of my subjects, especially art. I feel so much smarter this year than last year. I'm very proud of my work. (Student)

In a show we put on at the Kensington House Gallery, the student guides who explained it to the public made it real to the people who were there... These were kids talking to the adults about the projects that they had created... and they felt good about themselves. (Teacher)

The moment of pride came when I returned with the edited DVD, with credits and music, and the students spent a couple of days watching the video and showing it to their friends and fellow students. (Artist)

Five teachers at different schools mentioned ‘turn-around kids’; students whose behaviour and performance significantly improved as a result of participating in the ArtsSmarts project. In these cases, students were observed taking much more pride in what they did, coming to school excited, and building on individual successes. (SAEE, 2006)

CHANGES IN TEACHERS

Teachers find that ArtsSmarts projects open them to new possibilities: new relationships with their students, a renewed commitment to their passion for students and learning, a new willingness to become co-learners in the classroom, and a new sense of freedom that comes from sharing responsibility with another adult in the classroom.

A Different Relationship with Students

Teachers are constantly exhorted to ‘connect’ with their students, particularly if those students are young adolescents. Connecting with an adult builds a student’s sense of security and safety and significantly increases the likelihood of resilience in the face of life’s problems.

Connection is so important that some school systems force it, assigning teachers to act as mentors to at-risk youth, or structuring the day to include ‘advisory’ periods. ArtsSmarts provides for more natural connections, as teachers become both guide and co-learner.

We were a very close group beforehand; I've taught them for two years in a row. But now they see me as learning with them and participating with them. It's almost as if I'm a peer learner. They're more inclined to talk to me on a different level than they did before. (Teacher)

It is certainly possible to achieve co-learner status in a classroom where the teacher is the only adult. For example, both inquiry-based classrooms and knowledge-building classrooms work on the premise that the teacher is also a learner, albeit a more experienced one. ArtsSmarts, however, provides a very different kind of co-learning because the teacher, who is usually not an art teacher, is learning from the artist and alongside the students, giving students the clear message that “We’re all in this together. What we are doing is important.” At the same time, the artist and teacher are together learning more about their students and how best to work with them.

Teachers frequently report that the ArtsSmarts process provides them with an opportunity to see different strengths in their students. When teachers see strengths, they see their students as capable and treat them as such. They also learn to respond appropriately to individual students, scaffolding each student’s efforts by building on his or her strengths.

The kids have inspired me with their interest and they are more invested in something they are already interested in. I want to do English because their skills are very weak. We can do comic book illustration and story development. I have a student that mixes up the J in his first name, but he did a stunning replication of a Tom Thompson painting and it boggles the mind how he can translate a photograph onto a piece of paper, but he struggles with letters. (Teacher)



Using art in the class has enabled me to see a side of my students I would not have seen. I feel more connected to them and I'm able to encourage better. If I had never given that student an opportunity to shine, when would I have been able to say, 'You did a great job.' It wouldn't happen in writing and reading or math. (Teacher)

The arts help me find strengths in kids and find things to reinforce my program. Working with the arts projects helps me gain rapport with difficult kids; gives me an in. I can talk about the project; I can connect. (School Counselor)

As is the case with students, product serves to enhance a teacher's deeper relationship with his or her class. Teachers feel proud when their colleagues express their disbelief that the students were capable of such high quality work, or when parents express appreciation for the teacher's role in bringing a child's strengths to light.

Personal and Professional Creativity and Learning

Most teachers enter the profession for the noblest of reasons. They love children, they love learning, and they want to combine those two passions so that their students come to love learning.

This ‘moral imperative’, as Michael Fullan (1993) calls it, quickly moves to the back burner as the sheer volume of problems, mandates, children and activities threatens to drown even the most efficient and well-organized of professionals.

Stephen Covey (1994) tells us that we can’t make progress if we spend all of our time focusing on the urgent (a.k.a. problems, mandates, children, activities) rather than the important (learning). Fullan tells us that education won’t improve unless we remind teachers of their moral imperative and return it to its rightful front burner location.

ArtsSmarts answers both Covey and Fullan in two ways.

First, teachers have the opportunity to assume a different role in their classrooms. They are still teaching, still managing behaviours, still organizing programs, but for the duration of ArtsSmarts they are not solely, exclusively in charge. There’s an artist who shares the responsibility, brings the specialized knowledge, and models a life lived with passion. It is as if teachers were suddenly doused with cold water, reminded, “Yes, this is why I became a teacher”, and given permission to return to living that belief.

ArtsSmarts gives me the confidence and backing and mandate to teach the way I want to.

ArtsSmarts is a reassurance that this is what we should be doing. It should be the norm.

My beliefs about integrating drama wherever possible have been affirmed. Students learn best when they do, create and become what they are studying. Drama provides the experience and anchor needed to activate the memory. The integration of drama has always been an integral part of my teaching; however, through working with an actor, I was reminded of many drama activities that I had not done with this class.

Second, ArtsSmarts helps teachers renew their moral imperative by putting them in the position of both learner in a creative activity and observer of the impact of creativity on student development. It’s a double whammy; teachers are shown what happens to learning when engagement is high, and they are reminded of their own place as creative, engaged learners. The two combine to reinforce teachers’ understanding that they have a unique contribution to make in the classroom, a role well beyond simply deliverers of curriculum.

I have completely been more involved in the arts lately. I grew up in the arts, but dropped it when I was teaching. Now I’m drawing more. More ideas have come to me. I’m inspired on a regular basis. I’m choosing not to consume my life with teaching, but to consume it with what I love. Those three weeks with the (ArtsSmarts) musicians in my class were the happiest three weeks of my career.

My parents and roommate see change – I’m smiling, happy, and don’t seem as tired. I’m laughing more inside the class and outside. Now I’m transferring things we could be doing in the future into my class. My creative juices are really going. It has snowballed into so many ideas of what I can do with my class in the future.

Teachers’ spirits are renewed through their involvement in ArtsSmarts. This renewal both emerges from and feeds back into the four components of the ArtsSmarts experience. As the teachers at Tsolum Elementary remind us, “The projects were not only fun for the student; they were fun for the teachers too.”

Risk Taking

We have claimed that taking risks and meeting challenges are essentials of learning task engagement. We now claim that this is as true for adults as it is for students and that, in order to take risks and meet challenges, adults also need the sense that their work is important and that they are in a supportive environment.

The importance of this work is confirmed for ArtsSmarts teachers when they see the gains that arts integrated teaching provides for their students. Students' self-perceptions change, attitudes change, behaviours change, and learning takes place. These transformations are neither gradual nor invisible. On the contrary, they happen quickly and very tangibly.

The supportive environment teachers need for risk taking is sometimes provided by administration and teaching colleagues, but more often it is created in the classroom itself by the combined actions and attitudes of students, teacher and artist. When the match of artist and teacher is right, the artist makes a significant contribution by gently guiding the teacher to expand the range of teaching approaches and strategies. This is the best form of professional development – seeing a new method in action, and then being supported in trying it out.

I'm really self-judging. Reading my children's writing to the artist about how they've learned to have confidence and be proud risk takers, encourages me. I learn from them. I can take risks also if they can. (Teacher)

New Learning about Teaching

Teachers readily identified the new teaching approaches and strategies that they had learned from watching and working with artists.

They have learned:

...to let students experience something first and talk about what they are doing, rather than me explaining it to them and then following them as they do it.

...the importance of stepping back. I've always had a hard time, if students are struggling, to just let them finish something. My artist has helped me to see that I should let them go, let them make their mistakes, let them be independent.

...alternative ways to assess. I realize the assessment has to be innovative because the projects are so different.

...to begin with the experience (the poems) and then get to the mechanics. Before, I'd have given them the mechanics and then got them excited. Doing it this way has created poets. If you get them excited, they will learn the mechanics they need.

...to allow for freedom for my students to express and choose and go their own paths as they see fit. Before, I wasn't willing to take the risk in case chaos ensued. I will rein back in if I feel I need to, but for sure I will take more risks.

...to let my students take control of their own learning. Before, I'd create a song or rhyme they'd use for learning. Now they're creating it on their own. The learning used to be driven by me; now they drive it.

...ways to encourage my students to dance and perform that the artist used that I began to use in my class more.



Photo: Multicultural Arts for Schools and Communities (ON)

THE IMPACT OF THE ARTIST

The professional artist is central and indispensable in the ArtsSmarts model of student engagement. This is not to imply that students will experience high levels of learning task engagement only through the arts, but rather to recognize that the artist brings expertise in his/her discipline and in the ways of thinking in that discipline. Any expert in a particular discipline can make a similar contribution to students' learning to think in the modes of that discipline. Teachers can be particularly adept at teaching students to 'think like a mathematician' or 'think like a writer' or 'think like a scientist' or even 'think like an artist'. But when teachers bring their expertise in instructional design into a collaborative relationship with a professional's expertise in a particular discipline, an ideal learning situation emerges.

This should not be taken to suggest that all artists are alike; that all ArtsSmarts projects are the dream union of compatible, like-minded, flexible, intelligent teachers and artists transforming all ArtsSmarts classrooms into places of high engagement and quality learning for all students. As in all programs, some experiences are more successful than others.

What is required of the artist and of the teacher to make an ArtsSmarts project successful? Teachers say that the artist must have some teaching ability, by which they mean some basic class management skills and the ability to communicate and interact effectively with students. Most teachers find that most artists work very well with students.

Artists ask that teachers involve them in the planning of the ArtsSmarts unit, rather than simply assigning them the art component after the fact. Our research suggests that when teachers volunteer for ArtsSmarts work, they embrace its philosophy and happily collaborate with the artist. Only rarely, when someone else, such as a school principal or arts coordinator, volunteers the teacher, does collaboration become an issue.

When this collaboration works well, what do students and teachers learn about art and artists, and what do artists learn about themselves and their work?

Student Learning about Art

Students develop their artistic skills, particularly when they are involved with a series of ArtsSmarts projects over a significant time period. They also often express interest in a career in art, and begin to see it as a viable career choice:

The storyteller taught me that stories can be from the bottom of your heart. I have never wanted to learn how to tell stories more, and he inspired me to do so. Now I can add 'writer' to the list of things I want to be when I grow up. (14 year old student involved with the aboriginal storytelling project at Yellowquill School in the Portage la Prairie School Division)

I want to get into animation. I do many drawings and cartoons and I loved directing my video on the karate fighting. I want to do this when I grow up. (Student)

One of my students was always interested in media arts but did not know where to get his training, and it has helped him decide what he will do when he graduates. (Grade eight teacher)

In expressing an interest in art as a career, these students are acknowledging the power of ArtsSmarts in helping students connect their school experiences with future possibilities. At a stage in life when many students question the relevance of school learning, these students see art as relevant and they see it as work they enjoy and are capable of doing.

Teacher Learning about Artists

In ArtsSmarts research studies and year-end reports, teachers acknowledged and appreciated the commitment of the artist to the class, recognizing that such commitment takes artists away from their own professional work.

Teachers frequently note that artists work differently than they do. They have commented on the artists' strong emphasis on process, their greater spontaneity which often included lots of changes throughout the process, and their insistence on 'doing things right'. For example, wigwam building at Good Spirit School Division schools involved "trial and error, and having students take down portions of the structure they had already done in order for them to be properly rebuilt." (SAEE, 2006)

From a pedagogical perspective, the artist's or the teacher's 'press for learning' is evidence to the student of a caring adult:

Teachers press students to learn by encouraging them, paying attention to their work and giving constructive feedback, refusing to accept halfhearted efforts, providing assistance when students needed it, and refusing to give up on students. Holding students accountable without this support and encouragement is likely to discourage and alienate them rather than motivate them. (Stipek, 2006:48)

However, from an organizational and class management perspective, having a second adult press for learning can be challenging for a teacher. Insistence on doing things right or on making frequent midcourse corrections takes extra time – time that teachers feel they can ill afford to devote in an already overpacked curriculum. And spontaneity is wonderful, but if it means students miss their recess break because the artist couldn't bear to stop the work, it is the teacher who pays for that spontaneity in distracted and unproductive students later in the day.

As in any creative collaboration, there will always be issues to work out in the instructional partnership of teacher and artist.

Artist Learning

Far fewer artists have been interviewed by ArtsSmarts than have students and teachers. However, we do have a few interesting perspectives of artists on learning to share their expertise with students.

Several artists commented that students' perspectives encouraged them to look at their professional work with new eyes.

I definitely look at the editing process a lot differently. We spent a lot of time with the kids getting their ideas with putting poetry together. More than one pair of eyes really helps, and that helped me to go through my music at a different level and see it in a different way. It was a two way street – we (the musicians) learned as much from the students as they did from us.

I always learn new things about making puppets. Kids actually come up with great ideas that are quite workable, so I am always learning about those things.

Even more frequently artists, like teachers, note that the students' willingness to risk encouraged them to take new risks of their own:

The students make me more creative. I am willing to try new materials and build anything out of anything.

You get a little older and you think... Do I do this? Will I like it? Am I good enough to do it? You always are kind of doubting yourself, whereas they (the students) just kind of say... We're going to do it. We're going to be involved in the here and now and just have fun. Have a great experience, be involved in it, concentrate on just doing. I think that's the important thing I should learn from them all the time.

CHANGES IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

When such significant changes occur in the perceptions and behaviours of students and teachers, some of those benefits inevitably spill over to the larger school community.

School Appearance

A highly visible change comes about as a direct result of students' product work.

For example, at William Latter School in the city of Chambly, Québec, the entire school of 380 students created 'Outside In/Inside Out: The Garden' focused on the theme of nature and the environment through the creation of murals in the entrance foyer of the school. The Garden shows life under the earth, on the earth, and in the air. Highlights include a life-sized papier maché moose and a heron with a fish in its mouth.

The entire school was transformed through this project. Now, when you enter the school, you know that it is loved. The murals are so inviting – every student helped in the painting and some painted at lunch hour and after school as well. The teachers were brought closer together through the project, and the artists, they said, were very warm and approachable. New relationships and professional development ensued. (ArtsSmarts Coordinator)

School Climate

When ArtsSmarts is employed school-wide, administrators and teachers note an improvement in student behaviour. Students are more comfortable expressing themselves, and incidents of fighting and bullying are often reduced.

(At a school talent show where everyone participated): Here we were all making total fools of ourselves, kids and teachers alike, and having so much fun, and I didn't see one student making fun of or putting down another kid. Everyone was up putting themselves out there. I just don't think that would have happened a couple of years ago! Even the shy ones did things, and nobody gave anybody a bad time. They just loved it. (Teacher)

Community Connections

ArtsSmarts projects often reach beyond the school to the wider community. Community recognition of the students' products can lead to closer ties between the local community and the school.

The children of Caslan's kindergarten class and their teacher attended an elders' dinner, bringing cookies that they had baked. After dinner, Susan Dean, local potter, helped each child create a plaque on which his/her handprint was pressed beside the handprint of a grandparent or other elder. Their first names were etched above the hands along with the words 'Mamawe Wekotowin' meaning 'We are all connected' and the plaques were later painted and glazed. The elders expressed great appreciation for this project.

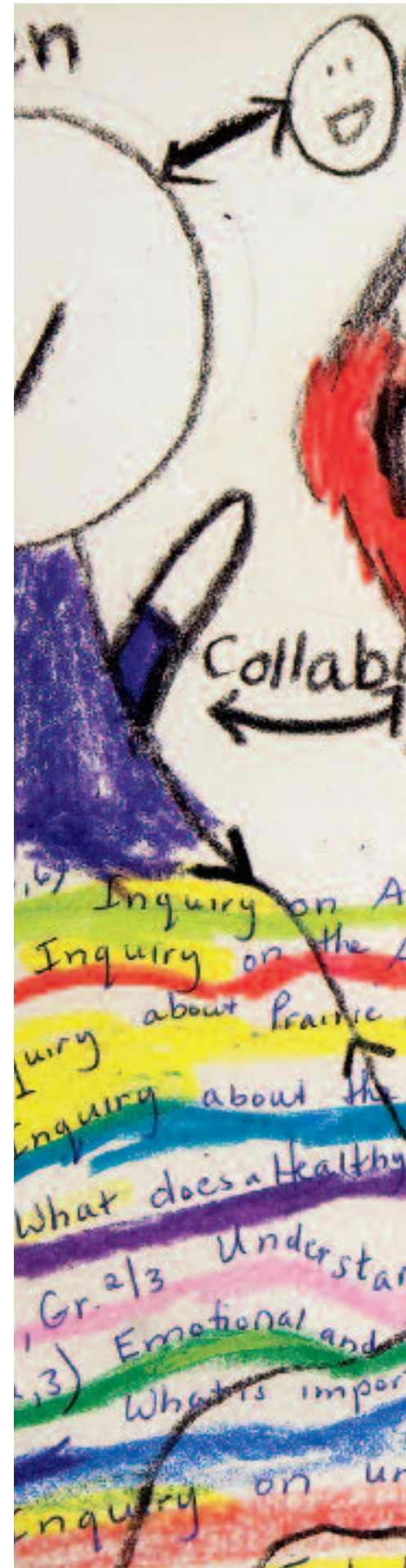
The screening of the student videos at the Film Festival had over 250 people in attendance in the community hall. Several community businesses sponsored awards and came to the banquet to present them to the students. The commitment of the professional artists involved was such that, when there was an audio problem for the awards, one of the artists had her boyfriend make an emergency trip to Broadview an hour and a half away to deliver a speaker.

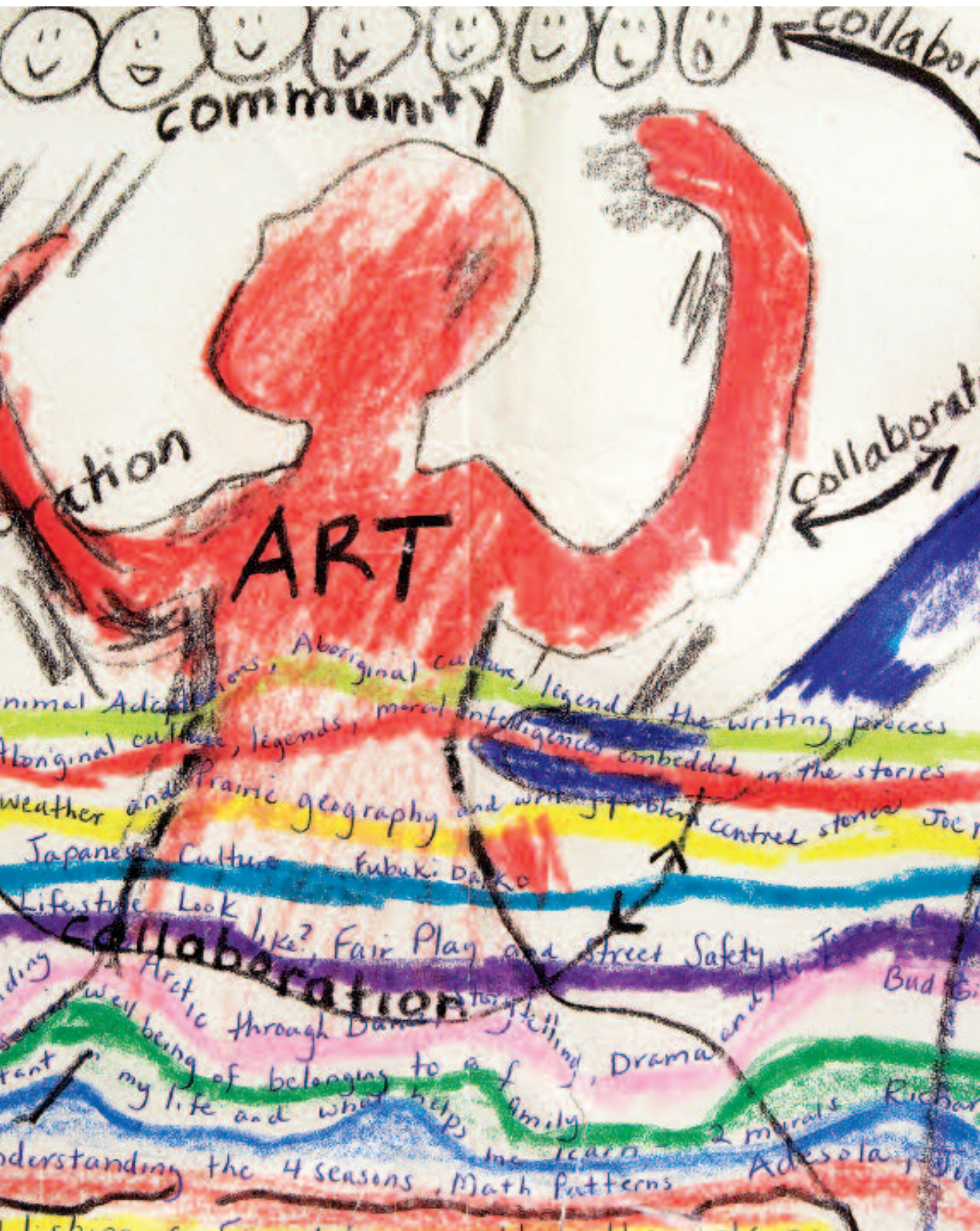
The Yellowquill School project entitled 'The Art of Aboriginal Storytelling' was a whole-school project in which every one of the 480 students produced a banner that told a story or a legend. At the conclusion of the project, all the banners were hung in the main hallway and multi-purpose room of the school. Parents were invited to come to the school over a noon hour to see the banners. The principal of the school reported the response was 'Phenomenal!' Parents and grandparents showed up to see the banners and the hallway and multi-purpose room were packed.

Due to the loud nature of thirty hand drums, we played outside in the school yard. This had some unexpected benefits such as being loud enough so the entire town could hear the drummers. People walking by were heard remarking that they didn't know that Signal Hill School taught 'their' First Nations traditional songs to students. Several community members volunteered to join the students while they were in the drumming circle in a show of support. Playing in the rain, the snow and the sun was a very natural experience that fit in well with the surroundings.

4. Making the Case for ArtsSmarts

In Canada, as elsewhere, we need to find ways to deal with the underachievement of many – too many – of our students. To do this, we must first address the school processes that cause students to experience a loss of curiosity, a sense of inadequacy in their ability to learn, and a disconnection between the school curriculum and their present and future lives. The ArtsSmarts model of student engagement demonstrates that we not only know how to do this, but that we do it effectively at ArtsSmarts sites across the country.





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