

Artistic and Educational Innovation in Action:
Reflecting on *Room 13*, *Proboscis*, and *enquire's* Northeast Cluster 2.1

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Art Education) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2011

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

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Entitled: Artistic and Educational Innovation in Action: Reflecting on *Room 13, Proboscis,*
and *enquire's* Northeast Cluster 2.1

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Master of Arts (Art Education)

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis reviews three examples of comprehensive, innovative, and sustained approaches to art education. *Room 13*, *Proboscis*, and *enquire's* Northeast Cluster 2.1 operate via emulation and implementation of artistic practice and research as well as through community building. This is a reflection on viable pedagogical models that can be adapted for use in the classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My warmest thanks and deep appreciation to Paul Langdon for his patience and encouragement. Thanks also to Linda Szabad-Smyth and Lorrie Blair for their helpful and constructive input.

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INTRODUCTION

This exploration started with a very personal process of observation and questioning that grew out of an interest in contemporary art and contemporary art practice. As I developed and sought to expand my own methods of and approaches to teaching art as well as my approach to considering how to go about teaching art, I increasingly felt that I was looking for examples that I wasn't finding. What I was finding in various teaching and learning environments that have included high schools, after school programmes, museum and gallery education, and public programmes, was that there were a number of different spheres of practice that somehow were not intersecting sufficiently to foster what I consider to be really interesting and worthwhile examples of how education can happen through art. Let me attempt to explain what I mean as it is reasonably clear to me, though it may not necessarily be obvious to others.

Perhaps I could start by saying that the notion of strictly "teaching art" has become increasingly problematic for me in the sense that it seems far too reductive and limiting as a way of describing the scope and richness of what art is (and might be, physically speaking), what it includes in terms of areas of inquiry, how it can be approached, and what it has to offer. This problem becomes clear in discussing the teaching of art with individuals who come from different backgrounds and areas of interest. What I have found to be true, over the course of my studies is that the question of what art is, let alone trying to address ways in which it can be taught, is understood so very differently by different individuals that it can become confusing and frustrating to know exactly how to proceed.

My interest has always been in looking at contemporary art and contemporary art practice as a model for learning. This can be complicated in a number of ways, but

mainly due to varying and differing experience and understanding of what contemporary art is across society. This is a problem in addressing art in general, however, it is particularly problematic when faced with contemporary art. There is frequently little perceived or actual consensus, even within the art world, as to what constitutes an important and significant contribution in very current practice. For the purposes of education, art practice, contemporary or not, is often treated as a means to an end, with the end frequently taking the form of creative and aesthetic “product” that can be reproduced in any number of ways. Consider for a moment how the work of an artist such as Andy Warhol has been turned into (perhaps quite literally) a million and one educational art projects. While this may be a valuable pursuit and fun in many ways, it is not where my interests lie. I am not particularly motivated by looking for models that will result in amassing a series of lesson plans that offer a linear, frequently narrative, route to a predictable end product. I am much more intrigued by looking specifically at how artists go about their work. Trying to understand this process and possibly actually trying it on, or emulating it, is what interests me. With this interest comes an understanding that the terrain I am looking at is vast, with approaches and processes that differ and diverge widely from one artist and art practice to another. For me, it is precisely this variability and multiplicity that makes art so engaging and, by extension, so valuable in terms of the educational potential that can be unlocked in exploring it.

In considering this I often come back to a discussion I had with an elementary school teacher a number of years ago. I was trying to describe what I perceived then, and still perceive today, to be a problem in successful art education. I would articulate this problem quite simply as being the persistent failure of two key, but different, spheres to intersect, to meet, to get to know each other, and ultimately to respect and

learn from each other. The two spheres I refer to are the two distinctive constituent parts of the term “art education”. Art is in one place and education is in another. Frequently the two don’t appear to have a sense of what or where the other one is. In attempting to describe this situation we agreed that Art doesn’t really know what Education is, except in the most general terms, and Education doesn’t know very much at all about Art, except what is most obvious about it. The notion of the two terms, the two disciplines, coexisting is not always comfortable. This becomes very obvious when one sees how teachers who are not art specialists try to include art in curriculum or, vice versa, when art teachers try to move from project-based activities to a more clearly pedagogical and didactic approach. Part of this difficulty in coexisting is that there are boundaries, be they real or imagined, at all. A more permeable understanding of how art and education can work together seems much more useful and I believe that it is precisely this idea of permeability (as in movement across boundaries and exchange) that can be found upon closer examination of art practice.

I wish to look at initiatives that work for both sides, in other words, initiatives that offer interesting ways of engaging with, exploring, or adapting current ideas and practices in art as well as providing real pedagogical opportunities. Additionally, I am very interested in models that actively examine how art can be taught in schools or offer models for learning and teaching that can be adapted to a school environment. School, taking into account all its real and potential shortcomings, is the place where we all learn how to navigate and engage with the world in which we live. It is the place where we learn strategies for interpreting the world through fundamental systems such as words and numbers. I believe that art should also constitute a fundamental system available to us for understanding and negotiating the world. When I started looking for

models that I thought I could use in my work, I found numerous thought provoking examples of current research.

There were three initiatives in particular that struck me as noteworthy for the simple reason that they seemed to emphasize a number of very basic but significant educational concerns. The three initiatives that caught my attention are all currently operating and have all been ongoing for a number of years. They have longevity. Each initiative is quite different from the other in how it is structured and how it functions but all three offer opportunities to consider the occurrence and importance of the following notions: the ways in which varying levels of independence can be encouraged and fostered; autonomy and how it can be developed and implemented; the questioning and exploration of social models in working with participants and the potential for social change; and quality in research and learning. They also each offer opportunities to apply and extend acquired knowledge and display a commitment to the visual arts, specifically by taking into consideration the research processes and behaviours of artists.

The first initiative that I will look at is *Room 13*. *Room 13* started in a small town in Scotland and appears to have now taken off internationally. Schools around the world are taking notice of its achievements and are trying, in their own ways, to reproduce these with their students. What *Room 13* offers, in its original form, is what might be described as a stand alone art project that exists within a school environment without being part of the established school curriculum. Ideally, and in its original form, it is a room where students can go on a voluntary basis to pursue independently and autonomously developed art projects. Students administer all aspects of the room, which might more accurately be described as an independent art studio, themselves alongside an adult artist in residence who is employed as a facilitator and resource

person. The artist in residence is available to the students to assist them in determining how to go about pursuing projects they wish to implement. He or she is also present to assist students in acquiring skills they will require to develop and advance the projects they have chosen to work on. Additionally, the artist in residence advises the students on running and maintaining their *Room 13* art studio as they are ultimately solely responsible for its success (Room 13, n.d., About Room 13).

The second initiative I explore is called *Proboscis*. *Proboscis* is located in London, England, and was founded in 1994, by artist, designer, and researcher Giles Lane. Artist Alice Angus joined *Proboscis* in 1998, and became, along with Giles Lane, its co-director. It is not simple to describe exactly what *Proboscis* does as their projects are numerous and eclectic, however, in very simple terms one might say that they explore creativity. They develop projects keeping notions such as questioning, openness, play, and the expansion of perception in artistic practice firmly in mind. They have worked with schools, universities, libraries, information and technology companies, and others, on various initiatives that frequently share a common thread relating to the exploration of one's place in the immediate surrounding environment. *Proboscis* proposes inventive and dynamic ways of considering history, nature, the built environment, geography, social relationships and structures, and many other important areas of inquiry that concern all of us in our immediate communities as well as in our larger world(s). Their approach is playful but involves serious exploration of the circumstances in which we live in order to achieve understanding that can assist in, and hopefully lead to, transformative change (Proboscis website, n.d., About section).

The final initiative I look at is the *enquire* Northeast Cluster 2.1. This research project is part of a series of research projects initiated by *engage*. Located in London,

England, *engage* is a membership organization that works to promote and facilitate an enjoyment and an understanding of the visual arts. *engage* advocates for gallery education and provides support and professional development to a membership that includes artists, art educators, curators, teachers, community workers, and others. *enquire's* Northeast Cluster 2.1 is striking to me because it is a research project that uses a more or less familiar model of artists in schools but deploys that model with great care and commitment so as to create a dynamic learning environment for both students and artists as well as providing support for teachers. Rather than, as we in Canada know this model, having artists come into schools and present a project with generally predetermined outcomes, *enquire's* Northeast Cluster 2.1 is a project in which artists went to work with small groups of students on an extended basis in order to develop individual projects. They were not physically restricted to the school and were able to visit art galleries and artists' work directly with professional artists, thus providing students with examples of real-life contexts in which art is made and exists. An additional component of this project is that classroom teachers were invited to participate in some of the project activities with their students (*enquire* website, n.d., *enquire* research reports, North East, phase 2.1).

All three of the projects I have chosen to examine are located in the United Kingdom. There are instances of interesting projects of this type developing in numerous contexts, but I don't think it's a coincidence that all of these are found in the UK. Although the political, and hence cultural, climate is currently undergoing massive change, funding structures in the UK have been relatively generous to the visual arts for some time now. This has allowed an array of organizations to emerge, develop professionally, and expand over time. Museums and galleries have certainly grown and

with this growth has come a clearer focus on the importance of art education at all levels. In very basic and pragmatic terms, developing innovative and comprehensive education strategies around expansion in the visual arts is one key way of stimulating interest and thus ensuring a level of public support. This approach seems to have been very successful and the result is that there are numerous dynamic and inventive programmes that merit attention. From those with which I have become familiar, I have selected the initiatives introduced above.

In addition to providing stimulating learning opportunities in the realm(s) of the visual arts, these initiatives appear to offer startling models of freedom, democracy, and autonomy that have the potential to teach students about the society they live in and ways in which creativity connects with civic life, thus advancing practical models for creativity existing in a continuum with life. All of the initiatives outlined either explicitly or implicitly stress the importance of agency through models of highly productive autonomy and independence. It is interesting to consider what these initiatives may be achieving more successfully than the standard school curriculum.

The models that are put forward by each of these initiatives, namely independence, autonomy, and agency, are also values that each one of them embodies. In addition to active research, each initiative self-publishes their findings on their websites, with *Room 13* being the least active in this regard and *Proboscis* and *engage* the most active. This is very likely a function of factors such as funding and structure.

I have observed all of these projects for the past few years via their websites. I have watched them grow and evolve. The growth and evolution that I have witnessed is evident the number and variety of projects initiated as well as in the increasingly detailed information available for consultation and download. As a result, it has become

increasingly possible to follow these initiatives over time and observe projects as they are unfolding. With this in mind, my point of view is very much that of a teacher, operating with limited resources and using the internet as a source of information that can contribute to developing new teaching approaches as well as facilitating independent professional development. What these initiatives indicate is that, in spite of the limitations of not being able to access them directly and in person, they are all committed to making their existence and their work known and available for perusal online. There is a community of practice that is actively developing and easily accessible that consolidates and facilitates the notion of a teacher as an active researcher.

The three projects that I have chosen to write about stood out for me because of their complexity, specifically in the ways that they explore the building of knowledge by attempting to eliminate boundaries. The models that they propose are profoundly inclusive and collaborative. The ways in which they share their findings echo this and have the potential to provide empowering opportunities for teachers.

SECTION I: ROOM 13

Room 13 is a project that I came across for the first time some years ago when I picked up a book edited by Anna Harding and entitled *Magic Moments : Collaboration Between Artists and Young People*. I followed up with frequent visits to *Room 13's* website and observed how, over the course of several years, it's growth and evolution.

What is Room 13 and how does it function?

According to *Magic Moments*, *Room 13* began in 1994 as a single room in Caol Primary School, located near Fort William in the West Highlands of Scotland. Caol Primary School currently has 160 students enrolled, so it is a small school. Students range in age from roughly 5 to 11, and are enrolled in P1, or Primary 1 which would correspond to our K or Kindergarten, through P7, or Primary 7 which would correspond to our 6 or Grade 6 (Highland Council, n.d., Caol Primary School section).

A room numbered 13 in the scheme for assigning numbers to rooms in the school, and hence the name *Room 13*, was an empty, unused, and available room in the school that was given over to students to be used as a space in which spontaneous visual arts project initiated by the students at the primary school could be pursued. The room was initially, and apparently continues to be, used as an art studio where students of all ages can go on a voluntary basis to make art, read, do research, acquire and advance various art-related skills, or discuss art-related topics (visual literacy, art history, etc.) with an artist in residence. The space was theirs and the understanding was that it was to be managed entirely by them (Room 13 Scotland, n.d., About Room 13).

The artist in residence is there as a facilitator who guides students through the

projects they choose to work on and helps them to identify skills they need to acquire in order to achieve the goals they have set for themselves. Rob Fairley is credited as being the founder of *Room 13* and from 1994 to 2005, he was its artist in residence. There is surprisingly little information available about Rob Fairley other than this brief biography listed on the current *Room 13* website:

Rob Fairley is well known as the founder of Room 13 project, holding the position of Artist in Residence at Room 13 Caol from 1994 - 2005. Rob studied at Edinburgh College of Art and his work varies from detailed paintings in egg tempera through oils, watercolours and drawings (in many media) to ephemeral work made by subtly varying the landscape to produce an aesthetic response. Rob has over 30 years of experience as an artist and educator (Room 13, n.d., Tutors section).

Room 13 is an extra-curricular space that can be accessed during school hours as well as after school. Voluntary participation in this context means that participation was, from the start and still remains so, a student's choice as opposed to being part of the school curriculum that a student is required to follow. *Room 13* operates entirely independently of the school curriculum at Caol Primary School which means that any activity that a student undertakes in *Room 13* is in no way graded, nor does it "count" in any way towards a system of evaluation. Students who are voluntary *Room 13* participants may go to work in *Room 13* only if their studies and work are complete and up to date and they are maintaining good grades. This makes it possible for students who have completed all assignments in their regular course of studies to access *Room 13* during their regular daily schedule, should time permit, so that they can potentially integrate time spent in *Room 13* into their schedule on an ongoing basis. Consider how this might work in practice via a hypothetical example of a student in a Mathematics class in which time has been allotted in class for the working out of a series of problems. If this student is, in all respects, up to date with his or her work, maintaining good

grades, and has also successfully completed the problems for which class time has been allotted, it may be possible for this student to leave the Mathematics class and go to work in *Room 13*. This is an example and, of course, there are so many variables that would determine how access to *Room 13* could be permitted and regulated. The main idea to retain is that participation is based on merit and merit is defined as a respectable level of academic achievement and responsibility. Participation in *Room 13* becomes a reward or perhaps, more accurately, a privilege, and it is important to note that this privilege can be suspended or revoked if a student starts to slip in terms of the regular curriculum. If the slippage is corrected and reversed, then the privilege can be reinstated (Room 13, n.d., Ideology).

Questions and Clarifications

I would like, before continuing, to stop here and to point out that I am very conscious of the fact that questions arise quite quickly in reading this description of the basic outline and functioning of *Room 13*. Appealing as it sounds, it is a highly utopian model and structure that immediately generated a series of questions for me. In many cases these remain only partially answered, mainly because there does not seem to be any exhaustive descriptive or analytical writing about this project. In other words, there seems potentially to be an element of mythology around exactly how *Room 13* came to be and how it actually operates. The writing that does exist about this project generally seems to repeat existing information that is made available on its own website. My questions centred mainly around wanting to know more specifically about the genesis of this project and the actual individuals involved. It would also be illuminating to have access to detailed practical and descriptive information outlining the creative,

administrative, and hierarchical functioning of *Room 13*.

Questions arose for me because there seem to be gaps in the available information. One example concerns the initial origins of the project. It was suggested, in a brief text that appeared on (and subsequently disappeared from) the *Room 13* website three years ago, that this project grew out of research initiated at Edinburgh College of Art in the 1970's that was then refined into an artist in residence position (*Room 13*, n.d., Ideology section). It has, so far, been impossible to substantiate this suggested lead any further or any more definitively, however, it remains an intriguing open question for many reasons. The larger question of both the potential and the role of post secondary educational institutions, in this case an independent art college, but it could just as easily be a university, in the development of innovative, experimental and, indeed, transformative approaches to education is an important one. Another example involves attempting to obtain a clear description of the precise functioning of *Room 13*. The information available is general and doesn't provide a detailed breakdown of who does what. Contact via e-mail with *Room 13* headquarters (it is not entirely clear from the *Room 13* website exactly where the headquarters are located, but *Room 13* Lochside in Fort William, Scotland would be my best guess given that Rob Fairley, *Room 13* founder, is listed as one of two artists in residence at this *Room 13* site) responded to by students, did not really provide sufficient additional insight for me to be able to answer my own questions and this generated yet another question: do I absolutely require these answers to be able to look at what is happening in the *Room 13* experience and extract, from the available information, conclusions about a project that is apparently surviving, functioning, and expanding?

While this line of questioning is completely valid and does bear consideration,

this is a somewhat bureaucratic concern given the evidence and information that does exist. This project has been running for years. Since its inception in 1994, now 17 years ago (and possibly even longer ago), it has grown to become a network of student-run art, media, and even science labs in schools that are primarily located in the United Kingdom. More recent additions to the network include sites in Austria, Botswana, China, Canada, Holland, India, Mexico, Nepal, South Africa, Turkey, and the United States. More than half of these recent additions have occurred in the past three years (Room 13, n.d., About Room 13).

The ideal is that *Room 13* facilitates the work of young artists alongside a professional adult artist in residence. This structure encourages autonomy through the establishment of equality and the exchange of ideas, skills, and experience. The studio is run entirely by participating students themselves who elect, on a yearly basis, a management team that becomes responsible for facilitating projects by developing and overseeing strategies for raising funds (ranging from a wide variety of business and government grants and charitable donations to website sales of a limited range of *Room 13* merchandise and *Room 13* led travel packages) to keep the studio running and employing an artist in residence to work with them. The students are responsible for keeping the studio stocked with necessary materials and supplies, for overseeing maintenance of equipment, and for dealing with all administrative tasks that arise from the existence and functioning of the *Room 13* studio. At the core of this project is a belief in the creative integrity and autonomy of each individual and a belief that developing these is essential to the well-being of the wider community (Room 13, n.d., Room 13 Network).

What immediately struck me about this project was precisely the autonomy that

is both encouraged in and demanded of the students, the quality of the art they produced, and the pairing of students with an artist in residence as a facilitator and also, in very practical terms, a consultant. Additionally, there seems to be a serious emphasis on addressing contemporary art practice in terms of discussion of visual literacy in the context of works that are in the process of being created or being raised as examples by *Room 13* participants. The introduction of personal artistic research, including reading and social engagement, and how this relates to art production, as well as the investigation of various types of media the students are interested in working with (painting and drawing in addition to performance and digital and analog media such as video, photography, music, and sound) are also examined.

The practical or “business” aspect of the management and running of *Room 13* is also an impressive, considerable, and essential component of this project and is fundamental to its functioning and its success. Herein lies a rather extraordinary introduction to reality, one that acknowledges the coexistence of creative inquiry and process with financial need. It identifies the additional need for accompanying administrative acumen that will be put into service uncovering and mobilizing responses and solutions to this basic financial need. It assumes and transmits the belief that creative activity must find entirely concrete ways to be self-sustaining. This particular aspect of *Room 13* might well merit a study of its own insofar as it touches squarely on very timely questions regarding social, political, and economic structures and the ways in which these relate to and interrelate with art and creativity.

Writings

My interests reside more specifically in the ways that contemporary art practice is being used as a model for teaching and learning. What I see in the *Room 13* model is that there is something intrinsic to art practice, the way that artists go about the business of making art, that has been identified as being very fertile ground for learning. Several illuminating articles examine the example of *Room 13*.

When I stated that I would investigate the various articles available on the subject of *Room 13* in order to identify what people are writing about and why, this was because I could sense, early on, a difference of purpose in various writers' approaches to *Room 13*. I think it would be relatively safe to say that a lot of the newspaper articles I have found on the subject address the question of funding, both gained and lost, that has been central to the success of this project. *Room 13* has been the recipient of some fairly prestigious and sizable grants that have put it in the media spotlight. When funding issues are raised, the "business" side of *Room 13*'s functioning is always addressed, namely the student-run management committee, and all that implies. It would seem that this project has fascinating implications for art education as well as for business management and the media, not surprisingly, readily responds to *Room 13* as a business venture (Milner, 2002).

At the same time, educators are looking at this project because of the fascinating implications it holds for art education and, I would suggest, education in general. All kinds of challenging questions arise including cross-curricular teaching and learning, differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, experiential learning, the fostering of democracy, the encouragement of autonomy, the implementation of a meritocracy, initiative, and the list goes on. One of the most stimulating questions, often not stated

explicitly, about how this project is making art, and more specifically contemporary art practice, vital and resonant through access to expertise, equipment, funding, and audience. At the moment, it would appear that success may have something to do with a complete rethinking of what we know as art and how it exists in a school setting.

The following articles have focussed attention either specifically on the *Room 13* experience or more generally on the challenges presented by teaching art and using contemporary art practice as a model.

In *Room 13 and the contemporary practice of artist-learners*, Jeff Adams (2005) discusses the Scottish primary school art project *Room 13* and argues that the method adopted in practicing and teaching art constitutes a significant development in art education. He studies the concept of the “artist-teacher”, and reports on the use of the concept of the “artist-learner” in the group, noting that pupils at the school can create art during the school day in the company of a resident artist. He explores the collaborative nature of the group, explaining that such collaboration can lead to a development of art-related knowledge, and critical skills, and considers the new teaching and learning paradigms that can result from such learning communities. He also analyzes the relationship of such art projects to institutional settings, noting that groups such as *Room 13* allow for a non-institutional view of art practice to form, and outlines a number of strategies that can encourage the teaching and practice of contemporary art in school settings.

Lesley Burgess and Nicholas Addison (2000), active in fields of research relating to contemporary art and artists in education as well as in studio-based learning, respectively, discuss the importance of moving away from a Modernist approach to teaching art in *Contemporary Art in Schools: Why Bother?* They suggest moving towards an

art education that embraces contemporary art practice through the formation of partnerships between schools, museums, galleries, and artists. They see this as being beneficial to both students, who will benefit from a more contemporary and relevant educational experience, and to teachers, who can benefit from renewal and updating of their knowledge and skills.

Monsters in the Playground : Including Contemporary Art by Lesley Burgess (2003) examines why teachers shy away from most contemporary art, considering it to be too difficult, problematic, and even transgressive to occupy a comfortable place in mainstream education. Burgess suggests that this omission denies students an opportunity to interrogate their immediate cultural environment and, in so doing, denies them the opportunity to participate in it. Burgess calls for a rethinking of how teachers conceptualize their role. She puts forward the role of the teacher as a public intellectual who attempts to identify how she/he can begin to cultivate a discursive environment that will ultimately facilitate more sophisticated responses to and engagement with contemporary culture.

Living Colour finds journalist John Crace (2002) recounting his experiences of a visit to *Room 13* in June of 2002. Crace describes a classroom in which some of what has been discussed in the above articles is actually being put into practice and finds that this “new” approach is producing results that are impressive. In reviewing the accomplishments of students in *Room 13*, Crace finds a small group of highly enterprising students with highly developed critical abilities working at a surprisingly sophisticated level on projects that would generally seem to be beyond the reach of students their age.

Arthur Hughes (1998) looks at the need for a general curriculum update or an

altogether new approach to the teaching of art in his article entitled *Re-conceptualising the Art Curriculum*. Hughes discusses the importance of moving forward by moving away from what he describes as “procedures and practices which reach back to the nineteenth century” (p. 47). He questions whether one concept of art education is sufficient in sustaining art education. Hughes points to the importance of recognizing and studying the dynamics behind a small number of pioneering art departments who have avoided becoming bogged down by what he describes as timidity.

Finally, *Room 13*, authored by Danielle Souness, former *Room 13* student and Managing Director, and Rob Fairley (2005), long-time *Room 13* artist in residence, provides a discussion of the inception of *Room 13* and some of its underlying ideas, interests, and philosophies by individuals who have been primary participants in the project. The portrait of *Room 13* that Souness and Fairley set out would seem to legitimate arguments presented in the above articles calling for a rethinking of approaches to art education. It would seem to present us with exactly the kind of example of a pioneering art department that Arthur Hughes suggests we must recognize and study.

Thoughts

The intent of all this, lest we forget, is to enhance what we do in our scholarly pursuits, so that, in turn, we can enhance the educational process. In the end the differences we seek to make are located in schools, those social institutions in which children and adolescents spend so much of their lives. (Eisner, 1991, p. 47)

Room 13 seems important to me. It is certainly exciting in terms of how one can teach and transmit art precisely because rather than focussing narrowly on teaching and transmitting, it is a model that focuses more expansively on creating and exploring the

conditions that allow for the emergence of learning possibilities. There is certainly a highly idealistic facet to this initiative. It is difficult to imagine whether or not it would be possible to assemble all of the necessary conditions to duplicate the experiences of students and artists at Caol Primary School or Lochyside Primary School, which seem to be among the most active members of the *Room 13* Network. In spite of this a small but growing number of schools seem to be taking notice. One school in England obtained funding and employed an architectural firm to design and oversee building of the first purpose-built *Room 13* studio (Room 13, n.d., Room 13 Hareclive-Bristol, England). Another primary school has a *Room 13* science lab (Ignition, n.d., Lab 13;). Some *Room 13*'s are after school programmes, some run one day a week, others run full time alongside the school schedule (Room 13, n.d., Room 13 Network). Whether or not each and every *Room 13* studio operates in exactly the same way as, for example Caol Primary or Lochyside Primary, is possibly not as important a consideration as the increasing body of evidence that something very valuable is being recognized in this experience. Schools are, in their own ways, deriving a fundamental lesson from the initial *Room 13* model that can benefit their students. It is important to mention that it is not exclusively just schools that are participating in the *Room 13* network. The Canadian *Room 13*, for example, is located at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto, a non-profit cultural organization with a programming purview that includes the arts (theatre, music, crafts, visual arts), education, and recreation. It is run as at lunchtime and after school programme for a currently limited number of days each week. (Room 13, n.d. Room 13 Harbourfront Community Centre - Toronto).

For some time now I have been very interested in how one can involve artists more immediately and concretely in the education. The ongoing *Room 13* initiative at

Caol Primary school initially suggests to me precisely what art educators have been quietly trying to advance for some time: that art education really does hold the potential to be a conduit for meaningful and sustained cross curricular teaching and learning. In the case of *Room 13*, this is because of a very particular emphasis on taking contemporary art practice as an example and offering students the possibility of emulating it.

Examining the functioning of *Room 13* suggests to me the possibility of starting to identify new, various, and multiple models on which to base the teaching and experiencing of art. *Room 13* provides the example of a model based on an artist in residence as a “classroom” facilitator and working alongside a community of artists who are students of various ages. Its possible implications for further research and practice, including how aspects of this model can be combined with existing models, appear to be exciting and far reaching.

Room 13 is predicated on very specific ideas about a community of teacher-learners that are implemented with great flexibility. In a sense then, rigidity, if it exists anywhere in the continuum of the model represented by and embodied in *Room 13*, lies in the principles on which this project was founded and remains based. These principles, discussed earlier, include equality (regardless of age, gender, race, etc.); freedom; responsibility; and cooperation between a community of learners working towards common goals. These common goals encompass the acquisition of new skills and knowledge as well as individual and group growth through the development and completion of projects (in many cases artworks, but not necessarily exclusively so). There is an adherence to these basic ideas as the crucial foundation for a successful *Room 13*. Indications are that a principled framework or ideology informed by

educational research forms the basis of such an approach and that it can then be implemented quite flexibly, depending on considerations such as time, resources, space, and available personnel. What we currently witness in the school curriculum is that an ideological framework of strategies, goals, and outcomes that may generally be sound is applied in a regimented way that does not, in substantial ways, allow for autonomy, agency, or any kind of exploratory deviation from a prescribed, established, repeatable and repeated route from point A to point B. The success of *Room 13* demonstrates that knowledge grows from the learning that happens when guided and assisted individual and group journeys are permitted to be defined and undertaken by an interested and motivated learner who is assumed to be capable from the outset.

SECTION 2: PROBOSCIS

My initial encounter with *Proboscis* occurred several years ago when I discovered their *StoryCubes* online. I had been researching tools and methods related to narrative and how to introduce concepts of narrative in the classroom. I became aware of the *Proboscis* website expanding as I revisited it and became increasingly curious about the scope of the projects they were initiating and the variety of partners they were attracting.

What Is / Who Are Proboscis?

Among the possible definitions of the word *proboscis* are a long and flexible snout, an elephant's trunk, and a prominent human nose (Merriam-Webster, 1985, p. 937). And additionally, of course, there is proboscis of an insect which is a long and tubular organ, extensible in some cases, and used for piercing, collecting, extracting and sucking substances. The definition could become more specific and involved but what is included here is enough to provide a start in terms of understanding what *Proboscis* an exceptionally inventive and dynamic, non-profit, artist-run creative studio in London, England, is.

Proboscis began in 1994, founded by Giles Lane. In 1998, Alice Angus joined *Proboscis* and she is, with Giles Lane, its co-director. Lane is an artist, designer, and researcher who has developed and led numerous interdisciplinary creative projects. He has made films, done curatorial work, and, since 2007, has worked as a visiting tutor and research consultant in the Design Department at Goldsmith's College, University of London. Alice Angus is an artist with a work history that includes curatorial work while

she was both the Programme Manager of Fotofeis International Festival of Photo Based Arts and the Visual Arts Consultant for the Glasgow Festival in Glasgow, Scotland. In their own words, *Proboscis*, are “pioneers of pie in the sky / makers of mischief” (Proboscis, n.d., Home page).

Proboscis is an independent non-profit organization that is supported through fee payments received for services they provide as well as through sponsorship, donations and public funding from Arts Council England. A complete listing of their funders, commissioners, and investors, present and past, is available on their website. It includes the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology in Montreal, as well as the J.W. Graham Trust at the University of Waterloo. Partners, collaborators and supporters include the Klondike Institute of Arts and Culture as well as the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (now NSCAD University) (Proboscis, n.d., Investors and Partners) .

The form that this organization takes is fairly simple: Giles Lane is founder and co-director. Alice Angus is a co-director. They have a finance manager and bookkeeper as well as two Creative Assistants who are hired for limited terms through employment programmes. This is the core creative and administrative structure, or team, of the organization. Then there are, currently, in addition to these positions, interns and also associates who come from extremely varied backgrounds ranging from community consultancy and engineering to architecture and design. There is also, included in the *Proboscis* structure, something called a Sounding Board, that consists of ten members and appears to function as an advisory board (Proboscis, n.d., People).

Activities and Interests

Proboscis is an organization that involves itself directly in an continuous process of questioning and exploration through residencies, collaborations, and colloquia. The artworks that emerge from the various processes they engage in can take the form of books, films, installations, published texts, and art objects. In the process of questioning, creative tools are developed that allow for the emergence of new perspectives to participants' vision an understanding of the world. I will describe a selection of specific projects shortly and these will, hopefully, illustrate how this process tends to work in *Proboscis* projects. (Proboscis, n.d., About)

Proboscis displays an avid interest in research but there are other considerations that emerge as being important to the very particular *Proboscis* ethos. I definitely see the process of questioning as being fundamental to the development of ideas and projects but there are also important elements of play, searching or scavenging, information or data collecting, exploring and understanding notions of geography and environment, collaboration, building community, and the list goes on. Also fundamental are communication, exchange, and learning. There seems to be a larger project of linking people through knowledge and empowering them through their knowledge and their strengthened community. To extend all of these concerns, *Proboscis* develops tools, some physical, some virtual, that allow for collaborative research and sharing of knowledge. The mapping and exchange of knowledge and experience that their projects encourage and facilitate are then extended through public authoring tools and that allow participants in their projects to communicate more effectively with each other and, potentially, with the larger world. *Proboscis* works with schools, universities, communities,

Communication or, more specifically, conversation, is probably the most important concept that is being put forward in any *Proboscis* project, and it is examined from many angles. Processes of finding a voice, using that voice to transmit or share information, and then hearing and listening offer a basic model for collaboration and exchange. The basic elements of conversation and listening actually offer a beautiful, simple, and effective model for learning and this, it seems to me, is important to the creative structures of many *Proboscis* projects. The question of receptors and emitters is important here and beyond simple conversation and listening, complex as they can be, *Proboscis* extends a kind of responsibility to all human senses to be engaged, to go out and find information about the world and then bring it back for sharing, interpretation and, hopefully, some kind of positive implementation. (Proboscis, n.d., Themes, Cultures of Listening)

A Building Block

The very first *Proboscis* project I came across is a very simple item, the *StoryCube*, that is easily made. It was developed in 2005, and is essentially a pattern for a heavy paper or light card stock cube that is cut out, can withstand paint, drawing, writing, stickers applied to it, etc., and is then folded and assembled. It can be pre-printed or blank and, because it is a cube, it has six sides or faces that can carry information in the form of words, images and data. It's basically a box that *Proboscis* developed as a very simple storytelling device. One *StoryCube* can hold all manner of information and can represent a narrative unto itself. Multiple *StoryCubes* can be stacked and combined to create a more complex narrative or multiple narratives (Proboscis, n.d., Tools and Techniques).

As the *StoryCubes* are combined, when an entire group is working with them for example, the cubes themselves and their arrangement create a kind of geography or installation in space. The starting point, or the basic building block, for communication is the cube. It is both real and a very powerful metaphor. And its three-dimensionality adds to its potential, both actual and metaphorical.

These blocks can be purchased, either blank or pre-printed (in this case, the purchaser supplies the “information,” in the form of words and/or images to be printed on the block) through *Proboscis*. It is also possible to simply download the pattern and make your own *StoryCubes* (*Proboscis*, n.d., Tools and Techniques). Or, obviously, bypass *Proboscis* altogether and figure out your own pattern for making multiple blank cubes.

I recall that when I first encountered these cubes I thought they were a rather amazingly simple and straightforward pedagogical tool, perhaps even too simple. I remember wondering what the point was of something so seemingly ordinary, but as I thought about it (and I did because I really appreciate simple strategies that have a big impact) I realized that I had judged it too quickly and that *Proboscis* was clearly on to something. It was partly that the *StoryCube* had led me to find out more about what *Proboscis* was doing at the time and I realized that the simplicity and effectiveness of the *StoryCube* was consistent with a general approach that seemed to be about making communication skills available to all. The *StoryCube* potentially provides an access point to the multiplicity of conversations, communication, and storytelling that can take place in any group of people. The cube can be used in such a way that it acknowledges the individual while promoting the idea of building (literally) on the individual experience through collaboration in order to arrive at shared narrative.

In retrospect this simple cube illustrates or encapsulates, extremely eloquently, the basis or the starting point for most other *Proboscis* projects. Exchange through communication and the sharing of knowledge is the starting point, or basic building block, of life, of civic engagement, and of advancement. The blocks are a very analog example of a highly sophisticated practice that can be implemented for use with levels ranging from young children to adults for applications that range from storytelling to brainstorming exercises.

Sound Scavenging

A *Proboscis* project completed the following year, in 2006, entitled *Sound Scavenging* also intrigues me. It's a project that employs readily available technologies that add layers of complexity, meaning, and resonance to a seemingly simple process. The project is a collaboration between Jenny Hammond Primary School in London, England, *Proboscis*, and American sound artist and educator Loren Chasse. Sound Scavenger Kits included an eNotebook, a sound recorder, a music box, ear plugs, a blindfold, stones, a cardboard tube, a bulldog clip, a pen and post-it notes. The project unfolded over 4 sessions in which grade 5 students explored listening, how they listen, the different types of sounds that they hear, favourite sounds, and how to approach mapping sounds or linking sounds geographically. The students were asked to think about the kinds of sounds they hear on their way to school and they learned how to map them onto a geographic area. Inherent to the project is an examination of listening culture: how do we listen, what do we hear, and how do we form relationships with our environment via sound. Students explored sound through actions such as experimenting with making sounds, listening to sounds, locating sounds, visualizing their sound

environment through pictures, and recording sounds. At the end of the project, *Proboscis* and Loren Chasse edited the recordings into a series of audio podcasts and, using Google Earth, mapped sound recordings and pictures (Angus, 2006, *Sound Scavenging Report*).

What seems particularly significant about its project to me is this emphasis on aural attention to detail. It seems to me that in visual arts, we really stress and emphasize the visual, and yet our other senses are frequently underutilized. They gather additional and at least equally significant information or data about the world around us. This information can be interpreted just as visual information can. By combining aural information gathered and generated by the students with a mapping component, a very concrete example of learning more about a specific environment is illustrated. The map places a specific environment in a wider context and, if we take it a step further, serves to illustrate the potential of extending boundaries and knowledge. The possibility that the knowledge and information gathered within specific boundaries can be extended beyond the borders of the sample area is very real and students who have come to learn more about their immediate environment can take the knowledge they have gained with them and, in a sense, continue to effectively “annotate” the larger map around them with the “expertise” they have gained while carrying out this project. They have a new means to understand and interpret the world that exists around them.

Conversations and Connections

Conversations and Connections is another project by *Proboscis* that I am interested in, partly because I don't quite understand it. It is a project that took place a year after the *Sound Scavenging* project and it is far more complex than *Sound Scavenging* in terms

of the number and type of technologies employed as well as the types of information being gathered.

Let me pause for a moment. I started describing *StoryCubes*, a very straightforward and effective tool for gathering and presenting information as well as a very physically and visually effective way of bringing together potentially disparate and individual narratives into a collective and simple structure. The second project I described involves some technology, but its use is well-considered and, ultimately, relatively simple. With *Conversations and Connections* there is a level of complexity in terms of what *Proboscis* envisioned achieving, as well as in its use and integration of various types of technology, that seems unclear even in the project description and the final report that was submitted.

If I understand the project at all, it involved a *Proboscis* project team working with residents of a housing estate (a subsidized housing project), Ealing Homes, in west London (Ealing Homes, n.d., Home page). My understanding is that this housing estate, was, at the time of *Conversations and Connections*, a troubled development. *Proboscis* proposed a series of information gathering activities with residents, community workers, and others in an attempt to increase information and communication about the housing estate that would hopefully bring about improvements through an essentially democratic process. There was access to a computer and a video camera as well as an array of free online services that could be used for mapping, collecting data, sharing knowledge, images, audio and video. Two *StoryCards* were also designed for this project. These were essentially postcards designed to gather information about the housing estate. These cards are in some ways a more simplified and more focussed version of the *StoryCubes*. In other ways, they are a completely different tool. One card has an aerial view of the

housing estate on it with a large blank area beside it asking for information under the heading “What’s the Story?” The second lists a number of issues of interest to estate dwellers, such as repairs and safety, and then indicates “Please describe” in a blank area next to the list. Information was to be gathered by residents via at least all the mentioned means, possibly more, in order to go some distance in developing a portrait of the location, the situation, people’s wishes to improve life on the estate, and concrete movement toward change. It sounds like, in this case, potential participants didn’t participate fully and didn’t find ways to develop sustainable patterns of participation that would lead to change (Harris & Lane, 2007, Evaluation Report).

Whatever the case may actually be, it is obvious that this project wasn’t a resounding success and I appreciate *Proboscis* including the report that describes this project in their online documents. Is this particular project an example not only of a failure in community participation but also a failure to integrate technology into a project so that the project is all about mastering the technology and not enough about the art and the communication that are its basis? It should be noted that *Proboscis* has gone on to do equally, if not more, complex projects with great success in past years.

This provides a brief glimpse into the work of this singular organization that strives to use art as a means of communication and collaboration in the larger community. My interest in *Proboscis* lies in what I identify as their ability to take on community questions and issues and open them up in order to conceptualize them as large scale collaborative art and education projects. Taking their respective art practices into the world with them, Alice Angus and Giles Lane attempt to expand what are generally understood to be the parameters of such practices. They demonstrate the application of creative processes and thinking to everyday life and I am very interested in

the lessons that can be taken directly from this kind of work into a classroom.

Ultimately the lesson is to know your environment and the people in it so that you can communicate, share, and collaborate. The more you engage in creative strategies to further and deepen your knowledge and understanding of your environment, the more possible it becomes to imagine improving it and to actually improve it. There is an overall development of personal agency through autonomy and the acquisition and sharing of knowledge that is communicated.

SECTION 3: enquire Northeast Cluster 2.1

My first exposure to *engage* was about six years ago via a photocopied section of a publication dedicated to their *Get it Together* programme. The programme addressed lifelong learning through collaborations between museums, galleries, libraries, and archives. I found this programme to be thought provoking so I hunted around for additional information, eventually finding material relating to many of their initiatives online. I had just read about *enquire*'s Northeast Cluster 2.1, when I met one of the artists involved in the project, who is incidentally someone I had known a number of years prior. I found the project to be a comprehensive example of artists working with young people and was able to obtain an early version of the research report associated with this project.

What is *enquire*, but first, what is *engage*?

The *enquire* programme is managed by *engage* and developed by *engage* in association with the UK Arts Councils. *engage* is based in London, England, and is a UK-wide, non-profit, membership organization. "What does *engage* do? *engage* works through its members to promote access to, understanding and enjoyment of the visual arts in the UK and in 17 countries worldwide (*engage* website, n.d., What does *engage* do?)". *engage* is funded by a variety of funding bodies including charitable organizations, lottery funds, and the Arts Councils of England, Scotland, and Wales. Members of *engage* include both individuals and institutions. The regular annual membership fee for an individual is equivalent to approximately sixty-five Canadian dollars, however, there is a fee scale that includes lower rates extended to students, seniors, and the unemployed, as well as higher institutional rates that cover both individual and multiple members.

There are currently approximately 1000 *engage* members and these include teachers, university professors, museum and gallery educators, artists, curators, community workers, students, and others. These members benefit from belonging to this organization by having access to professional development support, research, and an international community of peers (*engage* website, n.d., About *engage*).

In fulfilling its mandate *engage* works in a number of important spheres. Advocacy is an essential part of the work that *engage* does. The organization is involved in policy-making groups in the areas of art education and the visual arts. *engage* strives to foster an understanding of the importance of gallery education. Research is another key area of endeavour for *engage*. It also works to initiate and develop research programmes with key partners such as institutions of higher learning, schools, artists, and museums and galleries. Included in *engage*'s research initiatives are ongoing programmes such as *enquire* which I will focus on shortly; *envision*, a programme designed to support galleries in the development of new and innovative approaches to working with young adults; *Extend*, which strives to broaden the administrative skills of gallery art educators with an emphasis on areas such as strategic planning and fundraising; and past programmes such as *Explore*, an initiative to improve access to galleries for physically disabled and hearing impaired visitors. A sophisticated publications programme that includes online reports, thematic publications offered in bound formats, and a subscription journal emphasize *engage*'s commitment to developing and maintaining communications systems and networks that facilitate the dissemination of their research findings. Through this commitment, *engage* ensures international visibility for its projects and practitioners while at the same time ensuring an ongoing contribution to the body of literature in the field of art education. Another

key role played by *engage* is in the area of providing opportunities for and facilitating professional development. Some of the means through which this is achieved include research programmes, international conferences, and the peer networking opportunities *engage* offers its membership (*engage* website, n.d., About, What does *engage* do?).

Strangely, there is nowhere on the *engage* website that offers a chronological account of its inception and founding. Looking at project and publication dates, it seems safe to assume that *engage* has been operating since at least 1995, when *Opt for Art*, a project funded by the Arts Council of Wales and designed to solidify the position and importance of art in secondary education was initiated (*engage* website, n.d., Publications, *Opt for Art*).

The *engage* programme that I am interested in is *enquire*, and more particularly a project specific to the *enquire* North East Cluster. *enquire* is a programme that is funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Children, Schools and Families as part of the Strategic Commissioning Programme for Museum and Gallery Education, and by the Foyle Foundation. It is managed by *engage* and has been developed in association with Arts Council England. *enquire* is a programme that, to date, comprises 4 research phases spanning from 2004 to 2011 (*enquire* website, n.d., *enquire*, Home).

The main goal of the research carried out by the *enquire* programme, simply put and clearly articulated on the website of ISIS Arts, which is a visual and media arts organization and an *enquire* partner, is “an exploration of the impact of young people working with contemporary artists in gallery settings” (ISIS Arts website, n.d., *enquire* project section).

The *enquire* website itself provides a more in-depth description:

enquire is an exciting national programme of projects that engage children and young people with galleries, the contemporary visual arts and artists. The projects are organized collaboratively by gallery educators, artists and teachers. They have the aim of exploring, assessing and articulating the special learning benefits to young people of working with contemporary art and the gallery space. The programme offers extensive formal and non-formal Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for all the professionals involved (enquire website, n.d., About).

Each research phase is composed of multiple initiatives organized into geographical clusters. For example, Phase 1 of the *enquire* programme, carried out from 2004 to 2006, consisted of approximately 46 individual projects ordered by 3 geographical clusters including London, North East, and South East. The themes around which projects were developed varied from learning about how exhibitions are curated to exploring the differences between the ways in which artists in the country and artists in the city engage in studio practice. This just barely gives a real sense of the projects' scope. The defined research phases each have distinctive goals. For example, Phase 1 attempted to identify success factors in order to develop evidence-based support for an expansion of education, policy development, resources, and the study and implementation of best practice in the gallery sector. Phase 2 was continued research into the goals outlined for Phase 1. Phase 3 used research from the previous phases of *enquire* to develop capacity and thus offer both more and increasingly effective opportunities for learning among galleries, partner schools, and artists. Phase 4, which concludes this year, is investigating the development of projects and learning opportunities that involve partnerships between galleries, artists, and social programmes and services aimed at children and young people. The goal of this research phase is that projects will provide opportunities while addressing the objectives of the social programmes and services (enquire, n.d., About).

enquire Phase 2, 2006-2008

Phase 2 of the *enquire* programme included approximately 50 individual projects distributed over 10 geographical clusters. The projects range anywhere from CPD to a project entitled Desire Lines, focusing on the recording of desire lines (tracks, paths) that we create in outdoor spaces through habitual use.

In phase 2.1, 2006-7, the programme of projects and research expanded to comprise seven clusters, involving 31 galleries and seven Higher Education Institutes. In phase 2.2, 2007-8, a further three clusters formed. In this year 954 children and young people benefited through sustained participation in projects. Galleries worked with 37 schools (21 of which had not previously worked with a gallery), 53 teachers and 58 artists. The CPD programme benefited 228 teachers, 267 gallery educators and 53 artists (*enquire* website, n.d., Phase 2, 2006-8).

Again, the scope of the programme of projects is impressive and attempting to describe a sample range is difficult. The project partners include artists, arts organizations, art galleries, teacher networks, schools, and universities. The diversity and multiplicity of research partners involved in the *enquire* program is notable. Many of the partner galleries and arts organizations have established international profiles. Perusing *enquire* reports, one sees names of artists, galleries, and universities that are recognizable, thus establishing immediate legitimacy for this programme. To reiterate the goals of this second phase of the *enquire* programme, research from phase I was continued with the aim of developing evidence-based support for an expansion of education, policy development, resources, and the study and implementation of best practice in the gallery sector (*enquire* website, n.d., *enquire* programme).

Northeast Cluster Phase 2.1

The Northeast Cluster Phase 2.1 brought together a number of participants: Isis Arts, referred to above, a media arts organization that works with artists primarily through a residency programme and also through training or professional development programmes; Blyth Community College, located just outside of Newcastle upon Tyne, a secondary school whose population is reported to be socioeconomically below average to disadvantaged and whose academic achievement rates are also below average; a research team from the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies at Newcastle University; and four visual artists. The participating students from Blyth Community College were all volunteers and were between sixteen and seventeen years of age. There were twenty-one student volunteers who were divided into two groups. In addition to the students, classroom teachers participated in some of the project activities, namely the gallery visits, but they did not participate in the studio activities. The four artists leading the two groups of students included two mid-career artists working in the area of digital media. Both of these artists had considerable experience working with young people. Accompanying these two artists were two additional artists, both early to mid-career with little education experience. Each of the active research teams consisted of two artists (one mentor and one mentee) and half the volunteer students from Blyth Community College. So essentially, the project consisted of two groups constituted in a more or less identical way (Goulding, Newman, & Whitehead, 2008, p. 10).

The project unfolded over a period of approximately five months and involved two gallery visits. Each gallery visit was followed by three artmaking sessions at Blyth Community College. The first gallery visit took place in the late autumn, and the second

one in mid-winter. The first visit was to the Big M, an ISIS Arts facility, that is an inflatable, mobile structure for the presentation of video and digital media. The students and their teacher participated in the visit to Big M. They were shown a programme of videos, including works by the artists who were part of their teams. The subsequent three meetings at Blyth Community College were meetings in which students started to work on their own video project. The fifth meeting involved a visit to Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, and Hatton Art Gallery at Newcastle University. These visits allowed students and their teacher to circulate independently in two very different types of galleries. If I understand the reports correctly, the subsequent 3 visits by the artist teams to Blyth Community College focused on the continuation and completion of video projects initiated after the visit to the Big M (Goulding et al., 2008).

This project is complex in the kinds of relationships that it forges and what it tries to both examine and achieve through them. The scope of both the institutions and the individuals who are involved and the ways in which their roles overlap is considerable. There is an exploration of artists as teachers that is activated through the mentor and mentee relationship that is put into place. There is an exploration of the relationship between students in a disadvantaged setting and how they and their teachers (and their school) can benefit from the relationship that is forged not only with artists but also with various arts organizations and a university. The model that is advanced here is one that seriously takes into account and then truly maximizes all of the relationships that go into creating an instructive model for a community of practice.

The reporting on *enquire's* Northeast Cluster Phase 2.1 is not entirely straightforward. There is a research report, a final research report, and a research report overview, all of which can be downloaded from the *enquire website*. Additionally

there are both sections of the website that describe the Northeast Cluster projects and those that are dedicated to research partners that include additional descriptions of the same projects from a slightly different perspective. It is also possible to purchase, through the *enquire* website, a summary report that compiles all the above information into a bound volume. There are some inconsistencies from one report to another and from one description to another. While it is important to point this out, it does not detract from the vision and accomplishments of this project, or indeed from the programme as a whole.

One of the great strengths of the report, and the project, is the extent to which it reveals the teaching (and learning) processes unfolding for the mentor and mentee artists involved in this project. It offers exceptional insights into the role of artist as educator that can be of use, equally, to artists and teachers. While the role of teachers is not in itself explored, this report contains significant documentation of reflective processes and dialogue that centred around the teaching of project sessions by the artist teams. Any teacher will recognize herself or himself in the questions that arise. Here is one example:

By asking them to consider each aspect of the film, for example, the sound or the colour, she hoped that they would carefully consider whether the means they were using would convey their intended message. The mentor's intuition and educational experience made her realise that students are easily led by the expert, especially, perhaps, because they were not that familiar with video art. She was conscious of making them decide, and control the decisions behind their films. (Goulding et al., 2008, p. 14)

This artist is clearly coming to terms with the multiple ways in which students explore, form, express, communicate and understand their ideas. The project the students are working on provides them with opportunities to actually do all of this and ultimately

begin to understand how the arts reflect and depict diversity. What is also happening here is that the artist is becoming aware of her own artistic experiences and the ways in which they shape her attitudes. Her role as a teacher activates her awareness that teachers are influential, in this case as artist facilitators. In *The Celebrity Performer and the Creative Facilitator: The Artist, the School and the Art Museum*, Veronica Sekules (2003) explores, among many topics, “the development of the artist as teacher and workshop facilitator in the context of the art museum.” She poses important questions about the relationships between artists, teachers, and the teaching of art:

The artist has a particular contribution to make, and many would argue that this should be exclusively reserved for a specialist role as a producer of art, exhibitor, a visual thinker able to express profound philosophical ideas. Understanding artistic creation is also a professional matter, but mainly for the teacher, who needs to be trained to respond creatively. But where should the boundaries lie? Should artists venture out of the studio to engage in formal education or not? Do school teachers need to acquire additional skills in order to respond to the work of the artist and should they reserve the exclusive right to their own profession to teach art? And where is the museum situated in this debate (Sekules, 2003, p. 136)?

These questions are striking to me as they really get to the heart of territorial issues involving professional affiliation. It seems to me that the *enquire* Northeast Cluster 2.1 project responds to these questions (or perhaps, more accurately, insecurities) by presenting a project that is fundamentally based on meetings and collaborations between diverse but related institutions, organizations, and individuals, to the tacitly accepted (by all participating parties) exclusion of such concerns. The focus is on collaboration and what can be gained by all participants. The dialogue between mentor and mentee artists participating in this project reveals the existence of a community of peers working collaboratively to develop pedagogical strategies, to solve problems, and to understand the creative process and how it unfolds in various contexts.

Process

The artists positioned themselves as belonging outside the school system; they encouraged students, for example, to make mistakes and use trial and error, rather than producing quality coursework for assessment. The artists' body of work, the work the students produced throughout the project and the interview comments combine to suggest that the artists challenged normative practices and naturalised beliefs. It cannot be proved whether the work produced by the students differed qualitatively to work they produce under the guidance of their teacher. However, the artists all felt it would be valuable to work more closely with teachers. (Goulding et al., 2008, p. 28)

In the Northeast Cluster 2.1 project the artists privileged process over product or outcome. As suggested in the quote above and by this fact alone, artists positioned themselves outside of the usual pedagogical role and, as a result, may have assumed a less directive pedagogical position than might be adopted the students' classroom teacher.

A number of roles are adopted by the artists as part of the research process and creative process that clearly emerge from documented reflections and exchanges between mentors and mentees. Importantly, the artists were *facilitators* rather than teachers. They all appear to have valued an environment in which thought, exchange, and reflection were all important. They were *collaborators* at a number of different levels. The artists collaborated as both teachers and learners with the school, with ISIS Arts, with the Newcastle University researchers, with each other as mentors and mentees, and with the student groups for whom they led project sessions. Through the sum of these collaborative relationships, the artists became involved in an intense process of developing new forms of professional (teaching) knowledge and practice. This allowed the artists to examine, question, share, and then put into practice various technical aspects of teaching that they were unfamiliar with, for example, how to motivate students to work without directing the outcome of their work. What emerges from this

rather comprehensive and intricate process is a complex model for teaching, learning, and creating in which these processes exist in a continuum with each other and in parallel with another continuum which is that of the multiple collaborations. It's almost like a societal model emerges from this project and it focuses on process.

There is a real coherence to this project and its resultant report in that this notion of collaborative *process* is, perhaps somewhat implicitly, the central finding that is advanced. The process is what is illustrated through the excerpts of documentation, literally conversations about the project and correspondence between the artists, that are reproduced in the final report. The videos made by the students are never the central subject or object of the process, but rather part of the process. The project presents a possible interpretation and illustration of how the artistic process or creative research can function. The Northeast Cluster 2.1 project becomes an example of this process in action.

Artists at School

At first glance *enquire* most closely resembles what is familiar to those of us in Québec as Culture in the Schools or Artists at School. Ultimately, however, there is actually very little resemblance between these programmes and a complex and multi-faceted programme such as *enquire*. One of the first differences I notice occurs as I go through a listing of approved artists for the Artists at School programme offered through the *Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine's* website (Ministère de la Culture, Communications et Condition féminine Québec website, 2011, Répertoire des ressources culture-éducation, Artists at school, List of artists). I am not at all familiar with the vast majority of artists listed and, additionally,

many of the artists listed are not visual artists. A large number of participating artists come from the disciplines of performing arts and music and the visual artists who do appear on this approved list are not generally artists who are practicing within the network of local and national artist-run centres, public galleries, university galleries, or museums of art and contemporary art.

If a school or a teacher wishes to participate in The Artists at School programme, they can literally select an artist or a project from among a list of possible names and projects. A fee is paid to the artists for a project that unfolds over a determined period of time, frequently a day, and there is typically an additional materials cost associated with projects listed. The listing of projects allows schools and teachers to essentially “shop” for workshops that will result in a final “product” that is more or less known.

I have chosen to include reference to this programme as it exists in such stark contrast to a programme such as *enquire* even though, in very superficial terms it could be interpreted as having aspects in common with *enquire*. I do not mean to condemn Artists at School or in any way judge the participating artists. Glancing at what it offers helps to provide some concrete perspective in terms of precisely what is so interesting and so resonant about *enquire*'s various projects.

Contribution, Development, Continuity

When I look at a programme such as *enquire* and, more specifically, at a project such as their Northeast Cluster 2.1, I see a level of complexity that I have identified as

emulating the process of artistic research and creation. It is decidedly more complex than that. If we consider the counter example of the Artists at School programme for a moment, what we have there is a programme in which two environments or systems exist independently of each other, overlapping when necessary, so that one system can feed into, or actually feed, the other. There is no apparent ongoing relationship between the two systems, no apparent collaborative development, and no sustained mutual growth and learning. The Artists at School programme offers a service more than a considered, developed, and complex opportunity for learning.

What is so interesting about the Northeast Cluster 2.1 project is its complexity and how that potentially works for all participants. The model that is advanced in the Northeast Cluster 2.1 project is one of multiple systems that all intersect via the collaborative project itself in which all participants offer contributions to development, growth, and continuity. By working together they emphasize and actualize the reality that they already coexist as systems within a larger community. In the case of this example, all participating organizations and individuals exist within the larger community of Newcastle Upon Tyne. Some of the systems already intersect. For example, the artists have very likely all interacted in some way with ISIS Arts, Big M, and the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art. Some of them, artists, arts organizations, and art galleries, have previously collaborated with the *engage* and *enquire* programmes. There may also have been previous interaction between the Newcastle University research group and the galleries. What I am suggesting is that the systems intersect and become a larger system, much like a web, of research contacts and collaborators. They may, as I have already suggested, collectively offer us societal models as well as models of artistic practice and research. What they also collectively offer is a model for learning and

academic research. The model is initiated regionally by a national organization, with the eventual potential for learning and growth beyond the regional level. In some respects, the model described by Boris Groys in his essay *Education by Infection* in which he describes a “community of colleagues that often lasts a lifetime, infecting one another through ongoing dialogues, studio visits, exchanges of work, collaborative projects, exhibitions, publications, and so on” (Groys, B., 2009, p. 32). In a sense, this model could be seen as offering a collective constructivist learning opportunity, and therein lies its interest and its strength.

CONCLUSION

It is important to understand that *Room 13, Proboscis* and the *enquire* Northeast Cluster are three examples of very interesting and instructive initiatives among many. I have chosen to discuss them because of their obvious success, exemplified by their longevity. Their collective range and scope, from school to community to museum/gallery and, perhaps both literally and arguably, back again solidifies their interest. It is precisely their range of activity and engagement that first made these three projects stand out. Taken collectively as examples of what is possible, they add up to a comprehensive approach to thinking about and engaging in a considered practice in the field of art education.

In various ways they are all products of a moment in time in which interests in the intersection between pedagogy and creativity have shifted away from institutional pedagogical settings and towards sites of art production (artist's studios, galleries and museums, and special exhibitions such as biennials). There is perhaps a more obvious shift in the realm of what could be more accurately described as post secondary education but the existence of the initiatives examined here suggests an important evolutionary step in ways of thinking about and developing educational strategies relating to visual art that is evident at all levels of practice and engagement.

These initiatives work as models because they are not simply "one off" projects, but rather complex models that promote exploration of activities involving living and working together, filtered, or perhaps more aptly *focussed*, through a lens of creativity. What I mean here is that they are not limited to exploring questions of skills acquisition, mastery, and production. Each one of these initiatives is complex in terms of the settings and relationships in which it operates and takes an active interest in its surroundings. I

would suggest that one of the elements that is common to each of these initiatives is what I would describe as social engagement or, more simply and generally, *causality*. There seems to be a common interest in relationships between causes, effects, and understanding. Inherent to each of these initiatives and based on the relationship between complexity and causality, is the notion of time and transformation. Each one of these initiatives has taken shape and developed in the directions mentioned above over time. Relationships and areas of interest have been formed, have endured, and have persisted over time.

These initiatives focus largely on active practice rather than the pedagogy around active practice and, as such, engage in what might be described as a form of action research. In *Room 13*, the participants become a community of active researchers striving towards both individual and common learning and growth. In the *enquire* Northeast Cluster 2.1 project, smaller groupings of students led by artists do the same. In the case of *Proboscis*, any given project, its participants, and the community in which a project is realized is also part of a similar process. Ultimately, these processes mirror the processes of art production and presentation and engage participants in social and cultural investigation. They have the potential to play an important role in developing agency and autonomy.

At this point, I would like to discuss how I came to know about these initiatives, some of the conclusions that I draw from them, and what I learn from them as an art educator. The major common denominator in finding out about each of these initiatives has been artists and the internet. Peer-reviewed literature has not been a significant factor. Self publishing on the Web by each of the initiatives has been. The question of the pros and cons related to information disseminated and acquired in this way

inevitably arises, but it is not the aim of this study to examine this complex issue. A potentially fascinating study, with hindsight, would have been a tracking of the websites associated with these projects over the years of their existence in order to pursue a longitudinal study on how they have evolved in both presentation and content. While their websites generously provide self-published information, there is, in all cases very little, if any, peer-reviewed writing on their activities. It would seem then that none of these initiatives is receiving the attention that they deserve. I would suggest that one reason for this is that in the spirit of total independence, they are for the most part doing an extremely effective job of providing readable and downloadable documentation themselves, directly from their respective websites. I have to wonder, knowing that the answer is affirmative, if the standard model for research and reporting is changing?

This is not news, but it does highlight an enduring shift in how information is compiled, published, and disseminated by investigators and how it is collected by researchers. More importantly perhaps, it underlines the coherence of, or continuity in practice exhibited by each of these initiatives. Autonomy and agency are not only part of what the initiatives have to offer to others but an integral functional, I would suggest ideological, component of their existence and practice. Each initiative, to greater or lesser degrees, bears a resemblance to an open access platform, albeit very individual, and promotes the development and sharing of knowledge.

This very independent model reinforces the idea of a shift in focus away from pedagogical institutions and towards the actual site of practice and production. Additionally all of these initiatives operate outside of the official school curriculum and at varying and variable distances from schools, with *Room 13* obviously being physically at the very least, closest. All of these initiatives are deriving positive results from

following and emulating artists' research and working methods. While methods and behaviours necessarily vary significantly from artist to artist and from initiative to initiative, they generally involve discovery learning, collaborative learning and problem-solving via creative and inventive methods to arrive at a desired result. Each initiative illustrates a very active and engaged process of discovery and learning that is frequently exploratory and non-linear.

What is obvious to me in considering these initiatives is that even if the standard curriculum doesn't necessarily embrace these learning models explicitly or wholeheartedly, it is entirely possible for teachers to build the models exemplified by these initiatives into classroom practice so as to develop a more specialized and personalized curriculum. This is already integral to the teaching process. Each initiative inherently provides insights into how various models stemming from artists' practice can be implemented with success at many, if not all, levels. With these possibilities being obvious, equally obvious is the need for committed engagement on the part of teachers and educators. The quality of the initiatives examined here is indisputable but their implementation requires an active engagement with ideas.

As art educators, we have only to look to artists and their practice. I think it is safe to suggest that there is a proliferation of objects, forms, and media in art. What constitutes art has become increasingly flexible and various and so it would be logical to conclude that points of access to art have also proliferated and expanded. Art and art practice represent an embodiment of ideas that we need to engage with in order to develop meaningful art curriculum.

Most importantly, what I see in the initiatives I have chosen to examine is insight into considering an absence of boundaries in the teaching and learning process. I am

thinking very specifically of *Proboscis* and the many projects they have developed over the years in which so many complex ideas are addressed that it becomes difficult to identify and articulate the boundaries between the bodies of knowledge explored. There is a continuum and a seamlessness in which bodies of knowledge run into each other that is illustrated through art practice but which is a reflection of the reality that we live in.

An engagement with ideas rather than technique, which art curriculum still relies on so heavily, offers an opening in the direction of a significant transformation in how we think about and develop teaching practice. It involves both educators and learners in the ongoing processes of learning and understanding through active research and the creation and the sharing of knowledge.

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