



## **A Forum on Integrating The Arts into our Children's Lives**

**Wednesday, October 25, 2006**

**Imperial Oil Centre for the Performing Arts, Sarnia**

## **A Summary Report**



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## Introduction

Artists, educators and presenters from across the province gathered at the Imperial Oil Centre for the Performing Arts in Sarnia, ON on Wednesday, October 25, 2006.

The day was designed to bring together and coordinate the efforts of educators, performing artists and community presenters so that children can benefit from the best performing arts experiences possible.

We enjoyed a performance of Elijah's Kite by Tapestry New Opera Works, along with students from local schools. We were inspired by comments from Jennifer Mossop, MPP and Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Culture. We participated in workshops and discussion groups.

We truly did **Think Creatively...Participate Actively...Experience Passionately!**

An important component of the day was to gather participants' comments and ideas in the form of a survey conducted by Cheryl Ewing of eyeGo to the Arts. A total of 24 completed surveys, representing a return of 50%, were submitted to form the basis of this report.

## General Results

### Arts involvement:

- 44% of those attending are currently involved in the arts.
- 22% had no arts training at any time.
- The education sector had their experiences with music while the arts sector was fairly evenly distributed through instrumental and vocal music, theatre and dance.

### The arts and teaching:

- The education sector indicated they were neither comfortable nor uncomfortable in regards to their arts knowledge. It is likely that their need to be able to teach in areas of both their own personal strength and weakness gives them a confidence that the arts sector lacks.

## Specific Results

We asked a series of questions about attending performances; seeing arts education as a valuable part of children's learning; and whether each child has the ability to express him/herself creatively but needs help. Consistently the arts sector strongly agreed with these statements while our educator reps indicated that they mostly agreed.

### *Who do you think should take a leadership role in exposing children to performing arts?*

Both sectors agree that the Ministries of Education and Culture need to be leaders. Additional comments suggested going to the business community, the federal government and service clubs.

### *What barriers do you think limit exposing more children to the performing arts?*

The arts sector believes that the biggest block is the parent's unfamiliarity with the arts closely followed by teachers. The education sector believes that cost is the biggest barrier. Comments included:

- Lack of funds, overwhelmed, underpaid school system advocates
- Not a priority in education system or private lives
- Parents lack of time, convenience versus other activities
- Socio-economic, cultural stereotypes or prejudices of promoters or potential patrons

In discussing whether attending performing arts is frightening for someone unfamiliar with the performing arts or that the act of going to the theatre can be frightening; the education system does not agree that this the case and the arts sector is split down the middle.

The two sectors did not agree on the three most important reasons why they attended the Arts Ed Forum. The arts sector is concerned about the future of the performing arts and they hoped to learn about educators' needs regarding introducing children to the performing arts. Educators attended because they were asked to by colleagues and are concerned about their own lack of knowledge. Both want children to experience more performing arts activities.

### **The Performance**

Tapestry New Opera Works' *Elijah's Kite*, both absorbed and intellectually engaged participants, although the message had a neutral impact on them as far as provoking or challenging them or causing the attendees to reflect on their own opinions or beliefs. Most felt that the children were engaged in the performance. The majority were inspired to introduce elements of performing arts in the classroom and to perform or program for children.

### **The Workshops**

As planned, the workshops had a pretty even split as far as numbers and sectors. Generally, those attending the forum were there because they had an interest in arts education and therefore found the workshop concept interesting but did not necessarily feel that they gained from it. They had fun but did not feel that the workshops addressed their specific needs whether they were there from the education or the arts sector. The respondents did agree that it would be a good experience for all children regardless of their level. They also gained an appreciation for the skills learned in a short period of time and realized that it is necessary to develop a team.

### **The Discussion Groups**

In reflecting on the discussion groups, the majority found them to be supportive rather than stimulating. The responses were pretty evenly split as to learning about additional resources but the majority felt that they had developed contacts that would be helpful in improving arts education opportunities.

## **Overall Results**

The organizers are pleased that in rating the Arts Ed Forum as a whole, the responses were supportive. The majority felt that they were part of a larger group with similar goals, were challenged or provoked and were driven to reflect on their own beliefs about the value of arts education. They felt better equipped to develop a working partnership with others in their community and the overwhelming majority would recommend that colleagues attend an Arts Ed Forum.

## Next Steps and Recommendations

There were several excellent suggestions that will be taken forward to the next Arts Ed Forum to be held in Kitchener on April 12<sup>th</sup>. These ranged from suggestions for putting the day together to additional information to be made available to the attendees. These suggestions will be taken to the Kitchener steering committee for them to consider while they plan a day to meet their needs. They include:

- provide more concrete ideas and suggestions
- provide more information related to presenters' concerns
- include a panel discussion with educators, artists, community and government representatives
- bring people together at the end of the day

To close, one educator commented, *"Excellent day. I met many interesting people. You made me think about the nature of arts – don't develop your art around the curriculum. Create the art for arts sake. Keep your integrity. Teachers will find the curriculum connections. Help us afford to take the students to the venues – that's an educational experience. As adults they won't go to the theatre if they don't feel comfortable there as kids. "*

## For more information

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