

Collaborating with Arts Organizations: Creating Opportunities for Gifted Children

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*Introduction*

Including exposure to and educational experiences that focus upon the arts is a vital part of gifted children's development (Smutny & von Fremd, 2009; Treffinger, 1998; Zimmerman, 2004). Advocates for arts education are adamant that the arts are an integral part of children's lives and minds, one of the bulwarks of a democratic society (Botstein, 1998; Greene, 2001). Although most acknowledge the importance of the arts for gifted children, pressure to have children achieve on standardized tests, budgetary cutbacks, and a lack of resources have made such programming difficult at many schools. Teachers, parents, and administrators who are advocates for providing gifted children with exposure to the visual arts, music, dance, and theatre often have many questions related to their goals. How can I begin a program during these economically difficult times? What if I do not personally have any knowledge about the arts? Where can I get assistance to improve my current offerings? How can I provide quality arts instruction to a mixed ability classroom? Is it possible to incorporate arts instruction into my daily classroom or is it better to collaborate with a specialist?

Fortunately for teachers and parents who wish to ensure that gifted children are able to engage in the conversation regarding "strangeness and sameness" that is the arts, a plethora of resources exist that can assist in the delivery of services (Botstein, 1998, p. 68). Many cultural institutions, such as art museums, opera companies, symphony orchestras, and dance and theatre groups, provide rich and varied materials and programs that will assist in efforts to provide gifted children activities and experiences that will build their skills and talents with the arts. These resources may be used in a variety of ways, including their being used with existing arts services, integrated with other

classroom instruction, as the basis for special services for the gifted, or as part of a special school or classroom initiative (Renzulli & Reis, 2003; Taylor, 1986; Tomlinson, 1999; Treffinger et al., 2004). Arts organizations and cultural institutions provide several main types of assistance to interested teachers and parents. These include:

- Lesson plans and lesson guides for use with K-12 students;
- Professional development and training for teachers and parents;
- Online resources, including access to collections; and
- Access to a community of like-minded collaborators.

This article will explore some of the opportunities available through various national and regional arts organizations and cultural institutions. Special focus will be given to sharing resources that can easily be used or modified in the classroom or home. Resources will be provided for the visual arts, music, and dance and theatre.

### *Visual Arts*

Emily is a second grade teacher who has little experience in the visual arts, other than a drawing class she took as an undergraduate. Emily has noticed that many of children in her gifted screening classroom are very excited about art, and are very engaged when visual representations are incorporated into lessons and other activities. Because of recent budget cutbacks at her school, however, Emily has few resources to assist her with such integration. As the school is located in an isolated rural area, there are no groups or organizations to which she can turn. Before planning a language arts and social studies unit on work, Emily consults Bridget, an arts specialist who serves Emily's school as well as several others.

Bridget explains that many art museums and other organizations have long had education and other outreach organizations that provide resources for the parents and teachers of gifted children. Bridget supplies Emily with a list of some of the better resources available online, listed below in Table 1, as well as a brief description of some of the resources available.

Table 1

*Visual Arts Resources Available Online*

Organization	Key Resources	Web Site
Art Institute of Chicago	Lesson Plans; Access to Collection; Teacher Programs	<a href="http://www.artic.edu/aic/">http://www.artic.edu/aic/</a>
The J. Paul Getty Museum	Open Studio Lessons from Artists; Access to Collection; Games and Videos; K-12 Lesson Guides	<a href="http://www.getty.edu/museum/">http://www.getty.edu/museum/</a>
Metropolitan Museum of Art	Collection Database; Timelines; Videos and Vocational Presentations	
Minneapolis Institute of Arts/Walker Art Center	Art Finder; Art Collector; Access to Collection; Lesson Plans and Presentations	<a href="http://www.artsconnected.org/">http://www.artsconnected.org/</a>
Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)	Summer Institutes; Games; Database of Lesson Plans; <i>Red Studio</i> , for HS students	<a href="http://www.moma.org/">http://www.moma.org/</a>

Emily uses these resources to assemble a collection of images that she downloads from various web sites.

For the unit on work, Emily incorporates images of men and women working at different tasks to increase her students' understanding of the content covered. Emily also

employs timelines and online lesson plans to increase students' repertoire of artistic terms, and helps them to place various works in time. Finally, Emily plans and implements a culminating activity where she creates a web page of student work that is based upon similar themes to the works they viewed during the unit. Resources such as these can enrich and empower gifted children's experiences (Clark & Zimmerman, 1988). Teachers and parents can use the visual arts resources made easily accessible to transform art instruction or to integrate the resources into existing lessons (Tomlinson, 1999; Smutny & von Fremd, 2009).

### *Music*

Jeff is a fourth grade teacher at an urban school. He is a member of a team consisting of three fourth grade teachers. All the teachers in Jeff's grade level meet daily to plan. One day, the team leader Sondra, mentions that all fourth grade students will be attending a student production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. In order to prepare students for this experience Sondra hands each teacher materials prepared by the opera company.

While at home that evening, Jeff looks through the materials. As he reads through the materials he realizes that the majority of preparation activities assume the classroom teacher as the central figure in introducing and preparing the children for their experience. Jeff becomes worried because he has little knowledge about or interest in opera. Since Jeff's school does not have a full time music teacher and the school's music teacher spends less than 30 minutes with his class each week, he becomes deeply concerned.

The next morning Jeff finds Sondra and wonders what he can do considering his lack of knowledge or interest in opera. Sondra mentions that she also does not have much

experience teaching music but that the curricular materials are structured in such a way that the preparation can be tied into work in language arts, social studies and science. Further all the lessons are aligned with state standards. The plot summary and excerpts of music are such that the teachers need only make sure the children have read and understood the plot and the instructions in the teacher's guide she received from the Lyric Opera of Chicago provide the teacher with all the information necessary in order to explain and provide examples of different operatic forms.

During the common planning time that day, Jeff asks about the culminating project suggested in the curricular materials. Maria mentions that this project while about an opera is, like much of the curricular materials, approached through different subject matters that they teach each day. Thus, students can think about the opera and respond to it in a variety of ways such as: student created movies, comic books, scene, costume, and lighting designs, and the like. Maria also mentions that the opera is willing to host professional development prior to the initiation of the unit to assist teachers.

Most opera companies and symphony orchestras focus outreach in two ways. First, these organizations provide curricular materials to schools in order to prepare students and teachers for a live performance. In many cases, the live performances take place at the "home stage" of the organizations. Second, these institutions may construct and make available on-line materials that may serve as a general introduction to the art form. The Metropolitan Opera, for instance, has numerous curricular materials for various operas. The materials can be downloaded for free and the musical examples are also available on the website.

As indicated in the case above, most of the materials constructed for teachers attempt to connect the musical materials with extension activities that are aligned with state standards in content areas like science and language arts. This is a relatively new means of approaching music education for students attending a performance. In previous attempts at this preparation, the music teacher was responsible for the preparation. This move away from “music teacher only” preparation is positive insofar as the way that the art form is presented to children will have many more common anchor points within the traditional school disciplines than if music alone was the preferred approach. So too, since instructional time in music is limited and in order for children to have the best opportunity to make sense of the opera or symphony, many musical organizations approach programming for concert attendance through the understanding that any instructional time will take place through the classroom teacher and, in order for this to occur, the lessons must be aligned with standards in content areas that are valued in the schools.

Listed in Table 2 are examples of websites from the education departments of opera companies and symphony orchestras.

Table 2

<i>Opera Company and Symphony Orchestra Resources Available Online</i>		
Organization	Key Resources	Web Site
The Metropolitan Opera	Curricular Guides; Backstage Tour	<a href="http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/about/education/">http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/about/education/</a>
The Lyric Opera of Chicago	Program Information for K-8 and High School; Curricular Materials	<a href="http://www.lyricopera.org/education/index.aspx">http://www.lyricopera.org/education/index.aspx</a>
Washington National Opera	School Programs (Create your own	<a href="http://www.dcopera.org/education/schoolprograms/index.asp">http://www.dcopera.org/education/schoolprograms/index.asp</a>

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	opera)	
New York Philharmonic	KidZone (online application teaching children about music); School Programs	<a href="http://nyphil.org/education/">http://nyphil.org/education/</a>
Chicago Symphony Orchestra	Orchestra Explorers; School Programs	<a href="http://cso.org/Institute/default.aspx">http://cso.org/Institute/default.aspx</a>

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### *Dance and Theatre*

As a first-year fourth grade teacher, Michael is surprised to be placed in charge of the dance and theatre program his principal, Mrs. Wyman, wants to begin at Cherry Elementary School. With no background in dance or theatre, Michael asks Mrs. Hare, the gifted education specialist at Cherry, for assistance. Together, Michael and Mrs. Hare compile the resources indicated in Table 3.

Table 3

### *Dance and Theatre Resources Available Online*

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Organization	Key Resources	Web Site
Dick Blick Art Materials	Lesson Plans; Video Lesson Plans; Searchable Database	<a href="http://www.dickblick.com/">http://www.dickblick.com/</a>
Great Books Foundation	Anthologies; Videos; Curricular Materials for K-12	<a href="http://www.greatbooks.org/index.php?id=32">http://www.greatbooks.org/index.php?id=32</a>
Guthrie Theater	Play Guides; One-Act Plays; Video Lessons	<a href="http://www.guthrietheater.org/">http://www.guthrietheater.org/</a>
Joffrey Ballet	Dance Clubs; Workshops; After School Programs; Residency	<a href="http://www.joffrey.org/">http://www.joffrey.org/</a>

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Programs

KET                      Dance Arts Toolkit; <http://www.ket.org/artstoolkit/dance/>  
Lesson Plans; Idea  
File; Videos

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Michael assembles all of the materials he can from these resources and examines them with an eye on how he can best use these in conjunction with other program needs of Cherry Elementary School.

Not having much background in dance or theatre, Michael decided to use a story from the Junior Great Books, with which his students are familiar, and turn it into a play with some movement culled from dance lesson plans he obtained. In addition, Michael worked with Mrs. Schwartz, Cherry Elementary School's art teacher, to create backdrops and sets for the play. After working with his students for several weeks, the production of *Kaddo's Wall*, a West African folktale, premiered at Cherry Elementary School's open house to great acclaim. To assist him for the next school year, Michael was able to sign up for a summer workshop with a local dance company that would provide him additional perspectives of preparing dance and theatre instruction for gifted children.

*Conclusion*

Teachers such as Emily, Jeff, and Michael are not alone. Recent movements in educational policy have resulted in a reduction in instructional time in the arts. Thankfully, arts organizations have taken this reality and constructed materials allowing children of all ages to learn about music and art, and, in the best circumstances, either travel to or receive a visit from these organizations. National and regional museums, orchestras, companies, and theatres make available tremendous resources to assist gifted children.

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