

Running Strong After All These Years: How a Five-year CAPE¹ School Sustains and Continuously Improves into Year Eight, 2000

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Introduction

A central component of our evaluation and inquiry agenda for the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) during the school year 1999-2000 was a quest for understanding the reasons for the ability of programs to survive after the sponsor funding ceased. Why do some programs survive well beyond their original funding and support? This is an absolutely crucial question for the sponsors of most any program entering schools with goals of long term or permanent change. This question equally impacts foundations, government agencies, and individual philanthropists. Sponsors of funded programs in our schools generally have as their highest hope that their investments will spawn change, and not just expenditure of money.

To seek information and suggested answers to the critical issue of sustainability, we interviewed parents, teachers, and administrators. We also surveyed key players and asked them to enumerate what they saw to be important longevity factors for their CAPE programs.

We uncovered many things in this process. One component of our work that turned out remarkably well was interviews with key teachers involved in the CAPE programs that have lived in since CAPE's very start. Our team invited a teacher, perhaps the most experience and thoughtful witness to the whole project, to compose a narrative account of the development of the program at her school. What resulted was a very lucid account of the complex process of launching and institutionalizing a program ignited by an outside sponsor: the successes and pitfalls, the leaders and resisters. It is a compelling story about the long-term evolution of a school community and its central conversations.

¹ The Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education, Arnold Aprill, Director, 1993-present

² Our CAPE teacher correspondent worked with our evaluation team over three years. We commissioned an essay from her which is featured in this report-with only minor editing which does not impact the substance of her submitted draft. This teacher and school remain anonymous for this presentation.

We have decided to present our most important findings in the context of this teachers' narrative. So the story begins with an essay titled *Still Up and Running*. Here goes:

Still Up and Running

Our CAPE Partnership is now entering its 8th year. I have been involved from day one; it is truly astonishing how strong a program we have. We almost didn't even make it out of the starting gate.

Getting Started

When we started, the principal was quite leery of the program; she was not convinced that CAPE for a program for them. The teachers thought their available time just did not allow them to have an artist come in and interfere with their teaching. Or, like the principal, they were not at the outset convinced of CAPE's relevance or value to our school.

To be honest, we got over the start-up hurdle through attraction to grant money; the seemingly generous funding (this sort of outside funding was unprecedented for us). So the prospect of CAPE was hard for either the principal or the faculty to turn down.

We also benefited from an interested and bright parent who foresaw what the CAPE program might contribute—a revival of the arts at the school, possible engagement, and enthusiasm, and renewal of teachers. And a critical possible benefit: boosting our academic success through arts integration in the curriculum.

New school improvement programs arriving at the doorstep are inevitably greeted with skepticism. We've seen so many programs come and go, and have two dozen going on right now. Why another?

The first, second and third most important ingredients: leadership, leadership and leadership. The importance of a championed vision for a program under consideration stands out here. What could this program eventually look like and do? If no one is painting a vision, a program becomes aimless. It will not grow or sustain.

This parent seemed to keep planning, leadership growth and expansion, and necessary paperwork moving throughout our start-up. The parent is still with us. We hope she has many, many children (and never moves away) in order to stay intimately attached to our school. She probably will anyway. She stands at the top of our substantial engaged enthusiastic CAPE community.

Hints of what a fully engaged CAPE school looks and feels like after the program matures.

Sustaining and Growing

So how did we make it to our 8th year-where teachers now chase me down the hall to explain their ideas for next year's unit and beg me to help them get a specific artist to work with? And our principal now speaks very highly of the program to us and to her colleagues at other schools. Moreover, she has continued to give discretionary money to the CAPE program, even though the Board has cut funds drastically over the past three years. As I reflected on what has made it work, I feel so many things have blended together to sustain it.

A real test is the allocation of discretionary money to activities by the school principal. Rhetoric indicates sympathy; resources mean real commitment, as economists say about real demand.

There are two major components we all seem to find critical when considering when looking at why we are functioning so strongly today. The first is the process we went through in order to start up the program. The second is evident among all involved at the school- teachers, the principal, the parents, and the children.

Hints of full community involvement emerge here. Later in the story, we see this as tremendously important if not vital for sustaining.

Our launch was critically dependent on the strong leadership that developed very quickly for constructing our basic framework. CAPE professionals' flexibility and guidance, as well as staff adaptability and support, seemed to have cultivated and inspire initial leadership.

But I cannot leave out the professional artists and the creative teachers coming together at the start. These are the partners who accomplished the hands-on work of building a solid and enduring foundation for our partnership.

If I had to boil things down to the essentials, sustainability today seems as a result of the strong foundation we all built, the artist-teacher relationships and our growing group of parent advocates.

Elaborating on the importance of parents for a moment, our kick-off parent leader had a knack for finding the strength in each of the partners and encouraging them to contribute using their strengths. She has the ability to stay positive no matter what obstacles we faced. This leader stays calm in times of crisis, which now helps the steering committee come up with effective solutions to the problems that come along with any program. She is enjoyable to work with and respected by the partners and principals and parents at both schools.

Our program growth: sustainability through substance.

CAPE has played an important part in nurturing us to develop the way we have. From the very beginning CAPE insisted we develop our own program that meets our individual needs. No

Here we revisit the foundation building processes engaged at the start. They reverberate through the ongoing course of the program. We also see what getting over a key hurdle looks like; the internal advocates go from trying to sell and implement a program up front, and then to an enviable situation where there is a clamor for more and deeper involvement.

Here we get a first glimpse of the importance of mutual adaptability between CAPE and an implementing school. More discussion of this critical issue further on.

matter how much we begged for a formula, CAPE leaders and especially Director Arnold Aprill only guided us to develop our own sense of need and ways to address them in the context of the CAPE program.

CAPE would answer questions and provide support (e.g.: roundtable sessions with other partnerships as well as with internal players). CAPE also brought encouragement in the process, but they always insisted we derive a program for ourselves. Our partnership works for us, it truly fits like a glove. CAPE's ability to display our partnerships success, as well as to create visible symbols reflecting our school community and its mission, also really fueled us. This assistance facilitated teachers and artists in presenting their work and getting well-deserved appreciation for it. Substantive recognition is rare for educators, and for many artists I think. This part of the overall process proved to be vital for our success.

We return here to a more specific function of successful leadership; this is finding the strengths of actual and potential players, and building on those strengths to get things done, and other involved and excited. It would be hard to find a better capsule description of the key strategies of a successful leader.

The creation of important symbols within and without programs is often neglected by leaders in the implementation and ongoing work of programs. This school gets the message: good and positive symbols focus both internal and external constituents on a program. This serves to facilitate the embodiment of program identity, purpose and values in the school community and its culture. Visible symbols also attract curiosity and create enthusiasm of outsiders. See the author's note about kindergarten parents below.

Recognition of teachers' and others' good work is all too rare nowadays; the author testifies rightly to the importance in sustaining CAPE.

We see here an amplification of the importance of flexibility on the part of the program sponsor. Scholars, steered by the pioneering work of Stanford University's Milbrey McLaughlin, have recognized "mutual adaptation" as crucial to implementation of anything by outside agents, in all policy domains. Schools and teachers are seldom attracted to another's detailed model, nor do they like to read cookbooks to participate. Individuals and schools differ; programs must be shaped to fit different contexts.

Personal Growth

CAPE also furnished me with several opportunities to flourish professionally, by giving me a chance to share my and my fellow teachers' and artists' work nationally and internationally. This allowed me to see how important the work is; it also showed me that other seem all to confront similar struggles. This gave me the desire to stay involved, even when things got tough. And I feel I gained a lot as a person by being involved.

Of course, artists are in many ways the backbone of our CAPE program. Their professionalism, expertise, and constantly increasing ability to work with children comprise major reasons for why we have been so successful.

When planning a curriculum unit, the teachers from each grade meet with one or two artists to plan a 4-5 week integrated unit. The artists and teachers were provided workshops that taught them ways to develop these units. The workshops were eagerly attended, interestingly enough, by the artists. In many cases it has been the artists who have guided the teacher to true integration. Many artists faced stubborn teachers who felt this was a waste of time. The artists were able to stay focused and encourage teachers along. Now many of these teachers get it and participate whole-heartedly. I did not really anticipate this part-the artist as teacher professional developer.

Teachers naturally played central roles in our program's success. After all, teachers are almost always at the center of the classroom activities; without their

The writer describes what can only be called a very sensitive, successful, and purposeful touch by CAPE leaders on this issue.

When participants experience personal growth and renewal, of course they will stay on board.

The regular school classroom is a foreign habitat for many artists. They remember their own school days and have some idea of what they are stepping into. But the ongoing life and practice of an effective classroom constitute a complex set of practices and orientations. These artists must learn over time. Success in this is vital for CAPE's model.

We can't forget the partner in the key equation: teachers.

participation there would be no program; I guess this goes without saying, but I said it anyway.

Measured expansion.

We started out program slowly, only a couple of grade levels at a time (first Kindergarten and 4th grade). Then each year we added two or three more grades. This allowed teachers in many other grade levels to hear about the program well in advance of trying it out, and this also gave us an opportunity to tweak the framework along the way before the program would become widely or universally implemented at our school.

At our school, one of our highly respected teachers was quite certain the partnership was not going to work in her classroom and vowed she would not participate. We called a meeting with her and her grade level teacher colleagues. Myself, the principal, and our parent leader attended. After a long discussion explaining that the program was flexible and could be approached from many angles, this teacher said she would give it a try. This group gathered artists, and developed and implemented a unit that was very successful. This teacher is now one of our biggest advocates and seeks out funders to help us sustain what we so arduously developed over the years. Some other teachers witness this initially uninterested transformation and now participate willingly.

Now at Year 8

The program is now in its 8th year, and the relationship built between the artists and teachers are currently the most

Here a very important insight appears. This partnership developed slowly over time—teachers signed as they learned and saw what was happening. Gradual development governed by personal interest among non-participant teachers essentially will drive the school's pace for implementation—one shouldn't try to force a tomato into a closed mouth, so to speak. The trick is to cultivate receptivity through communication and contagion. But you'll never win them all as a program sponsor.

The above is echoed in the winning-over particular teacher described here.

And here we see the most important and surely pre-emptive factor for sustaining a program: in the case of CAPE, it is

important reasons for our sustainability. The planning teams have had several years to work together, and they look forward to improving their work from year to year.

The comfort level between teachers and artists has increased greatly over time. Artists have a feel for how a teacher runs his/her classroom and are better able to () in, seamlessly in many cases. The teachers also know the expectations of the artists and are better able to support their work during the regular class time.

I know I have begun to incorporate the artists' language into my consciousness and my regular teaching—so the students have many opportunities to understand what our team is up to and why. Teachers have grown to consistently want the artists in their classrooms and are fighting for and going to great lengths to make this happen.

To expand a point on parent roles, we did have critical parent support during the first 6 years of our partnership. There also have been a couple of other parents actively involved in our steering committee. We did not however have a large body of parents on board, and that was something we were constantly trying to improve.

Last year, with funding becoming a major concern, it was astonishing to me how many parents stepped up to acknowledge they were aware of CAPE and the arts going on in our school. A new group emerged wanting to help keep our model alive. Several LSC (Local School Council) candidates included the partnership funding

the quality, affect, and effects of what really goes on in the classroom as the result of participation. This depends fully on attaining successful and mutually liked artist-teacher partnerships.

With each year of program life, we see a higher likelihood of future and long-term continuation. The teachers and artists of CAPE here have crafted and shaped something they like doing and like exploring and fine-tuning in an ongoing way.

The artist as teacher developer was a surprising part of CAPE's process in the mind of our author. This really comes under the classification of general teacher professional development that most programs consider critical for success. But here, another outside and specialized intervener in teacher developer is the artist. The author spots this as a natural event; it suggests something that CAPE could build on specifically to its advantage; then again, if this practice is spontaneously widespread and effective, CAPE should not stand in the way. The observation of artist as teachers' trainer suggests an interesting subject for a systematic look. In effect, our evaluation team's systematic observations of teacher and artist work in the classrooms this year can help us learn about such processes.

Here we note that a well-established program may have wellsprings of support that they do not even

needs in their platform when running for a seat on the Council.

Many entering Kindergarten parents are now attending funding meetings and have begun seeking grants that we can apply for. After all, they have as many as nine years for their children to be impacted by our CAPE-generated program. These parents claim that one of the reasons they wanted to attend our school was because of the Arts Partnership and they want to help assure its longevity.

As we enter our 8th year and funding seems tentative, we teachers have concerns about the future of the program. It would be impossible to bring artists in without funds to pay them. But I am sure many of our teachers will continue to teach the units and incorporate the art themselves; or they might us the regular art teachers employed in our school to be a part of our efforts to integrate the arts.

As for me, I know I look at the arts differently. I see how art expression makes connections for my students. I find I use art for many areas of my teaching that I never did before. Many things I learned and developed would stay with me forever.

I do believe the arts partnership has woven itself into many areas of our school, and it will always be a part of us in some way.

Thank you, CAPE.

recognize, such as the many parents who turned out to assist with funding problems. We also see that funding for CAPE partnerships will probably never go away and our artists will stay on board. Indicated here is that another form of sustaining has occurred in this case: namely the permanent changes within individual teachers, which impact their teaching.

The author refers here to a truly bottom line ingredient for realizing sustaining effects of an educational program. This is permanent change in the beliefs, thinking, and dispositions of teachers. When a program accomplishes that, its elements will be long lasting and important to the education of children and this without funds or any outside guidance or encouragement. For this author, CAPE has been life changing-the ultimate high-order goal.