

Terry Barrett

# The Future: Hopes and Dreams, Obstacles and Solutions

## ABSTRACT

The voices of 19 colleagues speak out about the possible future of the field, as well as the obstacles and the actions necessary to achieve new dreams.

The last of a series of four “foundational articles” on Teaching Artists, this article deals with future dreams and obstacles. In preparing to write it, I asked Editor Eric Booth for contacts, sent requests for participation to people on Eric’s list, asked those respondents to suggest more people, and added some Teaching Artists whom I knew. I sent out 39 requests, and over the next five months, I received 19 responses from people working in Hawaii, the Pacific Northwest, including British Columbia, Ohio, New York City and State, and Massachusetts. Of those who responded, 9 are active Teaching Artists and the rest have been Teaching Artists and are now working in administrative capacities with Teaching Artists.

An e-mail request to the respondents was for short-paragraph answers to the following questions:

- How would you like to see Teaching Artists function more effectively in the future?
- What is your dream for the enterprise?
- What is the potential for future generations of Teaching Artists and their audiences?
- What are the obstacles to your vision?
- What is one thing that could be done to help your dream come true?

I asked the respondents to be optimistic but realistic in their answers. As I understand their responses, they emerge thematically as hopes and dreams, and as obstacles and solutions. Whenever it was spatially expedient, I have used the direct voices of the respondents here, rather than my own summaries, to be able to communicate their passionate and persuasive voices.

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## Hopes and Dreams

Teaching Artists and those involved with them are generally full of hope, enthusiasm, passion, and faith in their missions. They eloquently write about their aspirations for the future and the work that they do and want to do. The statements encapsulated and quoted below represent the spirit of their responses with some specificity.

**R-e-s-p-e-c-t.** In the responses there is a consistent call for respect for what Teaching Artists actually do and are capable of doing. Some referred to respect as credibility; others expressed a desire for appreciation. Teaching Artists want to be regarded more seriously both by those in the arts and in education, on the local, state, regional, and national levels. Barbara Ellmann wants to “work with teachers who have requested to work with” her and in places where she is “wanted and sought after.”

**Better partnerships.** Some expressed hope for better partnerships among all who are involved with Teaching Artists, including new levels of collaboration between artists and teachers. James Modrick insists that we work to stop all notions of “turf-wars,” and Laura Reeder calls for an end to all competition among Teaching Artists and all who are involved with them.

**More students; more artforms.** Everyone implicitly wants quality programs and more of them. Several respondents dream of reaching more students through more artforms, and Joanne Robinson Hill desires access to a more diversified pool of Teaching Artists. James E.

*All the arts, all the schools, all the students.*

Modrick succinctly and emphatically

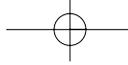
states: “All the arts, all the schools, all the students.” Susana Browne furthers the thought: “My dream is that every elementary school has access to a qualified Teaching Artist in music, dance, drama, and visual arts. Eight-week residencies in each art form allowing students to experience the depth and richness of art.” Ted Lind wants to bring Teaching Artists into art museums to enliven educational experiences with families, and to engage visitors in art making to support “art looking.”

**More populations.** Some want to expand from schools to larger arenas. Dawn Ellis writes: “I see us not limited to the education realm, but meaningfully included in the professional development of social service workers, businesspeople, and health providers.” Beverly Naidus wants Teaching Artists placed “in every school, community center, union hall, hospital, military base, and public space.”

**More significant learning.** Susana Browne dreams of students who would “receive quality sequential art instruction, make meaningful connections between art, academics, and culture, and discover the joy of learning...in schools of inquiry where creativity is valued more than high test scores.” Through engagement with the arts, Beverly Naidus envisions “more fulfilled, inspired, and peaceful lives with the arts as a daily practice of communicating and expressing what needs to come out.”

Hilary Tham writes: “As Teaching Artists, we touch our students’ lives and open doors to imagination for them. We teach them they are unique and their apprehension of the world is unique and valuable if they can communicate in any form of the arts.”

**Riskier teaching of riskier art.** Stephanie Springgay dreams of “teaching outside the boundaries, taking risks, and entertaining uncertainty...of exploring programmatic themes such as social justice and the arts, teens and bullying, homophobia, etc., that are developed and ‘promoted’ to school boards, making it possible for Teaching Artists to take risks and challenge students through the arts.” Sarah Jencks dreams of “an audience



that will appreciate and understand artwork that is innovative and risky. We must engage young people in learning craft and discipline as we encourage them to take creative, intellectual and emotional risks.”

*I initiate exercises to free students' imaginations through a sense of play. I want to infect my students with the pleasure of using and crafting words...to find that students have grown wings and become artists, writers, and presidents of their literary club a year or two later.*

Hilary Tham

**Educational reform through the arts.** Many respondents align themselves passionately with a general school reform impetus, and believe that the arts, in particular, can transform education. Beverly Naidus dreams of Teaching Artists who “provoke thought,

*Many respondents ... believe that the arts, in particular, can transform education.*

waking up those who are in denial, creating dialogue between groups in conflict, making invisible groups more visible, empowering, healing, educating, revealing hidden histories, transforming the status quo, and speaking when everyone is scared.” She believes that art can and should be “taught as a tool for social and personal transformation.” Barbara Ellmann sees herself as “an advocate for educational reform by encouraging the unusual, the rigorous, and the inventive.” She also dreams of “a future without forms to fill out, no plans to submit, and no evaluations to write.”

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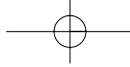
**Artistic integrity.** Some respondents dream of artistic integrity uncompromised by other non-artful demands or requests. For example, Terry Jenoure dreams “that the Teaching Artist enterprise not become an ‘enterprise’ in the sense that it becomes subject to standards dictated by administrators who are either non-artists, or non-practicing artists, nor by teachers, regardless of their area of skill.” Similarly, Terry Hermsen dreams of “maintaining the integrity of our own artistic processes, and not squishing things to fit into convenient academic packages like ‘the study of immigration’, or whatever.”

## Obstacles

When one dreams big dreams, imagined obstacles of all sorts to realizing those dreams quickly arise, and some can be rather large and overwhelming if they are accepted as inevitable: “Greed, corruption, narrow mindedness, and fear” (Beverly Naidus). Susana Browne specifies other large factors: “There are many obstacles to my vision: resistance to change that is inherent in bureaucracy, ignorance about the potential of the arts, lack of funding, and lack of qualified Teaching Artists and arts administrators.”

Larry Stein’s envisioned obstacles are multifold, including: misguided priorities at many levels of government and business; arts-in-education administrators who try to train artists to become teachers instead of helping artists articulate who they are and what they do; intentional or inadvertent usage of Teaching Artists replacing credentialed arts teachers by school administrators; credentialed arts specialists isolating themselves within the school community; and many schools of higher education and fine arts being out of touch with the real K-12 world.

Ted Lind and James Modrick see attitudinal barriers. Ted writes that artists are sometimes unfairly burdened with false preconceptions that must be overcome: “bohemianism,” stubbornness, and supposed lack of organization. Ted asks that some Teaching Artists also eliminate their own prejudices regarding condescending notions of “the establishment.”



Angelica Pozo identifies as an obstacle “rigidity in a system that has its eye only on the endgame of standardized tests.” She also cites “a lack of learning models that generate inquisitiveness and thirst for knowledge that serve the student while in school and after graduating.” Terry Jenoure makes a specific request: “Don’t call on artists to be administrators, politicians, or babysitters.”

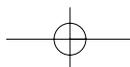
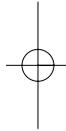
## Solutions

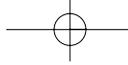
The respondents also suggest a wide array of solutions to the problems we face: some solutions are general and others specific, and some are meant to inspire creative solutions not yet invented. We all want to reach a common end point of excellence in education brought about by significant and sustained contributions of Teaching Artists. Some respondents see us greatly increasing our effectiveness through increased educational professionalization; others argue for artistic integrity expressed through artistic freedom within educational innovation. Although professionalization and artistic freedom and integrity are not mutually exclusive goals, sometimes tensions between the two seem evident. In the following paragraphs, ideas about professionalization come first, and the article concludes with ideas about intensified artistic involvement and what it might look like.

**Increased funding.** Many respondents identify increased funding as a necessary though not sufficient condition for bettering what Teaching Artists do. Increased funding could bring more artists of more diversity with more artforms to more places, reaching more students and citizens. Morenga Hunt asks that Teaching Artists be budgeted and paid for as valued educational resources for all K-12 students. Dale Davis recommends yearly contracts for Teaching Artists, and Angelica Pozo would be happy with semester contracts, and she would like to see financial support made available to house artists and their studios within schools. Many respondents suggest that Teaching Artists be provided paid annual workshops and other in-service professional development opportunities, such as a six-month paid on-the-job training with a mentor (Dale Davis).

**Professional development opportunities.** Several respondents ask that a variety of development opportunities be made available for Teaching Artists, including in-service courses on classroom management, child development, and assessment (Dale Davis). Stephanie Springgay recommends “paid, annual workshops with other Teaching Artists sharing innovative curricula, mentorship, and providing a sense of community.” Andrea Allen suggests that we “establish a feedback loop for Teaching Artists who enter the classroom, complete a project, and then go away. This feedback loop needs to include the teacher partner consistently throughout the process.” She believes that “such immediate feedback is essential for on-going professional development, as well as creating peak experiences in the classroom.”

**Thoughtful planning; better collaborations.** Morenga Hunt would like to see documentation of the history, current practices, and kinds of work being done by Teaching Artists. Deb Brzoska asks for “deep conversations between teacher and artist about their shared accomplishments with children.” Hilary Tham wants “weeklong summer institutes that bring teachers and artists together as co-equal experts—one in classroom pedagogy, the other in artistic knowledge—in deep conversation about what they can accomplish with children.” Andrea Allen suggests that Teaching Artists observe the host teacher in the classroom prior to beginning a long-term residency, “not to judge the teacher, but to get a better sense of how she manages her classroom, what the formal and informal





rules are, and the way in which she deals with spontaneous teaching moments.” In her program, prior to the full residency, the Teaching Artist teaches a brief workshop in the classroom so that when the teacher and Teaching Artist sit down to plan the residency,

*“Teaching Artists need both pedagogical autonomy and yet truly collaborative relationships with institutions. It is possible for both to happen at once.”* Terry Jenoure

both have a better idea of what to expect from the other person.” She also suggests that the students be brought into this planning phase, so that the children can express what they hope to get out of the project and their ideas be incorporated into the curriculum.” “By opening a line

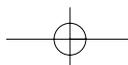
of dialogue between the teacher and Teaching Artist from the beginning, and then allowing time after each class to debrief, small concerns can be addressed before they become overwhelming.” Terry Jenoure writes: “Teaching Artists need both pedagogical autonomy and yet truly collaborative relationships with institutions. It is possible for both to happen at once.”

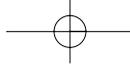
**A defined field.** Some respondents are calling for “a defined field” and “a formally recognized profession.” Morenga Hunt suggests a strategic plan with a 10-year timeline for organizing Teaching Artists as “a formally recognized profession with established competency levels, and norms of good practice, memberships, and benefits.” In his vision, Teaching Artists would be organized in local, state, regional, national and international bodies so that they can share information and expertise. Laura Reeder envisions webs, networks, conferences, and journals such as this one as the mechanism for defining a field.

**Standards for the field.** If there is to be a field, some respondents desire identified and specified standards for Teaching Artists. Some of these standards might include: “defined competencies” (Sarah Jencks), “norms of good practice” (Morenga Hunt), and “demonstration of continued growth as an artist” (Dale Davis).

**Professionalization.** Some respondents believe and argue that the lot of Teaching Artists would be significantly improved if Teaching Artists were demonstrably more adequately trained to work within educational institutions. Dale Davis “would like to see artist educators complete a year’s study of education following a college degree. The study would not focus upon methods courses, but would include intellectually challenging courses in the philosophy of education; in educational theory, that is, the sociology and anthropology of education, urban education, cultural foundations of education, cultural studies and education; and in the history of the artist in K-12 education taught by an experienced artist educator.”

Sarah Jencks suggests changes in the curricula that future Teaching Artists study as undergraduates, and would “integrate educational and developmental theory more thoroughly into BFA programs, creating opportunities for those artists who may make education a part of their careers to understand the fundamental links between artistic and educational theory and practice.” She also suggests the development of Masters and certification programs for Teaching Artists, believing “education in and through the arts requires a broader and more developmental set of pedagogical skills than education in other disciplines.”





Listen to the art muses. Laura Reeder would like to see Teaching Artists “function more effectively as experts in their disciplines without being required to take on much of the standardized requirements of education.” Stephanie Springgay reminds us that “Teaching Artists are able to teach outside the boundaries, take risks, and entertain uncertainty.” Sarah Jencks also wants to lead rather than follow: “Let’s recognize that artist educators are in the vanguard, modeling best practices in rigorous education, rather than trailing behind the field. We can work with teachers rather than for them, and change schools in the process.”

Many respondents seeking solutions to problems find their faith within their own artistic beings. Terry Jenoure, for example, writes: “Most artists, led by their passion, become artists first and then pursue teaching. It is important that schools and other places of learning respect and contribute to what feeds that original passion: freedom of expression, encouragement, physical and psychological space, and acknowledgement of highly developed talents.” Terry worries that increased professionalization might bring with it “rules and expectations of conduct that will inhibit intuition, honesty, and expressive growth.”

As a Teaching Artist, Stephanie Springgay draws from within: It is important that Teaching Artists be practicing artists, “living in the moment of creation.” They bring this passion and lived experience with them into the classroom. Often art educators, although committed to the arts, are removed from the daily “being” of artistic creation, and thus art education becomes something distant, “out there,” and separate. Instead, Teaching Artists are in the midst of art, and they bring this aspect of their lives into the teaching practice.

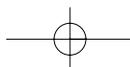
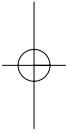
Larry Stein writes, “Teaching Artists need to look very carefully at what motivates them and how they do what they do. Then, they must clearly articulate and reveal their motivation and processes to young people in age-appropriate and compelling presentations that include art-making activities.” Terry Jenoure “would like to see less of a distinction made between

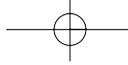
teaching and art making.” Angelica Pozo wants closer relationships between Teaching Artists as artists and students as artists. She wants the participants to get to

*... allow students to gain insight into the artists’ hearts and minds and get greater understanding of the art form, the artist, and the societal context in which the art form and the artists live*

know an artist as a real person and to work together through the creative process...Allowing for more sustained collaboration with what’s going on in school and what’s going on in artists’ lives and careers...such as developing and creating work for upcoming shows, or performances. Students could plan studio visits, or visits to a gallery or a theater to see the artist’s work...Artists and students could report their progress back and forth to each other through digital camera images. This would create better relationships among student-artists and teaching-artists. Both would develop an ongoing interest and curiosity with what they are each working on.

Similarly, Larry Stein also requests that we “allow students to gain insight into the artists’ hearts and minds and get greater understanding of the art form, the artist, and the societal context in which the art form and the artists live. Although challenging, this will





not only help the Teaching Artists be more effective with young people, but will set the stage for meaningful collaboration with classroom teachers and arts specialists.”

## Final Remarks

This article is not the kind that warrants conclusions. Rather, it sounds out some Teaching Artists and those who work with them, and hopes that their voices adequately represent the many artists who are active in education but who are not quoted here. The respondents cited in this article are both passionate and enlightened about what they want to do and what they can do, and they intelligently articulate what they can do to make their hopes and dreams come true. We have here a group of individuals who are realistic in recognizing significant problems and obstacles, but optimistic in knowing that they will persistently and creatively solve those problems—after all, they are artists.

## Respondents:

Andrea Allen, Director of Education, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Seattle WA.

Susana Browne, Maui Arts and Cultural Center, Maui HI

Deborah Brzoska, independent arts consultant, Vancouver WA.

Dale Davis, Teaching Artist and Executive Director, New York State Literary Center, Fairport NY.

Dawn M. Ellis, Teaching Artist, multidisciplinary arts, and independent scholar, New Haven CT.

Barbara Ellmann, Teaching Artist, Lincoln Center Institute, Symphony Space, and Museum of Modern Art, New York NY.

Terry Hermsen, Artist-in-Education, poetry, Ohio Arts Council, Delaware OH.

Joanne Robinson Hill, Director of Education, Joyce Theater, New York NY.

Morenga Hunt, Director, Education Institute, North Carolina Blumenthal Performing Arts Center, Charlotte NC.

Sarah Jencks, graduate student, School Leadership Program, Harvard University.

Terry Jenoure, musician and educator, Lesley University.

Ted Lind, Curator of Education, Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati OH.

James E. Modrick, Vice President, Affiliate and Education Services, VSA arts, Washington DC.

Beverly Naidus, Teaching Artist, interdisciplinary arts, and faculty member, University of Washington, Tacoma WA.

Angelica Pozo, Artist-in-Education, visual art, Ohio Arts Council, Cleveland OH.

Laura Reeder, Teaching Artist, visual art, and Executive Director, Partners for ArtsEducation, Syracuse NY.

Stephanie Springgay, Teaching Artist, and graduate student, The University of British Columbia.

Larry Stein, Teaching Artist, music, and Director of Interactive Media, Young Audiences, Inc., New York NY.

Hilary Tham, Teaching Artist, poetry and art, Arlington VA.

**Terry Barrett** is a Professor of Art Education at The Ohio State University and author of books of interest to Teaching Artists: *Interpreting Art*, *Talking About Student Art*, *Lessons for Teaching Art Criticism*, *Criticizing Art*, and *Criticizing Photographs*. He serves as an Art Critic-in-Education for the Ohio Arts Council.