



TCG

THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

CENTERPIECE

FOCUS ON: EDUCATION

• • • •

PERFORMING ARTS RESEARCH REPORT 2002: EDUCATION AND ITS VALUE IN THE COMMUNITY

BY DANIEL RENNER

The Performing Arts Research Coalition (PARC) is an unprecedented effort to gather information about our communities and our audiences for the performing arts in 10 cities across the country. The five major national service organizations for the performing arts, with the generous support of the Pew Charitable Trusts, are working with the Urban Institute to survey 800 households in targeted cities and gather statistical evidence about how people in each of those communities, both attenders and non-attenders alike, relate to the performing arts—what values and beliefs affect their attitudes toward the performing arts? The first five pilot communities Alaska, Cincinnati, Denver, Pittsburgh and Seattle have finished their surveys while Austin, Boston, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Sarasota and Washington, DC, are underway.

The results are extremely telling. (The link to the online version of the report is on page 6.) PARC's primary mission was to provide research that would increase attendance at arts events, but I was also curious as to what the reactions of education directors from the cities in the first round of the study would be to the findings—especially since the most dramatic statistic was that both attenders and non-attenders (9 out of 10 people) believe strongly that the performing arts contribute to the education and development of children. That statistic alone indicates that the work we do with young people has become a recognized component in our local and national educational system and in the minds of our citizens. A pause for celebration and then a deep breath as we plunge into some of the challenges and opportunities that the PARC study reveals.

As noted in several of the contributed writings for this *Centerpiece*, there is a disconnect between the widespread belief that the arts are important in educating and developing our young people and the actual value placed upon that belief when it comes to funding and attendance. As in the case of “No Child Left Behind” (which was embraced on both sides of the aisle and by the administration), good feelings, noble intentions and a lot of press do not a working program make. Still, the numbers undeniably point to opportunities. How do we leverage the fact that 8 out of 10 people strongly agree that the performing arts improve the quality of life in their community? Chambers of commerce, realtors and businesses are aggressively using the fact as a selling point...why aren't we? Strong majorities in all of the communities

Education *Centerpiece* Curator: Daniel Renner, director of education, Denver Center Theatre Company. Copyright © 2003 by Theatre Communications Group, Inc. All articles reproduced by permission of the authors. No portion of this publication may be reproduced in any form, or by any means, including photocopying, without written permission from the publisher or author. Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 520 Eighth Ave., 24th Fl., New York, NY 10018-4156, telephone (212) 609-5900, fax (212) 609-5901, website: www.tcg.org. Ben Cameron, executive director; Joan Channick, deputy director; Christopher Shuff, director of management programs; Laurie Baskin, director of government & education programs; and Rachel Ford, management programs publications associate.

believe that the performing arts help to preserve and disseminate cultural heritage. The survey also reveals that people strongly believe that the arts are a source of civic pride and value to the whole community. Yes, the economy is hurting all of us, but there is much goodwill to mine.

DENVER

Daniel Renner, director of education, Denver Center for the Performing Arts

Our educational programs and offerings constitute long-term audience research and development in support of our performances and the art form itself. We have traditionally been focused, for the most part, on young people, who are captive audiences in the schools. It's often easier to secure grants for programs geared toward young people, and they're an audience that tends to respond to artistic programming that is leaner and meaner. I like to think that we, as education directors and teaching artists, have been engaged in interactive advocacy of a very subtle sort for quite some time. With the strong numbers indicated in the PARC report, perhaps it is now time to train our sights on the adult audiences (who vote and create the budgets) in serving them in the same ways that we have traditionally served students—by engaging them more actively in the artistic/education process and creating connections that have immediate and discernable value to them. While adults will read study guides and articles, and even sit through talking head panels, I have to think that they would enjoy more visceral programming that demystifies the arts and allows them to feel a sense of ownership.

When I was working in Seattle, we created a series of events on dark nights; the idea was that teaching artists and actors would participate in an evening focusing on a particular play in the season. A scene from the play provided a springboard for roleplaying scenes in which civic leaders and players engaged in difficult ethical situations raised in the play (with apologies and credit to Fred Friendly's *Ethics in America* series). The line-up would also include a kind of town hall meeting, with the entire audience engaged in animated discussion with the use of traveling microphones (think Jerry Springer meets Oprah). These were standing room only events—charged evenings in which the arts became the catalyst for examining issues confronting that community. Non-patrons attended the theatre and were able to see firsthand the effect of our education programs. I bring this example up to illustrate my belief that civics, education and the arts are a powerful mix that should be employed as we build on the PARC survey results to move beyond our current position.

Like every other city, Denver is facing harsh cuts on every level, and schools and arts organizations are slashing budgets. Last year's battle to save Colorado's state arts agency funding made headlines. A larger and more telling referendum approaches in 2004 with the reauthorization by the public of our Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD) tax, which provides \$33-38 million directly to arts and cultural organizations annually. The SCFD tax has proved successful

in providing general operating support for arts organizations as well as money for free performances, arts education programs and the creation of an alliance of organizations providing two-year residencies in area schools and professional development for teachers. There is no tax increase involved in the reauthorization and it seemed, several years ago, a no-brainer. But in the current climate, where some of our schools are actually choosing to eliminate recess for grade schoolers, anything is possible and nothing makes sense.

To complicate the equation, last year's study by the Denver Chamber of Commerce revealed that not only did arts and culture generate \$1.1 billion in economic impact in 2001, but 9.1 million people attended cultural events. In a city that perceives itself as a sports mecca, arts attendees outpaced the 5.3 million who attended professional sports events. The Denver PARC results show that two out of every three Denverites attended a professional performing arts event in the last year. One in four attended 12 or more performances. For me, the PARC study shows that there is much more crossover than we supposed between arts folks and sports fans. They would appear to be the same crowd (based on Denver's population)—a heartening finding, especially for this arts attender, who also never misses a football game or hockey playoff.

What will be the outcome of the SCFD referendum when factoring in all these variables? The pollsters and policymakers in Denver currently consider it a close race, too soon to call. What I do know is that the PARC survey, when combined with the data that Denver arts organizations have been compiling about our arts education efforts, will be a welcome tool for advocacy and strategizing in the coming campaign. We have created a "No School Left Behind" strategy to prove that every single school (public, private and charter) has had arts programming because of the SCFD. We're taking very seriously the numbers that PARC has provided for our city and banking on them to help build real "vote your belief" support at the polls. My hope is that the rubber is about to meet a new road in Denver.

CINCINNATI

Bert Goldstein, director of education, Cincinnati Playhouse

Encouraged is the first word I would use to describe my feelings after reviewing the PARC report. As an education director for a major regional theatre I am especially encouraged that the report shows strong support for and awareness of our efforts in the area of arts in education. I would like to believe that the outreach and educational efforts implemented by the Cincinnati Playhouse and other arts organizations in this area have contributed to this positive perception. Did this awareness exist 10, 20, 30 years ago? Does this result from the explosion of arts in education programs that have proliferated in Cincinnati and around the country?

As an education director, I have an obligation to present programs that, as President Clinton used to say, “look like America.” Much of my programming has been along multicultural lines, and in this area I was again encouraged by the PARC report. It reflected a very positive response toward the arts as a means for “promoting an understanding of others and different ways of life”. I would hope that the choices we make in programming would facilitate this understanding and are in concert with the fundamental values of our community. There is some irony, however, for the city of Cincinnati. This is a city that struggles with issues of race and ethnicity. The city is losing population, while the suburbs are exploding. The underclass is growing and the inner city is in great need of revitalization. This is often a very polarized town, as the rioting that took place here two-and-a-half years ago proved. These issues are being addressed by government and business leaders, and there are numerous projects and proposals in the works to invigorate Cincinnati. The arts have the potential to play a significant role both economically and as a catalyst for change. For example, in an attempt to promote understanding and effect change following the recent unrest in our city, we chose to tour Anna Deavere Smith’s *Fires in the Mirror* to area high schools. In addition to the tour, we staged a special performance for invited schools,

followed by an audience discussion with a panel of local civic leaders and student representatives. It proved to be one of the most dynamic and well-received outreach events we have ever produced. The PARC report validates the spirit of this kind of activity wholeheartedly.

PARC is also a good indicator of other work that lies ahead. It was reported that 68 percent of respondents in the Cincinnati area strongly agreed that “the performing arts contribute to the education and development of children.” That’s a pretty impressive number. However, the question is: How can we harness that support when schools and state and local governments are making budget cuts in arts programs? How can we bridge the gap between awareness and activism? This is where advocacy comes into play. The Playhouse addresses the advocacy issue by annually contacting every state senator and state representative in a district where we were present (usually through our outreach touring efforts) and letting them know the specific numbers of young people we served in that district. We also contact every school we visited and ask the principal to write their local representatives to encourage them to support arts funding. In the future, we might want to include some of the research from the PARC report to support our advocacy.

In many cities, Cincinnati included, the arts have a greater economic impact on the community than do professional sports. The arts and the economy were the subjects of a recent study commissioned by the Cincinnati Fine Arts Fund. The findings determined that the arts injected \$169 million into our local economy annually, with 3.65 million people participating in arts-related events. The PARC report, however, clearly suggests that there is a lack of awareness among respondents about the arts as an economic engine. This implies that there is still much work for us to do to get the word out, backed by sound research, particularly in economic times when the arts look like an easy target for budget cutters.

SEATTLE

Andrea Allen, director of education, Seattle Repertory Theatre

I want to be hopeful. Really, I do. I want to run into the next Seattle Rep board meeting and proclaim with great sincerity and only a tiny bit of “I told you so” attitude that—of course—everyone believes that the arts are an important aspect of educating our children. I’ll pause dramatically after my announcement, as I wait for the checks and accolades to bury me. Still, some aspect of this data gnaws at the back of my mind, keeping me from enjoying that imagined moment of glory.

The PARC results in Seattle were similar to the results in other communities when it came to respondents’ agreeing or strongly agreeing that performing arts contribute to the education and development of children. A total of 93 percent of respondents agreed at some level (69 percent strongly agreed; 24 percent agreed somewhat; see table 4.6, “Respondents Who Strongly Agree That Performing Arts Contribute to the Education and Development of Children”). Perhaps even more impressive, this agreement held regardless of whether the

individual attended the arts themselves. Of the non-attenders, 53 percent strongly agreed with the statement, while 73 percent and 84 percent of the attenders and frequent attenders strongly agreed. As I stare at the data, that gnawing “something” begins to come into focus: the difference between what we believe in *theory* and what we believe in *practice*.

What I find confusing is the number of people who don’t want to make time to attend the arts, but who think their children should go. I am reminded of a recent lecture by Richard Florida (author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*) in which he remarked that while people in these creative cities (e.g., San Francisco, Austin, Seattle) want to know that certain events and experiences (e.g., climbing Mt. Rainier or attending *Romeo and Juliet* at Seattle Rep) are available, they don’t necessarily want to participate. In Seattle, the number one “big” reason listed by respondents as to why they don’t attend more performing arts was that it is hard to make time to go out (39 percent). The second “big” reason, at 32 percent, was that they preferred other leisure activities. I can’t help but picture the stereotypical over-worked Seattle-ite with their eighth espresso beverage of the day, working late into the night with no time to even consider a play or concert. And when they have a moment to contemplate leisure, a roster of other activities rises to the top. Thank god their kids went to a student matinee during the week to alleviate the guilt of not bringing more culture into their education.

As I mulled over the data this past month, I kept trying to figure out why I couldn’t just settle into feeling happy that the charts and tables from the survey seem to validate the work I do every day. But from conversations with educators and seemingly endless committee meetings about education issues, I know that the debate often centers on how our schools can create better workers. That’s where the “value” of the arts, chiefly as a tool for educating our children, as opposed to enriching our lives, becomes evident. One more step, and we realize that the debate assumes the arts are important mainly because they can create a strong workforce for the country. How many times have I rationalized a theatre residency with a teacher (or, more likely, a

principal) by focusing on the “public speaking” aspects? Rarely are we allowed to even whisper that maybe we’re developing artists in our schools. There’s no money in that. (Note that the smallest number of respondents, at 37 percent, strongly agreed that the arts contribute to the economy of the greater community.)

My fear (hopefully just a paranoid delusion) is that creativity and the arts are becoming metaphors for business acumen and entrepreneurship. Even Florida’s book defines the 38 million Americans in the Creative Class as “people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music, entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology, and/or new creative content” (Florida, p.8). While the order may be arbitrary, I can’t help but see some relevance to the fact that the arts are sixth on that list, following education.

My hope—and I do actually feel hopeful about the future of arts and education—comes from table 2.7 (“Personal Involvement in Other Arts-Related Activities”), in which we see the connection between attendance and personal involvement in other arts-related activities. That personal aspect (as I’ve also found in my arts-participation-related experiences with the Wallace Foundation) is, for me, the key. There is mounting evidence that encouraging hands-on participation in the arts (as we do with all of our residency programs) creates value for the individual that goes beyond theory into practice.

The data from the PARC survey is important information to have, and I am grateful that our conversations around arts participation are growing more sophisticated. But we must use this information in a way that goes far beyond congratulating ourselves for good theorizing. So now, when I visualize myself storming into the next board meeting, I imagine that we are strategizing in a long-term way as to how we can emphasize that personal connection through education programs and other means; in this way, perhaps, we can help people value the arts for the joy they bring to communities, to individuals—and, yes, to students in a schools.

ALASKA

Anita Maynard-Losh, associate artistic director, Perseverance Theatre

My daughter used to love that *Sesame Street* song that goes, “One of these things is not like the other, one of these things just doesn’t belong.” Let’s see: Cincinnati, Denver, Pittsburgh, Seattle...and Alaska?

Alaska is way the heck away from the contiguous United States, with a hefty chunk of Canada in between, and it’s a lot bigger than people in the “Lower 48” tend to realize. This is understandable when the U.S. maps that we see daily on television, in newspapers, and on my seven-year-old daughter’s U.S. map puzzle place Alaska somewhere off the coast of California, and reduce it in scale so that it fits better in the box.

It may be even more difficult to comprehend the distance and isolation that is part of our world. I live in Juneau, the state capital, which has a population of about 30,000 people and is not accessible by road. Really. If you get on the main drag in Juneau—and there’s only one—and drive as far as you can, you will eventually come to a sign that says “end of the road”—and it will be. The road stops and there is thick forest beyond. If you want to steal a car in Juneau you would have to make ferry reservations to get it out of town. You can put your car on the ferry, and within a day of sailing north you will come to a town with a road that, with a day or two of solid driving and good tires, will get you to Anchorage, Alaska’s largest city, with a

population of 300,000—that’s half of all Alaskans. If you get on a southbound ferry with your car, you can get to Seattle in three to four days. So we fly a lot. It’s about a two-and-a-half hour flight from here to Seattle, and over one-and-a-half hours to Anchorage.

This is a long-winded introduction to my comments on the PARC household surveys and how they apply to Alaska. The report states that the households surveyed were in Anchorage, Juneau and Fairbanks—but seven of the nine organizations mentioned are in Anchorage; the other two, including Perseverance Theatre are here in Juneau. For people in Fairbanks to attend a production in Anchorage, they would have to drive six hours each way. For them to come to Juneau to see a performance, they would have to fly to Anchorage and change planes to get here. If the price of theatre tickets is not a barrier to attendance, adding the cost of an airline ticket and hotel certainly is!

Because of this, I feel that the data cannot be as accurate as the data may be for the other communities. However, I believe that if these differences had been factored into the mix, Alaska would have an even higher rate of attendance and participation in the performing arts. For example, I have approximately 2,500 K-12 students scheduled to attend InReach programs at our theatre this season—a number that may not seem impressive on the surface but represents about 44 percent of the students served by the Juneau School District. According to one web source, the Denver Public School system serves about 72,000 students, so the equivalent percentage would be over 31,000 students.

Still, even with all of my crankiness about Alaska being so misunderstood as a state, there were some survey results that will be very helpful to us in planning our marketing and publicity, particularly with respect to our endowment campaign. The percentage of Alaskan respondents who strongly agree that the performing arts contribute to the local economy is only 32 percent, which is 15 to 34 percentage points lower than any other community value rated by Alaskans. This tells us that we need to get the word out more generally about the economic benefits that our organization brings to the community. This was demonstrated recently when we asked the City and Borough of Juneau to provide 10 percent financial match toward the \$500,000 endowment challenge grant awarded to us by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. The entire rationale put forth by the

assembly members supporting the funding was financial—the \$4.2 million we’ve injected into the local economy from sources outside Alaska since 1990, the \$1.23 million we’ve brought in from Anchorage sources within the same time frame, etc. This information was the tipping point for awarding us the funding, with little mention of artistic merit. So getting that information out to the wider Alaskan community could have a significant impact on our fundraising efforts.

There were other things about the survey that I felt were very telling and true about the Alaska that I know and love. A high number of Alaskans surveyed (76 percent) believe that the performing arts increase cultural understanding. We believe that art contributes to the quality of our and our children’s lives. And we believe that the effect of arts education on children is immeasurable. While on tour to Southwestern Alaska last March, a region whose indigenous population is mostly Yup’ik Eskimo, I recognized the woman who was translating our work into Yup’ik. She also recognized me—I had taught her in an artist-in-schools program in her village, Nunapitchuk, when I first came to Alaska. She told me how much the residency had meant to her, done for her, and that it was something she would never forget. That residency was only three days long, in the fall of 1979, and this was the first time we’d seen each other since. The arts may mean even more to us because of our long distances and isolation.

Another noteworthy result of the survey was the high rate of those Alaskans who are involved themselves in artistic endeavors. One of the effects of isolation is the need to create, the need to connect to others, and the need for entertainment—particularly during those long dark nights of winter. The line between civilian and artist feels less distinct here, and the tribal cultures native to this state have a rich and generous history of storytelling, dance and song that lives on in the present. The mix in Juneau is diverse—the independent souls who came to Alaska for adventure, and who pride themselves on their individuality; the members of traditional cultures indigenous to the state who have a spiritual connection to this land and that value the well-being of the group over the benefit of any one individual; and the many others who are Alaskans either by choice or chance, and they stay because there is something in the relentless beauty of the unforgiving landscape that feeds the spirit, something that encourages, or maybe even provokes, art.

PITTSBURGH

Rob Zellers, director of education and outreach, Pittsburgh Public Theater

My own experience and intuition, based on 16 years as education director and three seasons of talking to subscribers while working on our telemarketing campaign, compares very favorably with the PARC results.

The survey data regarding the value of the arts in the community (Section 4, “Value to the Community”) is most

welcome. They come as no surprise to institutional education directors and those who participate in our programs. In addition to our love of the art itself, I have found that theatre, dance, symphony and opera education directors as a group believe that what we do reaches beyond the time spent in the theatre and has lasting value for both the individuals we touch and the communities in which we live. The talkbacks and lectures, the

classes, the school partnerships—the many opportunities to watch, listen, participate and collaborate—all make great contributions to an individual’s and a community’s quality of life. In addition, students and teachers who participate in our programs attest to increased cultural understanding, improved critical thinking and creativity, and a link between attendance/participation in our education outreach activities and an overall improvement in school performance.

The arts-in- and arts education communities have done a fine job publicizing similar findings in the past, and I frequently use such data to underscore the importance of the Public Theater’s education and outreach efforts. The PARC results will supply welcome additional ammunition for both grant proposals and budget meetings.

I am somewhat disturbed by the discrepancy between respondents’ estimations of the value of the arts in their own lives versus the arts’ value to the community (Section 3, “Value to the Individual”). Over the years, I have noticed that many respondents speak highly of the value of the arts, especially in the development of children (it’s a rare individual who would say that the arts are a *negative* influence); they like to know that arts institutions exist and that other people attend, and they often send their own children, but don’t themselves attend or support the arts (pages 9 and 35 of the report). We need to be aware and vigilant regarding this phenomenon. Most school principals speak highly of the importance of the arts but, pressured to spend more time preparing their students for standardized tests, are forced to cut these programs. Tickets to arts events, and the buses that bring students to them, are deemed too expensive. Interscholastic sports serve fewer kids but often escape the

budget cuts. On the civic level, Pittsburgh recently built an enormous and expensive new jail while concurrently cutting funding for summer and school arts programs. Much is made of the high cost of professional sports tickets and the extravagant salaries of athletes, yet even as small a market as Pittsburgh supports three professional teams and two new sports stadiums that cost local taxpayers over \$450 million. No matter how loudly respondents laud the arts’ contributions to their communities, when funding decisions are made, this support for the arts can be hard to find. The PARC study data will further help the arts community and arts educators make their case.

The data that I find most surprising is the age data. While it is interesting to see empirical results that contradict the “graying of the audience” phenomenon, I still see far more gray heads than otherwise in Pittsburgh’s theatres and concert halls. Or at best, I see a mix of the old and the young—retirees and student groups. The figures cited in the PARC results for “under 25” attendees would seem in my experience to indicate patrons who are *significantly* under 25, attending as part of a school group (it might be interesting to see the difference between attendees *under* 18 and those *between* 18 and 25, for example). Whenever I attend an arts event in Pittsburgh—be it theatre, opera, ballet or the symphony—I am witness to this same pattern. As the study’s sample base expands to further cities, I would be most interested to see whether this pattern continues.

The PARC data is a formidable addition to the incredibly complex equation that faces all arts educators and administrators. Ascertaining the impact of arts organizations on the community is an ongoing process, and this study sheds welcome new light on the problem.

Read the PARC report, [The Value of the Performing Arts in Five Communities: A Comparison of 2002 Household Survey Data in Alaska, Cincinnati, Denver, Pittsburgh and Seattle](http://www.operaamerica.org/parc/CrossSite.pdf). If the above link is not active on your screen, cut and paste this URL into your browser: <http://www.operaamerica.org/parc/CrossSite.pdf> .

CENTERPIECE TOPIC CURATORS

If you would like to contribute an idea for a *Centerpiece* topic, please notify the appropriate curator or contact:

- ❖ *Marketing*
Barbara Geeson Watson, director of audience development, Center Stage, bwatson@centerstage.org
- ❖ *Development*
Dawn Rains, director of development, Seattle Repertory Theatre, dawnr@seattlerep.org
- ❖ *Education*
Daniel Renner, director of education, Denver Center Theatre Company, renner@dcpa.org
- ❖ *Governance*
Judy Hansen, trustee, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, hansenjudy1@aol.com
- ❖ *Topical Issues*
Email TCG’s **Chris Shuff** at cshuff@tcg.org