



Arts Learning in Dallas

*A Report on the Key Person Interviews
for the
Dallas Arts Learning Initiative*

*A Collaboration
among*

*Wolf, Keens & Company
Alan S. Brown & Associates
Annenberg Institute for School Reform
Big Thought*

May 2006

Key Person Interview Research

Executive Summary

Background

The researchers conducted 23 telephone interviews with individuals identified by Big Thought with the intention of reaching a cross-section of civic and cultural leaders as well as educators. The purpose of the interviews was to gather qualitative data about how the City views itself and where arts education fits into the future vision for Dallas.

Findings and Observations

- ***Future of Dallas:*** The interviewees displayed a strong sense of optimism about Dallas' future and its ability to continue to grow and prosper. This is a significant shift from past years, according to interviewees. Arts and cultural projects figured in the way interviewees documented their optimism – the Arts District, for example was cited by many, as was the Trinity River Corridor Project with its series of Calatrava bridges.
- ***Role of the arts:*** Yet the interviewees for the most part did not believe that their own understanding of the importance of the arts to Dallas' future was widely shared by most leaders. Because the expansion of the Arts District and the unfolding of the Trinity River Project will be major, visible civic accomplishments, this view could change in the future. This is especially true since Dallas is a city that celebrates great building projects.
- ***The schools and arts education:*** There is guarded optimism about the Dallas Independent School District, especially among educators, and a lot of praise

for the Superintendent and what he is attempting to accomplish. However, the importance of arts learning within the larger context of challenges facing DISD is not on many people's priority list. Big Thought is seen as an organization that can help in making people more aware of the importance of arts learning and it was generally given high marks from those who are familiar with its programs and activities.

- ***Distribution of arts learning resources:*** There was a consensus that arts learning resources and opportunities are not distributed evenly across the City. While many interviewees pointed to race as a factor, several pointed out that the issue was as much economic as racial.

Implications

- *To the extent that the long-term sustainability of the Dallas Arts Learning Initiative and Big Thought depend on the support of local leadership, great effort and resources have to be invested in a focused and compelling message.*
- *Helping to solve the challenges of the Dallas Independent School District is a theme that will resonate with local leaders.*
- *Bridging the gaps between the haves and the have nots is another important element of a compelling message.*
- *Given the fascination with building projects, providing for a physical location for a downtown arts education center could give the project and/or the organization more visibility.*

Background

The researchers conducted 23 telephone interviews with individuals identified by Big Thought in consultation with the research team, including civic and business leaders as well as educators. The purpose of the interviews was to gather qualitative data about how the City views itself and where arts education fits into the future vision for Dallas.

In selecting interviewees, the intention was to reach a cross-section of civic and cultural leaders. Many of the individuals who were interviewed had connections to arts and culture and specific cultural organizations. However, interviewees were also asked to compare their responses to what they expected their peers or colleagues would say.

A Big Thought representative made an initial call to invite participation. Once the researchers scheduled a call, an interview of between 20 and 45 minutes was conducted. Interviewees were assured that their individual comments would be kept confidential and were not for attribution.

Findings

There is a sense of optimism about the future of Dallas.

Among many interviewees, there is a consistent sense that after some years of stagnation, Dallas is going through a period of significant growth and the arts and culture is playing a role in that. Among examples cited are the further development of the Arts District and the Trinity River Corridor Project anchored by Calatrava bridges.

Many interviewees also commented that because Dallas is a young city, and because people are welcomed, it is easier to be a significant player in the cultural arena (as a trustee, volunteer, or donor). While this comment was echoed by many, it is important to note that it came primarily from interviewees who are white and major players who were mentioned were also exclusively white.

These views are tempered by an acknowledgement of some concerns about cultural development. For example, the Arts District is noted as characteristic of how Dallas does development. It is a major project that involves capital construction. Much less thought has been given to what goes in the buildings that

are built and whether there is sufficient support for the ongoing infrastructure of arts and culture.

In this context, interviewees point out, except for the arts high school that gets a building in the district, there is no thought to the role of arts education in the same way there was in the development of Lincoln Center and many other performing arts complexes.

Awareness of the importance of the arts is mixed.

Many of the interviewees articulated a central role for the arts in their view of Dallas' future. They were quick to point out, however, that their view was probably not the most commonly held one among civic leaders. Their sense was that there is a disconnect between a leadership group that sees the arts as critical to the future of Dallas and those who don't pay much attention to the arts.

That is beginning to change, some interviewees suggested, especially as certain arts organizations are seen to be succeeding on a national and international stage. But the arts are not universally regarded as integral to the City's identity as they are in a place like San Francisco or New York. Again, the Trinity River Corridor Project could change that as the arts are integrated into a new vision and identity for the City.

Dallas Independent School District is seen as pivotal.

One of the most commonly reported challenges facing Dallas, according to interviewees, is "repairing the public schools." This was frequently identified as a key issue, although the degree of familiarity with what is going on in DISD varies. Many of those with the most negative impressions are informed by media reports. Those closest to the schools – especially the teachers interviewed – tell a more balanced story. However, even among this sub-group, it is clear that there is much work to be done and that arts education is only one of a long list of issues that need to be addressed.

It is important to note that within this context, Big Thought is frequently given high marks and there is recognition of its contribution to improving arts education in the District. Big Thought's ability to address substantive issues in arts education as well as raising its visibility as an important area of focus is also noted.

Those interviewees who talked about the Superintendent give him very high marks. His own statements about the importance of the arts in making Dallas the best urban school district in the country are compelling. He has a greater understanding of the details of the DALI initiative than one usually observes among superintendents who are discussing an arts initiative.

The resonance of arts education is limited.

Even with the high marks afforded Big Thought, arts education in general has even less resonance with leadership across the board, though those who talk about it are passionate. For many, it is seen as something that is a “nice to have” rather than a “need to have” component of an improved school district.

Within the mix of issues facing the schools, there doesn’t seem to be any consistency in the value placed on arts learning relative to other issues the schools face, especially among the non-school leaders who were interviewed. Some think it is very important, and others feel that other challenges outweigh the need for more arts education in the schools. More work would need to be done to get the Superintendent’s message and that of Big Thought embraced by a broader leadership group.

In that context, it is interesting to note that few interviewees made a connection between arts learning and audience building. This is often a common refrain among leaders in other communities about why arts education is so important.

The role of race and income

Race and racial politics colors much of what goes on in Dallas. The shift in population from African-American to Hispanic is an important demographic factor that people talk about as it has had and will continue to have a major impact on the power structure.

Many interviewees point to income levels as a key source of disparity in the availability of arts learning resources. Several, including the teachers interviewed, suggested that economics plays an even more central role than race. They point to a growing middle class of African Americans and Hispanics as an indication of the shifting nature of the problem. In this view, concerns about day care, transportation, and program costs become considerably more significant.

Appendix A

List of Interviewees

The following individuals were interviewed in connection with this component of the research. Affiliations are provided for information only and were accurate at the time of the sessions.

<i>Naomi Aberly</i>	Community Volunteer
<i>Gigi Antoni</i>	Executive Director, Big Thought
<i>Jon Dahlander</i>	Director of Brand Management, Dallas Independent School District
<i>Don Drewry</i>	Youth Services Manager, Dallas Park & Recreation
<i>Laurie Evans</i>	Director, Dallas Public Library
<i>Roxanne Franco</i>	Teacher, Dallas Independent School District
<i>Elva Griffin</i>	Teacher, Dallas Independent School District
<i>Jeremy Halbreich</i>	CEO, American Consolidated Media
<i>Howard Hallam</i>	President, Ben E. Keith Company
<i>Dr. Michael Hinojosa</i>	Superintendent, Dallas Independent School District

<i>Ronnie Jesse</i>	Cultural Programs Manager, City of Dallas Office of Cultural Affairs
<i>Hank Lawson</i>	Executive Director, Southfair Community Development Corporation
<i>Carlos Munguia</i>	President, F&M Bank
<i>Ray Nasher</i>	Art Collector; Founder, Nasher Sculpture Center
<i>Bonnie Pittman</i>	Deputy Director, Dallas Museum of Art
<i>Pat Porter</i>	Executive Director, North Texas Business Committee for the Arts
<i>Caron Prothro</i>	Community Volunteer
<i>Howard Rachofsky</i>	Arts Patron
<i>Dennis Raveneau</i>	Teacher, Dallas Independent School District
<i>Tatum Rogers</i>	Director of Marketing and Publicity, Dallas Black Dance Theatre
<i>Catherine Rose</i>	Civic Volunteer
<i>Deedie Rose</i>	Community Volunteer
<i>Lynn Flint Shaw</i>	CEO, Lynn Flint Shaw, M.C.D./C.C.C. & Associates

Appendix B

Key Person Phone Interview Protocol

Questions:

1. How many years have you lived or worked in Dallas/North Texas?
2. When you talk to friends or business associates, what are some of the things you tell them about Dallas that makes it a unique place to live and work?
3. As you look forward over the next decade, what are your greatest hopes for the community?
4. What are the greatest challenges that the community will need to address?
5. How important a role do you think the arts and culture play in a future vision of the community? In what way?
6. Is the development of arts education opportunities for young people important to the work you do? In what way? Do you think others in your field feel as you do?
7. Do you feel the community places enough emphasis on arts learning for young people? How might it be strengthened? Do you think others in your field feel as you do?
8. There is some concern that arts learning resources are not widely or evenly distributed throughout the community. Is this a problem? How might it be addressed?

9. Do you think the [depending on interview (business) (education) (faith-based) community] is sufficiently aware of arts education in Dallas? What can be done to strengthen that awareness? Do you think others in your field feel as you do?