

# Arts Smarts Saskatchewan

## Project Documentation for “Our Voice, Our Land”

Final Report  
June 9, 2009



Ministry of  
Education



# ***Project Information***

## ***“Our Voice, Our Land”***

Project Contact Name: Sherron Burns

Project Dates: May 20 - 22, 2009

School: Living Sky School Division #202

Teacher(s):

Kali Weber, NBCHS (gr 9 -12) - theatre

Paul Suchan, NBCHS (gr. 9 - 12) - music

Kelly Waters, St. Vital (gr. 7 & 8) - dance

Shannon MacFarlane, Spiritwood HS (gr. 8-12) - film

Natana Bartlett, Cando, (gr. 9 - 12) - visual art

# Our Goals

Brief description of your project:

Our primary goal is to bring together artists, arts educators and students with an interest in art – from both First Nation and non-First Nation cultures – to collaborate on an arts process to build relationships and to help us explore the concept “We Are All Treaty People”.

Another goal of the project is to bring the concept to the attention of our community. We do not want to focus just on “issues”, but we hope that by uncovering hidden tensions we can begin to build relationships and promote community.

Artists help us find other ways to express ourselves through metaphor, beauty, and symbol. It challenges perceptions, gives shape to meaning and moves the spirit.



# Artists & Partners

Brief description of your artists:

- Gabriel Yahyahkeekoot (filmmaker)
- Angela Edmunds (filmmaker)
- Michele Sereda (theatre arts)
- Holly Hildebrand (visual art)
- Lyndon Tootosis (visual art & cultural leader)
- Brad Bellegarde (Rap and Hip Hop)

Community partners:

- Fort Battleford
- Office of the Treaty Commission

# Reflection

Why have you chosen to participate in an ArtsSmarts project?

*“The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance.” (Aristotle)*

*“Art is the perpetual motion of illusion. The highest purpose of art is to inspire. What else can you do? What else can you do for any one but inspire them?” (Bob Dylan)*

The ArtsSmart program allows us to interact with artists in a meaningful way. Exploring topics of our choosing, of relevance to our students and our place, through a process as determined by the participants. The financial support and advice provided by SAB is crucial to the success of the projects.

ArtsSmart adds status to Arts Education programs and helps the Director, the Board and our community see the value of our activities.

# Research Question

1. How will working with artists help me better understand the creative process through collaboration when working with students in the classroom?
2. How might my partnership with an artist influence my practice as an Arts Educator?
3. Does the First Nations perspective influence the process of creating and collaborating?

Teachers have responded in various ways to the questions. All responses were positive and identified feelings of being inspired, encouraged and stimulated by working with the artists. Each teacher had many skills to begin with, and so felt an integral part of the planning and the process. They were invited to the April planning meeting and were excused from classes for a day to work with the artists before the students came. This day allowed for relationships to form and so they might truly begin the collaboration as equal partners. The First Nations perspective was certainly an influence in the work - as was the youth perspective. Participants felt free to experiment with all forms. At one point we heard a song created by the students that featured Pow Wow singers, drummers, jazz musicians and Rap - an exciting form of fusion.

# Teacher Quotes

“I believe in approaching tough topics and issues with sincerity, hope and compassion. I believe that the drama piece that we did was just that. It celebrated, it told a story, it showed things in a new light. As a result I got to experience those things as we completed the journey to creating it, and I began to see the issue differently.”



# Teacher Quotes

“The intense focus of exploration in each arts area allowed for student growth to a level not normally attainable in a short time period. Those students who were willing to trust the artists and their methods of process experienced a creative adventure! The setting of the historic Fort naturally inspired consideration of the cultural aspects being examined.”

## **Teacher Quote**

“I hope to challenge them by helping their pieces become less narrative and more conceptual. This experience has challenged me to want to work a lot more in a collective manner, rather than using play text to guide my classes.”

# Student Inquiry

We provided each student with a journal and pen and the artists asked them to make reflections throughout our process. We did not ask for formal evaluations and have not collected their writing. We wanted the journals to feel private and personal. The artists guided their work with students with these two questions in mind:

1. How does partnership with an artist help me gain confidence in expressing my ideas?
2. How might we fuse cultural traditions with contemporary modes of expression?

Artists observed student behavior changing - they were becoming more open, comfortable in the group and willing to take risks with the work. Each seemed excited by the possibilities as represented by each artist and were eager to express themselves in new ways. They met the challenge presented.

# Student Quotes

“I want to do more things like that. I didn't know that all the arts could be put together. It was really fun!”

“I love to write. In the drama group I learned different ways to build a story that I didn't realize were possible.”

## **Student Quotes**

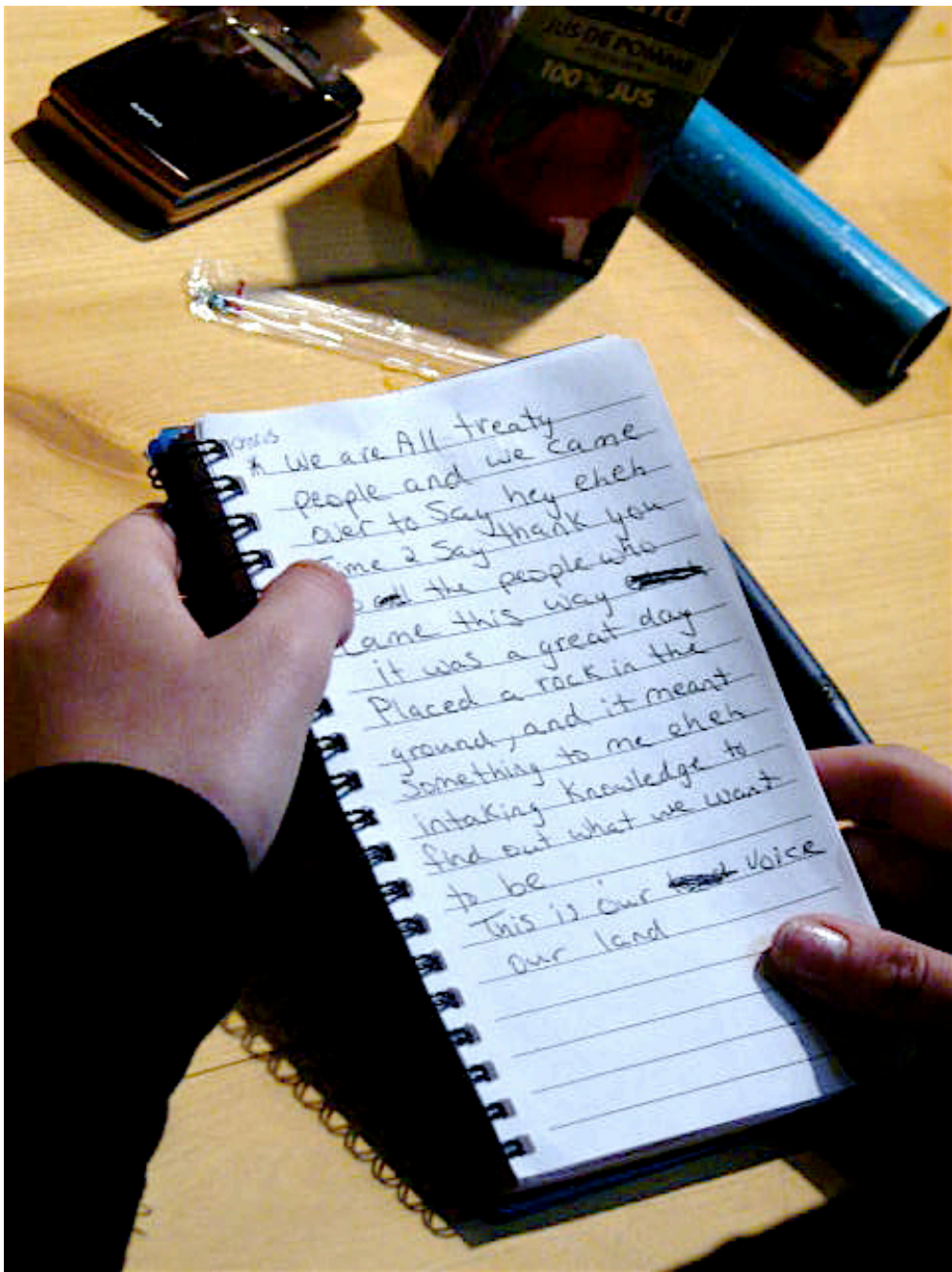
“It made me think in a new way. It definitely impacted my confidence about myself as an artist, and I wasn’t shy about working with other people in my field of creativity.”

“It helped me with my treaty background and taught me lots about the treaties. It taught me lots about our relationships with others and now I think differently about things.”

# Student Quotes

“The way I create my music and art has improved in a big way. Working with different artists changed the way I play guitar and the way I look at music. It was a great experience.”

“It made me confident. I’ m not as shy to sing in front of people I don’ t know and it sounds really cool when you mix different cultural music together.”



We are All Treaty  
 People and we came  
 over to say hey eh eh  
 Time 2 say thank you  
 about the people who  
 came this way  
 it was a great day  
 Placed a rock in the  
 ground, and it meant  
 something to me eh eh  
 intaking knowledge to  
 find out what we want  
 to be  
 This is our ~~land~~ voice  
 our land

# Curriculum Connections

*"Our government is committed to strengthening partnerships between First Nations and non-First Nations people in Saskatchewan in the spirit of the Treaties," Deputy Premier and Education Minister Ken Krawetz said. "As such, we are committed to ensuring that instruction in the history and content of the Treaties is mandatory in the provincial Kindergarten through Grade 12 system."*

*(Government of Saskatchewan website: <http://www.gov.sk.ca/news?newsId=5a502966-90b4-43a2-89b5-b6d492905f7b>)*

Judy Bear, a Traditional Knowledge Keeper, helped us get started by bringing teaching about Treaty and the history of the relationships formed. She also introduced various concepts about First Nations Worldview.

Students were respectful of her and receptive to the messages. We wanted to provide a context for the work and to set the stage for further discussions between participants.



# **Student Thoughts on Treaty**

“The introduction at the beginning was very interesting and made me want to start right away. Throughout the two days I just kept the Treaty story in my mind.”

“Yes (I think differently), because I thought only Indians were Treaty. I made many new friends there.”

# ***Big Ideas about Artistic Process:***

The Arts Ed curriculum features:

Creative and critical thinking

Problem solving

Inquiry

Connecting ideas

Envisioning

Exploring

Stretching beyond & taking risks

New perspectives, multiple views

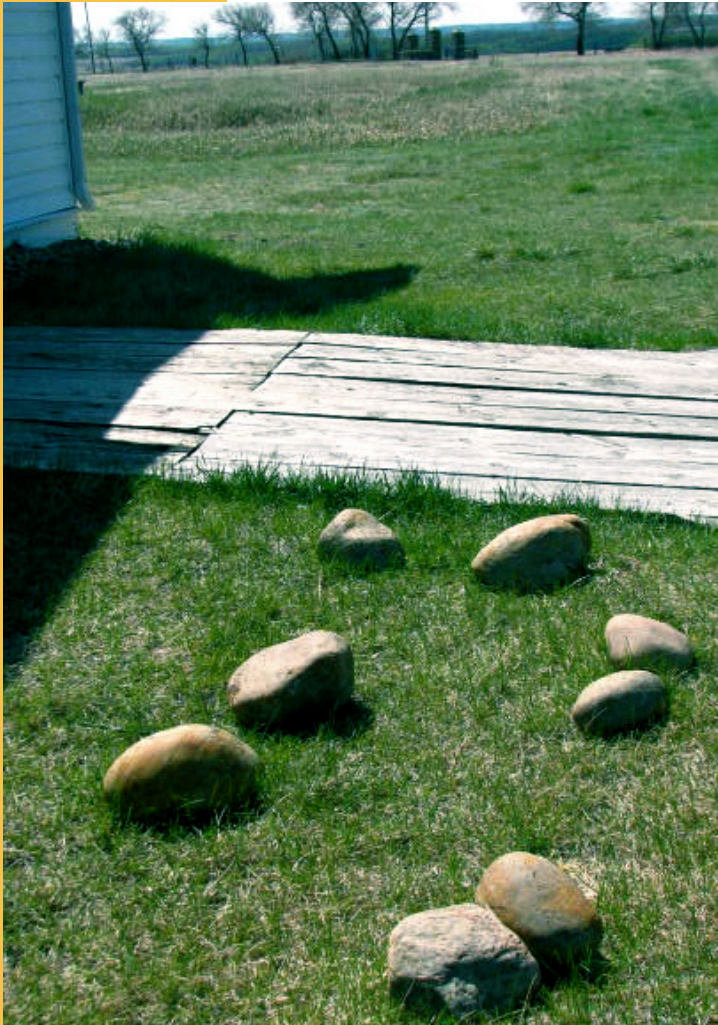
Unanticipated possibilities



# *An Historic Meeting Place*



# Stories in Stones



All participants were invited to bring a stone with them - a stone selected from a place special to them. They were also asked to think about a story they could share, using their stone as a connection.

Each of the artists incorporated it into their approach with students. Lyndon Tootosis talked about the Grandfather spirits in rocks and our connection to the land. He invited us to place our stones into a Medicine Wheel, or a design or significance to us.

At the end of the two days we reclaimed our stones and took the new story home, so that we might remember the experience.

# Documentation

We are very grateful that ArtsSmart provided a filmmaker, Lisa Unra, who is creating a documentary of the project.

The Arts Education Consultant also documented the process with written work, observations, photographs and video. This will be posted on the Living Sky School Division website and shared with our schools.

The News Optimist attended the end event and was provided with a full story and photos by the Arts Ed. Consultant. It was printed in the local paper.



Fusing the new and the old... (click to play)







# *Friends through Song*



# Mid-Project Reflection

- This was a three day project - only two with students - and we were working through Process the entire time. We discussed goals, strengths, issues and problem solved all throughout. Reflection was key to the entire process.



# What we found...

“Thank you for including me in the project as I enjoyed it immensely and found it a great learning opportunity, not only about art but about myself.”

“I was humbled by the great ideas and enthusiasm... limitations... struggles to communicate... fear... energy of expression... commitment...wide variety of emotion... and the quality of artistic voice.”

“It was fun! I met some great people and tried new things.”

“It was interesting how it all came together. Who could have known?”

“It really challenged me to see my work in a new way.”

“We are ALL treaty people. We feel this way when we make friendships and express ourselves together!”

# Tell Your Story

People are interested in what we did because we approached the question “What does it mean for us ALL to be Treaty people?”

We did not deal with issues of race or historical wrongs - we shared our stories about who we are and how we connect to this land. Some told stories about their culture, some imagined people of long ago and others wrote lyrics of hope and joy. The event was positive, happy and alive with creative energy.

The story has been in the newspaper, shared at the board table and in each home of students who participated. It has been blogged about (on the Arts 2.0 Ning) and will be featured on the Arts Alive website for our division. Our flags are displayed at the Student Hall of Fame celebration.



# *Last Thoughts*

## Problem Solving:

- one of our artists got very sick with the flu and could not come, so we used only 5. The artist who was sick contributed to the overall plan however.
- Two teachers had to drop out in the last week and we had to find replacements. A teacher from Cando was able to bring students at the last minute. As well trained drummers and singers, they added a lot to the process.
- We originally thought we'd have about 90 people but in the end had about 60. This turned out to be in our favor as we would have run out of room. The number of people seemed perfect.

## **Wonderful Moments:**

- the National Fort was a beautiful and meaningful location in which to work. We could use a combination of outdoor and inside and had the historic setting as a context.
- Cando drummers were a last minute participants but they added a layer to the work we could not have anticipated. A beautiful surprise.
- The 5 Arts Educators were a meaningful part of the project. The teachers were not there as “managers of students”; they were artists, mentors, creators and facilitators in the collaboration
- Raising the tipi together and placing our stones helped add an aspect of ritual that contributed to the meaning of the event.



# Project Statistics

How many artists were involved in your project?	<b>5 (plus one who could not attend)</b>
How many schools were included?	4 (there were 5 classes)
How many students participated?	50
How many teachers were involved?	5
How many volunteers assisted?	4
How many community organizations participated?	2
How many businesses contributed in some way?	5

# *Financial Report*

A Financial report is attached as a Word doc.

**The expenses were \$ 11,302.51**

**The revenue was \$ 11,302.51**

**We received additional support from Battleford Allied Arts Council, the Office of the Treaty Commission, North Battleford Culture & Rec. and Living Sky School Division. Both Culligan Water and Super A Foods gave discounts.**

# *Feedback on This Template*

The template is clear and concise, though a bit time consuming. It is a useful way to organize feedback. I cannot use it for the Financial report, however, I was able to make it suit my needs.

Thank you for the support provided to us by the Saskatchewan Arts Board and by Dianne Warren and Carol Greyeyes. Your assistance was invaluable!