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AFA 2012-13

Workshop Paper 1

### Arts & Community Symposium

I attended the “Arts & Community Symposium,” hosted by Westminster College on Tuesday, October 23 and Wednesday, October 24. The seminar included several break-out sessions, led by professionals from around the country. The sessions I attended included “El Sistema: History, Theory, and Impact on Venezuelan Youth,” presented by Mark Churchill (10:00 am - 12:00 pm on Oct. 23), “Community Arts Learning: An exploration of the programs and projects of the center for Community Arts Partnerships, Columbia College Chicago,” presented by David Flatley (2:00 – 4:00 pm on Oct 23), and “A Conversation,” with Mark Churchill and Dudley Cocke, the closing dialogue session and wrap-up to the event (7:00 – 9:30 pm on Oct 24).

This symposium was especially relevant to me as a dance teacher and artist, as it focused on the many issues facing educators as they look for ways to make meaningful community connections, help students appreciate the ‘real-world’ value of community projects and internships in their field *before* graduation, and put into practice personal philosophies and perspectives on arts and community partnerships. The first session, with Mr. Churchill, was fascinating because he really revolutionized the values of the Venezuelan culture through his music program. In a highly impoverished country, where few students have access to quality education or motivation to actively pursue it, he implemented a powerful music program. Through the arts, the children learned values of dedication and perseverance, gained confidence in themselves and their abilities, and brought pride and a sense of accomplishment to their families and towns. It was remarkable; I was inspired to continue seeking ways to empower my own students, through their exploration of the communicative potential of dance.

In the second workshop, Mr. Flatley used active learning strategies to engage the participants in meaningful discussion about the importance of community outreach and connection. He had butcher paper covering each table, with a leading question written in the middle. Each contributor wrote his/her responses and discussed the issue, then changed tables. The big 'take-away' I gained from this session was that community partnerships must include *reciprocity*. Although this may seem obvious, it was good for me to be reminded that, in all partnerships of all kinds, both or all parties must be gaining something beneficial. Otherwise, the partnership becomes one-sided and not meaningful, or, in the worst case scenario, breeds resentment and negativity. I also appreciated Flatley's broad view on the possibilities of community partnerships; he suggested some I had not previously considered.

In the closing session, the gentlemen talked about their lives' works and how, by fully investing in the idea of community partnerships, we can, in fact, change the world (or at least little corners of it). I was inspired by their passion, commitment, and stories. What all of these presenters had in common was that they continually asked 'why not?' rather than saying 'I can't.' In other words, they kept expanding their own ideas of what might be possible, rather than stopping once they reached a first tier goal. As teachers, I think it is so important for us to remember to continue pushing boundaries – for ourselves and our students.