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When the Twain Meet

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When the Twain Meet

Klare Shaw

According to some, “the word twain has its origin in the Old English *twegen*, meaning two. The phrase never the twain shall meet was used by Rudyard Kipling, in his *Barrack-room ballads*, 1892: ‘Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.’” Kipling uses a colonial lens to bemoan the lack of commonality and accord between the British and the indigenous East Indian. Until my recent trip to New Mexico I often felt that same lack of accord between arts funders and education funders.

I am responsible for a portion of both portfolios at Barr Foundation. Annually I weighed available time and money to determine whether to attend the conferences of Grantmakers for Education (GFE) or Grantmakers in the Arts (GIA). The decision was even more onerous in years when the conferences were within days of one another. Finally in 2007, arts education had recovered from a vague feeling within GIA that it was passé, and there was enough momentum for a working group within the organization. That working group helped plan the collaborative effort in New Mexico that began with the GFE conference at the Tamaya Resort and Spa in Santa Ana, continued on to the joint Arts and Education Weekend in Santa Fe, and culminated with the GIA conference in Taos. So armed with my two sets of clothes, (somewhat more conservative for GFE, and more colorful and hand-made for GIA), I set off for New Mexico.

It was a refreshing time that was both affirming and informative. Conference attendees were treated to an increased artistic presence at GFE: The moving poetry of Jimmy Santiago Baca; an update on the comprehensive “Big Thought: the Dallas Arts Learning Initiative (DALI)” that has garnered support from the Ford and Wallace foundations; and an intriguing summary of the role of the arts at Alma d’Arte, a New Mexico charter high school. Fast forward to the day and a half in Santa Fe where funders from both camps (arts and education) joined together to share and learn. In Santa Fe a highlight was the presentation by Sarah Cunningham of the National Endowment for the Arts who gave a memorable talk about the importance of arts education in modern day curriculum reform and U.S. competitiveness. During that weekend I was also struck by the large gulf between the two fields. I overheard an arts funder who did not know the size of the city’s public education budget, nor what the relationship was between the union and school administrators. There were also education funders who

had no knowledge of the rich history of research that underscores the efficacy and desirability of arts education for youth. Thanks to Richard Deasy, Dennie Wolf, Judith Keenan, and their colleagues there is an extraordinary body of work proving the importance of the arts to learning, but still doubt prevails.

We then went on to an impressive GIA conference in Taos that was infused with American Indian culture, great visual art, and a prevailing spirit of grace. The conference site visits to the Taos Pueblo and the Institute of American Indian Art left me with residual images of incredible landscapes and memories of the breathtaking work of Native sculpture Roxanne Swentzell.

Finally, at the end of the week I was left with a feeling of enormous gratitude. I continue to be appreciative to the conference planners for this amazing experience. It confirmed that I am happy to be working at the Barr Foundation with an executive director, Marion Kane, and trustees that sustain a holistic approach to funding. The foundation’s understanding of networks, knowledge management, relationships, and the system dynamics among elements of the nonprofit sector have allowed me to be part of a wonderful team that does important work. I am delighted to be able to help support arts education in Boston so that children and youth in our city benefit from a rich educational experience that allows them to observe, experience, create, and integrate as they bring new eyes to learning.

Ultimately in life, as in the end of the full Kipling quotation, the polarity is shown to be false and the two must become one.

*But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, tho’ they come from
the ends of the earth!*

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