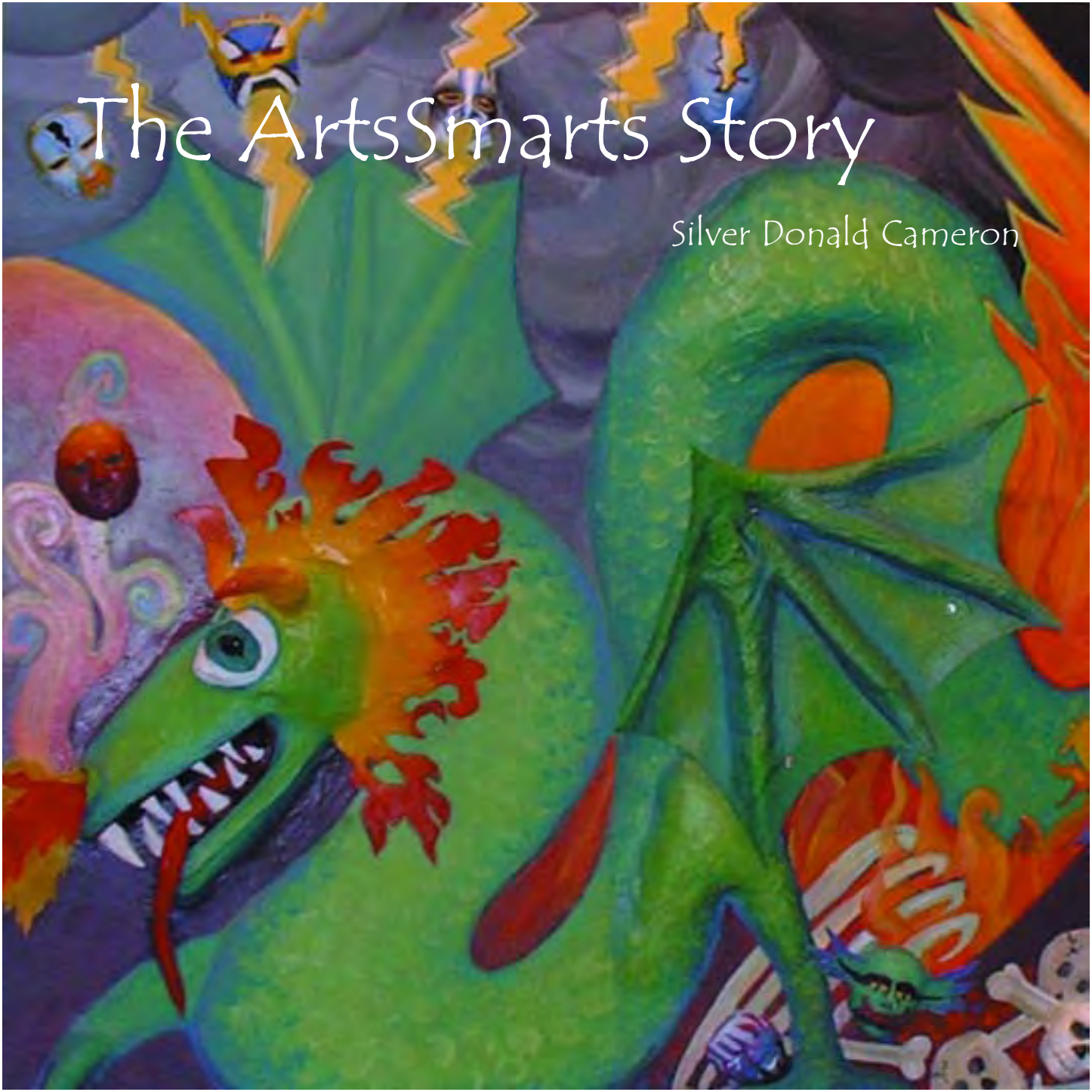
The ArtsSmarts Story

Silver Donald Cameron



The ArtsSmarts Story

When Silver Donald Cameron, one of Canada's most creative and engaging writers, agreed to document the ArtsSmarts Story, we could not have been more pleased. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation developed and is funding ArtsSmarts in order that artists might bring a new way of learning to children in schools and communities across Canada. It took very little time for Donald, through his warm way with children and his keen ability to observe the world and all of its nuances, to understand the magic of creative learning through art as well as the value and potential of "art-infused" education. He shares that magic here.

The Canadian Conference of the Arts has been an essential contributor to the development of ArtsSmarts and acts as the National Secretariat for the program. For more information on the CCA, please visit www.ccarts.ca.

— *The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation*

Photographs courtesy of ArtsSmarts Partners across Canada.

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Cover and this page: Mural project in mixed media *(detail)* by artist Joey Mallet and students at Maple Creek Middle School in Coquitlam, BC. The mural was part of an ArtStarts in Schools project.

Sydney Vrana raises his baton. The classroom falls silent.

Vrana brings the baton down, and the light, silvery chime of a plucked dulcimer floats on the air. The recorders pick up the melody. The percussion follows: drums, triangle, cymbals and shaken gourds, then xylophone, lute and tambourine. Measured and ethereal, the music evokes a stately dance of robed figures in mid-air: imperturbable, decorous and serene.

This grave and haunting music is not what one would expect from Grade Five students in the unprepossessing English-speaking suburb of Candiac, near Montreal. This is not a music class, either. These students are studying history: the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. They know about the feudal system and the dominant position of the Church. They have studied mediaeval calligraphy — it's "cool," they say — and they know how modern letters evolved from Aramaic and Hebrew sources.

Sydney Vrana adapted this music from a composition by a 16th-century German named Hans Neusidler. Now he takes out his guitar strikes a chord, nods, and the students sing in harmony:

If you intend thus to disdain, it does the more enrapture me,
And even so, I still remain a lover in captivity.

This is a love song, the incomparable *Greensleeves*, published in 1580. The students know that such secular music only became acceptable as the Church's influence waned. And if you ask them, they will tell you that the music takes them spiralling back in time, lets them touch the minds of another era.

Sydney Vrana is at St. Raymond School because of ArtsSmarts, a remarkable three-year-old national program funded by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, administered by the Canadian Conference of the Arts, and delivered by ten Partner organizations across the country. In Candiac, the ArtsSmarts Partner is the Riverside School Board.

Sydney Vrana at St. Raymond School, QC.

The objectives of ArtsSmarts

ArtsSmarts has four intertwined objectives:

- to build long-term, local partnerships that link young people, artists or arts organizations, schools, and the broader community;
- to provide opportunities for young people to actively participate in the arts;
- to enhance appreciation of the importance of culture and the arts;
- to enable schools/community organizations to explore ways to integrate arts activities in non-arts subject areas, aligned with provincial curriculum where possible.

The fourth objective is the crucial "action" item, and in practice ArtsSmarts has focussed its attention on innovative ways to integrate arts activities into the daily work of students who are not specifically studying art — integrating music, for instance, into the study of history. But innovation in a complex system always has intricate and often-surprising results. Education is a complex web of relationships encompassing everything from janitorial services to ideology, from bus schedules to pedagogy. Change one feature, and the effects ripple out through the whole web.

In this sense, ArtsSmarts is a consciously subversive program. In its first year, during which it funded more than 100 projects in schools from coast to coast, ArtsSmarts stressed the phrase "breaking down walls" — the walls between "schools and communities, the education sector and the cultural sector, artists and teachers, arts organizations and community foundations; the walls around subject areas in the curriculum; the walls around artistic disciplines; the IQ walls around measurements of learning; the walls that stereotype children among their peers and as students."

Breaking down walls — erasing divisions — means imagining new wholes, seeing relationships which reach over and through the walls. It means a different pedagogy. Ultimately, it means a different conception of knowledge and a different manner of learning.

In the foyer of Halfmoon Bay Community School, on BC's Sunshine Coast, a local musician and a doctor are playing guitars and singing — "King of the Road," "Side by Side." In the gym, an adult class is doing yoga. But most of the people here are clustered around the wall of the foyer.

This is an unveiling. The school's Grade Six and Seven students have made an innovative map of their community — a large ceramic mural, seven feet wide and five feet high, composed of four-inch tiles. Each of the thirty children has created six tiles — researched their contents, sculpted them, painted, glazed and mounted them. Hanging in the foyer, the finished mural will be a permanent adornment to the school.

The map mixes the past and the present, the natural and the man-made, showing whatever features the students found important. To identify those features, the students went on research trips with biologists, local historians, teachers, artists, officials from the BC Ministry of Forests and from Environment Canada. The football field, which is very important, is marked on the map by a huge soccer ball and a boot. Stores, homes and symbols of native culture are on the map, along with sea life, family dogs, bald eagles, bear paw-prints and bike trails. So are the "daddy boats," the long-vanished steamships which once carried commuting fathers to Vancouver for the work-week.

The high point of the evening is a gathering in the library — scores of parents and children and community volunteers. The MC is Sue Lamb. Like Saskatchewan, BC has a Community Schools program which supports co-ordinators in selected schools to ensure that the school offers programs to serve the whole community, not just the children. Sue Lamb is Halfmoon Bay's Community School co-ordinator.

The mural is about the importance of art in the schools, says Sue Lamb, but it is also about paying real attention to what's around you. And it's about teamwork. It's about parents and teachers helping the students work together in the creation of something both lovely and lasting.

The kids present flowers and a gift to Kez Sherwood, the young ceramic artist who guided them through the process, and fired the tiles. It is her birthday, and the crowd sings *Happy Birthday.*

"I am so proud of you guys," Kez tells the students, her two-year-old son clinging to her long black evening gown. "I'm just amazed at what you've done. And I am so proud of this community."

Community Map project at Halfmoon Bay Community School, BC.

Maps, creativity and curriculum

One could define a map as a representation of the important features in a given stretch of terrain. But that raises a question. What features are important, and who decides?

A school curriculum is the prescribed body of knowledge which is to be mastered by the student. It is also a map of knowledge, says Ken Robinson, professor of art education at the University of Warwick and chairman of the British National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education. The curriculum says to young people, "This is how knowledge is organized."

In most Western industrial nations, Robinson says, the curriculum is dominated by three messages which stand like mountains on the map. One: there are ten subjects in the world. Two: language, mathematics and science are the really important subjects. Three: the arts and sciences are completely different things. A fourth might be: knowledge comes in tidy, hermetically-sealed containers.

These messages are, at best, obsolete. The curriculum they embody is reminiscent of the map which confused the great economist E.F. Schumacher in Soviet Leningrad. He saw four large churches nearby, but only one appeared on the official map in his hand. "Ah", said his guide, "we don't show churches on our maps." Schumacher pointed at the one church which was prominently displayed on the map.

"That is a museum, not what we call a 'living church,'" said the guide. "It is only the 'living churches' that we don't show."

This Orwellian moment led Schumacher to realize that "all through school and university I had been given maps of life and knowledge on which there was hardly a trace of many of the things that I most cared about and that seemed to me to be of the greatest possible importance to the conduct of my life." Among the most prominent omissions was art, which appeared "only as self-expression or as escape from reality."

But the haunting music of Candiac and the map in Halfmoon Bay seem more like an escape *into* reality — an escape from the airless abstractions of the traditional schoolroom into the green, fluid reality of natural and social life. An escape from passive absorption to active participation. An escape from a stale, archaic curriculum into a joyful, impassioned quest for understanding.

From time to time, said the novelist Margaret Laurence, "the world, like a snake, sheds its skin." The traditional curriculum maps the cast-off skin of the world. It was designed to produce the work force needed for a vanished industrial economy — 80% manual labourers, 20% managers and professionals. It assumes that intelligence is shown primarily by verbal and mathematical reasoning. In the post-industrial economy, says Ken Robinson, the great adventures — new media, telemedicine, biotechnology, entertainment, software, dozens more — are "built on a fusion of art, science and technology." The people who undertake these adventures are "people who can adapt to change, who can innovate, who can communicate, who can work in teams and roll with the changes."

The sweeping shift to an information economy has drastically changed our view of knowledge and intelligence. Teachers, schools, publications and libraries were once the acknowledged gatekeepers of information. But the gates have been overwhelmed. The world has become an ocean of information.What we require from the educational system now is tools for navigation — methods of analysis, standards of judgement, instruments for critical thinking.

A project like the student map provides an organizing principle for knowledge. We learn what we need to know in order to complete the project. And what we learn is not learned in isolation. The news from Halfmoon Bay is not that the familiar disciplines are irrelevant, but that they are best absorbed and most valued when they are integrated and applied.

To lay out their map, the students in Halfmoon Bay needed to understand concepts of ratio, scale, and geometry, otherwise known as mathematics. To determine its contents, they had to accumulate masses of data from history, geography, ecology, economics, biology, sociology. To complete it, they had to grasp the physical and chemical properties of paints, clays and glazes. Much of this is thoroughly conventional knowledge. But it was mastered in a manner that was exploratory, imaginative and active.

That is the way that creativity works, in pre-schoolers and painters, in physicists and financiers. And it is creativity which is fuelling the most powerful and protracted economic boom we have ever seen, transforming every aspect of our lives. Of all school subjects, however, only the arts are *focussed* on the development of creativity. And that makes the arts central to post-industrial education, whose objective has to be the development of human resources and natural creativity.

Paper maché project, Hazelwood Elementary School, NF.

A brown trout noses into the current, sliding up beside another. The two hang in the cold winter water, moving gently in the sluggish current beneath a thin layer of bright ice. The river bottom is olive-coloured, soft-focussed and dim.

"Look." The guide points at a scrap of masking tape on the glass wall. The handwriting on the tape says "two eggs," with an arrow. These fish are spawning — in the wild — right before the visitors' eyes.

This is the Fluvarium — the "window on the river" — in St. John's, Newfoundland, a lovely hexagonal structure planted right in the Rennies River. This entirely urban river now has the most dense population of trout known anywhere in the world. But just 15 years ago, it was a horrible orange soup of sewage, oil, silt, diapers, mufflers and chemicals, lethal to fish.

The Quidi Vidi-Rennies River Development Foundation, volunteer conservation group, has cleaned up the river, planted trees, removed pipes and culverts, implanted artificial reefs, built fish ladders, and created trails along its entire 3.5 km length. In 10 years, they have made a miracle. The river lives again.

The river's future is being forged a short distance downstream, where it flows — metaphorically — through Pius X School, which stands on the riverbank. For the school's students and teachers, the river is the theme of their learning, and art is their medium.

Enter the school, and you find artist Don Short supervising a group of Grade Six students painting a mural of the river and the surrounding countryside in the stairwell. Because they are doing a science unit on minerals, they know what these rocks are, and why they are that particular shade of brown.

The school virtually bursts with art. A display case shows models of water birds wading or perched on twigs — the river's actual birds, accurately modelled by students working with Ducks Unlimited. They were learning the principles of flight. So was another class which did a stairwell mural of birds, planes, helicopters and hot air balloons — all of them flying above the surface of the river, while the fish and turtles painted by Grade Threes swam below it.

The school is full of volunteers — parents in particular, but also historians, biologists, Fluvarium staffers. Some of the materials came from such donors as Canadian Tire, Kent Building Supplies and a local painting contractor, Triple E Painters. The school's ArtsSmarts co-ordinator, Margaret Best, once donated a batch of paint she had purchased for her kitchen ceiling.

The gym and the library display photographs, ceramic panels, models of dragonflies, collages, fabric hangings, cartoons, cutouts of animals, watercolours, puppets, stained glass windows and clay sculptures of fish. Grade Sixes made a video of the river, with an original poem for its soundtrack. Other students have written and produced plays and songs. Grade Fours wrote river poems on the school's computers, and then designed and constructed their own books. The kindergarten class created a dance.

"The kids get so motivated," says Margaret Best. "They want to get it right. You see them rushing into the library to research the background of what they're doing. It's an alternative to verbal reporting, but it also builds verbal skills. We had a boy with real reading trouble, but he thrived on this — and he wrote a wonderful artist's statement about his work."

The river runs through all of it. The students' love for this river is its security for the future.

Deep learning: the nature of knowledge

Pius X is just one of 40 schools with ArtsSmarts projects supported by the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council. The projects involve 8000 students and 180 artists — not to mention innumerable teachers, parents and citizens. That story is multiplied across the country; in 2000-2001, for example, the activities supported by ArtsSmarts included 37 projects in Portage La Prairie, nearly 100 in British Columbia, 28 in Acadian New Brunswick. In total, ArtsSmarts projects are enriching about 200 Canadian schools, demonstrating the power of art as a vehicle for curriculum delivery.

Part of the curriculum is raw information; students are expected to know the author of *Hamlet*, the names of the continents, the difference between a mean and a median. A deeper layer of curriculum, however, is the understanding of the nature and usefulness of the disciplines themselves — the links between the facts and techniques of the classroom and the realities of the world outside. A student who truly understands the discipline knows that mathematics is an intellectual scalpel, a tool which cuts away the confusing specifics to reveal the essential skeleton of external reality. An equation is another way of stating the information on a graph, and the graph describes a shape, and the shape may be the curve of a roof, the trajectory of a meteor, or the downward trend of a bear market on Wall Street.

For teachers, this level is infinitely more difficult both to teach and to evaluate — and for those purposes, art is a superb vehicle. Artistic endeavours *require* that students go directly to the essence of the discipline. A student who sews a quilt with a Dresden plate pattern — like petals radiating around a central circle — has to understand an array of geometrical shapes which are based in nature. A student cannot write a successful story without understanding how stories are constructed and how they convey meaning.

Some projects come at this issue from the opposite direction: creating art from the principles of the discipline, inviting students to interpret curriculum concepts in art. In Calgary, for instance, a dance troupe called The Tricksters has helped to create dances emulating air movements with students learning about aerodynamics. The students became molecules, moving in the wind. Break-dancing taught them about the duration of musical notes — quarter-notes, eighth-notes, sixteenth-notes. These are fractions, and dancing them made fractions real. Shadow-dancing taught them about light.

Teachers who are deliberately pursuing the deeper levels of learning often combine the use of the arts with other techniques and devices, using the experience of construction to strengthen the students' abilities to analyze and deconstruct.

"The usual emphasis in history is on books, but I'm big into artifacts," says James Kostuchuk, a high-school teacher who is involved with ArtsSmarts projects at Portage Collegiate in Manitoba. "Studying from books is not about risk-taking or anything like that. I'm trying to create a citizen with balance. I want my students to think about things like, 'What are the battles worth fighting?'"

"So I use photocopied readings, and artifacts like flintlock guns and beaver pelts. And of course that ties right into the art we do here. Creating something gives you the skills to deconstruct things that other people have created."

The shadows in a bas-relief respond to the intensity and movement of the sun, Gerry Collins tells a class. As the light changes, the bas-relief reveals "une beauté incroyable," an incredible beauty. That beauty will soon grace the entrance to Vanier School, in Moncton.

This class is being taught in French, and its students are mainly Acadians, whose earliest ancestors arrived in the Maritimes from France when Shakespeare was writing Macbeth. The bas-relief will explore the creativity of the Acadians in the past, the present and the future. Historically, Acadian lives were focussed on physical labour. So their creativity went into the fabrication of tools and household items.

The students have visited Le Musée Acadien, the Centre Culturel Aberdeen, and the archives of the Université de Moncton. Each student had to select and draw five objects. Now Gerry Collins wants to know what items they chose to draw. "Fusil, horloge, cloche avec croix, soufflet, scie à deux", they tell her — rifle, clock, bell with cross, bellows, two-man saw, and many other objects of symbolic value.

"Bon", says Gerry, now we have to think about setting these objects into an artistic composition. The process of composition is like musical composition, and the individual objects are like notes in a melody. In a melody, do you hear a note only once? "Non! Eh bien," we can repeat our images in our composition, and we can alter them when we repeat them. Some of these things look like other things — a bellows could look like a duck, perhaps a fish, "n'est-ce pas"? We can play with the composition, try different things, amuse ourselves. It's supposed to be fun.

She quickly sketches some examples on the board — the shape of a horseshoe echoing across the surface, drops of liquid which could be tears or blood. She gives the students five minutes to play at a composition of their own.

"The first thing I had to do," she says later, "was to dispel the notion that there are artistic people and non-artistic people. We all have emotions, we all react to art, it makes us want to express ourselves. Art is for everybody."

Gerry Collins with students at Vanier School in Moncton, NB.

Deep learning: how knowledge is constructed

The universal nature of art may be among the most important things the Vanier school students learn. But they are learning much else as well — for instance, that their culture is creative and important, and that work and play can be indistinguishable. Dr. Kit Grauer, a professor in the Curriculum Studies Department of the University of British Columbia, is currently studying the effects of arts-in-education programs such as ArtsSmarts. She believes that their impact on students is profound, though difficult to quantify.

"Frankly, I'd be surprised if we saw the effects in standardized tests in subject fields like, say, mathematics," she says, "but that may just mean we're looking in the wrong place. There probably are substantial cognitive gains, but we're more likely to see them by noticing that kids who've been through those programs make connections differently, or look at life differently. It's very difficult to measure their understanding of multiculturalism or the environment, for example, but there are major attitudinal changes happening there — really deep, thoughtful things. As one of my own teachers liked to say, "Just because it can't be counted doesn't mean it doesn't count."

ArtsSmarts projects do seem to draw students and teachers towards large, rich themes derived from the character of global society. Rising concern about the environment, for instance, is reflected in ArtsSmarts projects everywhere. Issues like human rights, democracy and multiculturalism are pressing matters in Canadian classrooms, which often contain students from 10 or 15 different countries. As a result, many school art projects have targetted racism, bigotry and fear by exposing students to a variety of world cultures, including aboriginal culture and values.

"These themes aren't prominent just in Canada," says Kit Grauer. "I was in Thailand last year, and they were asking questions like, Who are we, and how do we fit in among all the other cultures of the world? And I was in New Zealand and Australia, where the things that are going on with respect to aboriginal culture are exactly parallel to what's happening here — this growing awareness of what the aboriginal peoples have given us, and how those cultures are now evolving."

Ultimately, these themes rest on a new philosophy of knowledge. Since Isaac Newton, knowledge has been viewed as objective and autonomous; it was out there, independent of the knower, and it was the same for everyone. Science advanced by reducing objective phenomena into ever-smaller parts which could conveniently be manipulated and measured.

Modern physics blew that model apart. The ideas of science, wrote Einstein, do not describe the physical world, but only *our experience* of that world; scientific findings are essentially "free creations of the human mind." That perspective changes the whole way we look at learning and knowing.

"There's a really strong constructivist philosophy right across Canada now," says Dr. Grauer, "the idea that knowledge and meaning don't occur in some objective and abstract form. You *construct* knowledge, you *construct* meaning. So of course it's really important to deal with who you are, and where you are in the world. Constructivism is creating a sense that kids are real individual human beings with their own understandings, and that it's in building on those understandings that learning occurs. It's very different from the way we looked at things when today's adults went to school."

"Living Better Together" project at Harold Sheppard School, QC.

At École Donat-Robichaud in Cap Pelé, New Brunswick, for instance, students pursue the theme of animals in Grade Five, followed by health, environment and community in Grades Six through Eight. All the grades are collaborating in writing a song, each grade doing a verse on its own theme. All the students will participate in recording the song, and the resulting CD will be packaged with a booklet containing 48 student illustrations as well as the lyrics.

At Harold Sheppard School in Tracy, Quebec, the curriculum across all the grades is shaped by the single theme, "Living Better Together." The theme is interpreted in Grades One and Two as "friend-ship"— how to be a friend, how to make a friend. In Grades Three and Four, the theme appears as "environment" — how to be a friend to the living world. In Grades Five and Six, the students focus on global issues of peace, respect and harmony. Each group makes a quilt, incorporating hand prints, maps, flags, images of nature and photos.

These locally-shaped themes cover the requirements of the provincial curricula, but the links within and among them have been structured to generate an understanding of "who you are, and where you are in the world," as Dr. Grauer phrases it.

Five Grade Seven and Eight students sit around a hollow square, listening to the husky man at the synthesizer keyboard — Neil Currie, composer-in-residence with the Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra. He plays a passage of Stravinsky. What does it bring to mind?

"Two dragons fighting." Right, says Currie: danger, energy, aggression, power.

"Someone chasing somebody, and it stops when they got him." Excellent, says Currie. He plays a short piece of Bartôk, and asks what they notice.

"The right hand's far behind the left hand, but it's playing the same notes," says a girl named Janelle.

Moments later the students are bent over their desks, each writing an original 16-bar melody using just five notes. Currie circulates behind them, pointing out the valuable habit of "writing crisp, clear, well-spaced notation." When they are done, he plays their work, noting the different time signatures they use, the difference in the feel of the pieces. As he plays, he remarks on what he's playing.

"If you make what seems to be an error, and it sounds good, keep it. Notice that the synthesizer has many different voices to choose from. Develop your inner ear — imagine what the music will sound like, and then try it out on the piano or the synthesizer. Compliments make you feel better, but constructive criticism helps you get better."

Five weeks from now, these students will have a suite of original pieces ready for public performance.

Once upon a time, Bartôk must have been just another schoolboy.

Deeper learning: new competencies

At Whiteshell Provincial Park in Manitoba there are "boulder mosaics" in the shapes of snakes, turtles, fish, wolves and other animals. These are "petroglyphs," created by aboriginal people centuries ago.

Most of the students in Grades Two and Three at North Memorial School in Portage La Prairie are aboriginal or Métis. Working with artist Carmen Hathaway, they are gluing several varieties of Manitoba-grown beans to painted styrofoam food trays, re-creating the petroglyph patterns which were first imagined by their distant ancestors. Manitoba produces nearly 40% of Canada's bean crop and exports to 39 countries around the world, and a local company has contributed these beans.

Several of these students, mainly boys, says teacher Val Smith, are "rushers" who don't listen well, can't focus, don't concentrate. But this project has changed them. Here and elsewhere, the children who do well in arts projects are often the ones who do *not* learn well from traditional classroom routines. This is hardly surprising, since research on learning styles shows that only about 20% of us learn best from reading and listening as opposed to active participation.

"In BC, the educational system has articulated three fundamental principles about learning," says Kit Grauer. "First, learning is an active process. Second, learning happens both individually and in groups. Third, there are many different ways of learning and many different kinds of competence." Arts projects match these principles precisely, and among the competencies they foster are the big, vital competencies which are so difficult to teach directly — risk-taking, experimentation, diligence, patience.

"I find the artists helping the students to look deeper, to find their own stories," says Brionn Sadler, a teacher at West Dover school in Calgary. "An artist brings something different to the classroom. Last year I did a science unit on sound, and I worked with Roger Duncan of The One World Drum Company to connect sound with drumming, myths and story-telling. The arts push the senses, and the artists lead the students to experience deeper things, not just child-like things."

"I expected that children who had watched so much television would be visually literate," says Thirza Jones, a video artist in Saskatoon. "But they weren't. I had to ask them to go and look critically. How many times does the picture change during a commercial? How does it tell a story without using words? And the filming was really challenging. They didn't have long attention spans, and they were surprised how boring and slow it is to make a video. But we kept 60 kids involved all the time, and I think the kids learned a lot about who they were. They learned a lot about patience, too."

The process, says Thirza, "is more important than the product." In a broad sense that's true — students are hardly likely to produce imperishable works of art in their classrooms. In another sense, however, the experience of carrying a project through to completion is an important one in itself. Acadian artist Julie Boulianne remarks on the importance of the result — the concert, publication or exhibition. For students and artists alike, this is the reward: the moment of completion which justifies all that patient effort.

Creating petroglyphs at North Memorial School, MB.

In a classroom in Newport Station District School, half-a-dozen students are painting on bed sheets. With visual artist and musician Rose Vaughan, aided by a parent volunteer and a teacher, they are creating a backdrop for their upcoming production of Fiddler on the Roof. The backdrop, inspired by Marc Chagall, is "ten bed-sheets wide." The bell rings for recess, but nobody leaves.

Nova Scotia does not have an official Community Schools program — but this is a community school if there ever was one. NSDS is a small school — 130 students, seven teachers, and innumerable community volunteers — located in a low-income rural community about 80 km from Halifax. It is not a multicultural school, and 97% of its students have never been on an airplane. But they are citizens of the world.

Working with artists, teachers and parents, they have created a Jamaican environment in their Biodiversity Room, presented Japanese bunraku puppet shows and written haiku. Students serve nutritious food at recess and noon from in a well-equipped kitchen which also includes a food bank; students from hungry families can simply take food home. No Jewish families live in Newport Station, but as part of their research for Fiddler on the Roof, the students recently prepared the foods of the Jewish Sabbath — latkes, spiced applesauce, matzos — and celebrated Sabbath rituals.

Linked by the Internet with an astronomer at the University of Illinois, the school has developed its own space science program. (On his own time, school-bus driver Wayne Langille has developed a fine computer lab, and networked the whole school.) NSDS belongs to Industry Canada's Network of Innovative Schools, and its Web site (www.go.ednet.ns.ca/nsds/) will soon begin hosting Web pages for partner schools in Ghana.

On the school's 18-acre campus, in partnership with the West Hants Wildlife Association, students study biodiversity, build trails and manage a 10-year forest-regeneration project. They document the changing forests with video, paintings and digital photography. NSDS's other partners include government agencies, Fundy Gypsum, the Nova Scotia Arts Council (which is the province's ArtsSmarts Partner), two local universities and Pete's Frootique, a Halifax fruit and vegetable shop.

NSDS has been written up in *Maclean's*, *The Globe and Mail*, *SchoolNet* magazine, the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, and all the local weeklies. It has won awards from the Canadian Wildlife Federation and the Conference Board of Canada. But the local school board has twice attempted to close it, on the theory that small schools cannot provide a rich educational experience.

"We told them they couldn't close the school," says principal Diana MacLean. "We told them that our volunteer fundraising and successful grant applications provide more money for the school than all the operating funds provided by the board."

The school — which is to say, the whole community — won. It promptly established a centre for research on the educational advantages of small schools.

ArtsSmarts schools and teachers

What makes an ArtsSmarts project work? And what's in it for schools and teachers?

Successful schools seem to be self-confident, open, brave and busy . Their administrators, like Diana MacLean, have clear priorities and provide real leadership to the staff. They welcome outside visitors — particularly parents — as colleagues. They are adventurous and outward-looking, seeking partnerships with businesses and other organizations. They see their service to students as the vehicle for service to the whole community. Their mandate excites and delights them. Such schools often have low staff turnover, which allows them to take a long view. A 10-year biodiversity project will be part of the school for longer than any student.

Within a receptive school, ArtsSmarts can spread like a benign virus. The project at Ranchlands Community School in Calgary, for instance, began with seven teachers and three artists. In its second year the whole school was involved — 25 teachers, six artists, all working within a school-wide theme of "Living Wide-Awake Lives." Similarly, the Grade Six and Seven students who created the map at Halfmoon Bay inspired the Grade Threes to do visual projects called "What Happened On The Day I Was Born."

This may be the most durable legacy of ArtsSmarts: a nation-wide corps of turned-on teachers, reaching out to artists and communities, constantly refreshing their own learning, and infecting their colleagues and communities with their creativity and enthusiasm. Once started, they will not easily be stopped. In Dieppe, NB, teacher Eileen Ouellet says, "We have our whole project on film and video. If we had to, we teachers could do a project like this without the artist now."

ArtsSmarts and the artists

Canada, notes one artist, often seems happy to pay artists *not* to practice their art. We'll pay them to teach, travel, research, speak, broadcast — but not to do their real work. Does an ArtsSmarts project really benefit the artist?

Yes, says Suzanne Cormier Dupuis, a sculptor in Dieppe, N.B. Unlike doctors, shopkeepers and policemen, artists have no established role in the community, and few daily activities which connect them with their neighbours. Though she had lived for years in Dieppe, most of her neighbours were completely unaware of the sculptor in their midst.

Then she came to Amirault School to help students create *"bestioles"* — imaginary animals whose habitats and habits had to be specified, and whose body shapes had to show scientifically-appropriate adaptation to their ecological circumstances. Now parents and friends were jamming the school gymnasium for a spectacular evening display of the *bestioles.*

"With this program I'm reaching every student in this grade, not just the ones who are taking art. Now I go shopping, and students bring their parents over to meet me. I'm really pleased at the number of parents who've come out tonight, and surprised at how long they've stayed, and how many questions they've asked. I feel much more a part of this community after doing this project."

"Bestiole" project at Amirault School, NB.

A few miles away at Cap Pelé, painter Julie Bouliane nods. Local people once viewed her as "the girl with the funny hair," but now they understand what she does. She's currently involved in 10 school projects, and some of the students are intensely interested in knowing about art as a career — an experience shared by Carmen Hathaway in Portage. Students have asked Julie how much her own works cost. When she says that some are priced as low as $100, they exclaim, "I could buy that!"

"A lot of artists find this kind of work trans-formative," says Hayden Trenholm, executive director of Calgary Arts Partnerships in Education Society (CAPES), an ArtsSmarts Partner organization. "They find the kids' vision is liberating for their own art, and they say that working in the schools renews and reinvigorates their work."

"At the same time, some of them set a maximum amount they're prepared to do, maybe 15 days a year, because otherwise it becomes like a full-time poverty-level job which brings in maybe $18,000 a year — and they still don't get their own art done."

Voices in the Ranchlands staff room:

"It's a wonderful learning experience for teachers. Artists do things differently, and you learn from that."

"We used Gregorian chant to do math and fractions. I'd never have thought of that."

"It builds a community within the kids. I had four Chinese kids who were very separate and controlled, but they were much more integrated with the others after we all danced together. We danced the government, and each group could see which parts of the government other groups were dancing."

"People who can't write English very well — immigrant students, for instance — find it easier to do dance, murals, things like that. Art activities give all the children an opportunity to shine."

"When we were drumming on the African drums, just for a moment we were all together as one."

"So much of what we saw was magical. One of the kids said to me, 'I didn't know you could make a friend with your eyes.'"

"It was an incredible new experience, a huge learning for us — and it became a whole school interest. Everybody wanted to participate the second year."

"I think it will show up on the provincial exams. I think if you're connected and confident, you can do well on those exams."

"It's totally changed my teaching. I would never go back."

"I'd never have danced with my students before, but I'd do it again in an instant. And the phys ed teacher couldn't believe how much the kids had grown after they'd done the dancing."

"You know, I never hear from business people or government that they can't get people who can do math, or don't have computer skills. Never! I keep hearing that they can't get people who have good social skills, people who are good at communicating, problem-solving, risk-taking, critical thinking! Well, that's exactly what the arts teach! Why don't they see that?"

"This year's project involves earth, air, fire and water," says Ross Imrie, with a laugh. "Which suits me fine, since I'm a fire-breather. Literally. I am."

Lanky, casual and enthusiastic, Ross Imrie sits — and stands, and paces, and gesticulates — in a classroom in St. Mary Margaret School in Ottawa. Like his companions, Carol Brascoupé and Beth Ross, he is a parent and a member of the School Council. All three have a passionate and professional interest in the arts.

The school board once funded a $25,000 art program here. When that ended, the parents stepped in, raising up to $10,000 themselves and providing hundreds of volunteer hours, not to mention materials, connections and knowledge. In their view, the principal, Marcia Lynch, is "absolutely key" to the arts program. They asked Marcia and the teachers to specify what they could not deliver — and then they delivered those components themselves.

Last year they brought in a scriptwriter to help in the creation of an original play involving 165 students, with elaborate costumes, dances, scenery and settings. The students learned about co-operation and commitment and practice and revision, say the parents. They learned about production values and quality standards. And they had an unforgettable experience. "Think back on your own schooling," Carol Brascoupé demands. "What do you remember? The school concert! The school play!"

This year's project is about art and environment. At first it was to involve a garden, and a big outdoor structure. With fish? Flowers? Maybe. But then what about the performing arts? Well, what about an outdoor presentation with large puppets? So now the plan includes a parade, with giant puppets all made of recycled materials, turning trash to art. And the garden may become a labyrinth, with dancers moving through it. Maybe it will be permanent.

"You need a year-over-year involvement," says Carol. "One-shot projects don't work. And we know we won't be here forever, so we're actively recruiting our own successors. Ontario now has a very tight curriculum, with prescribed outcomes for every grade. Well, we work very hard at integrating and articulating what's in the curriculum — but through the art program we're trying to meet another set of expectations as well."

Partners and parents: growing roots in communities

In almost every successful ArtsSmarts program, parents are an integral and powerful component of the school dynamic. In Newport Station, says Diana MacLean, the school has more volunteer hours per week than it has students. Parents move through effective schools like a second set of teachers or aides, bringing important resources of insight and skill, acting in partnership with the staff. The parents become advocates for the school in the broader community. Inevitably, the community comes to serve the school as well, building a virtuous circle of co-operation and growth.

The ArtsSmarts Partners in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia are provincial arts councils. In BC and Alberta the Partners are organizations specifically dedicated to the advancement of art in education. In Montreal and New Brunswick they are school boards. In Ottawa, Saskatoon and Portage La Prairie, however — and also in the newest ArtsSmarts location, Quebec City — the local ArtsSmarts Partners are not educational or cultural organizations but community foundations.

Community foundations often push the "community partnerships" aspect of the ArtsSmarts mandate in innovative directions. The Saskatoon Foundation, for instance, has awarded ArtsSmarts grants not only to schools, but also to other organizations such as the Saskatoon Symphony, the Mendel Art Gallery, a downtown youth centre, a children's film festival, two theatres and Dance Saskatchewan. The Community Foundation of Ottawa makes grants to community

centres, theatres, health organizations and a chaplaincy as well as to a number of schools.

Recipient organizations often expand their programs using additional support from churches, local businesses and service groups. The Mendel Art Gallery, for instance, after working with one school for two years, is now developing a Gallery School for several additional schools. In addition, schools which discover the community foundation through ArtsSmarts often apply later to other foundation programs.

Because of their community-wide mandates, community foundations often fund projects which concentrate on marginalized groups — immigrants, the unemployed, urban aboriginals and others. Heart of the City Piano, for instance, gives piano lessons to 131 at-risk children in inner-city Saskatoon. Not far away, students from Bishop Pocock elementary school are doing a dance project jointly with the residents of a nursing home.

A project at Ottawa's Russell Heights Community House serves children in a 160-unit subsidized housing complex, about 60% of whose residents are Somali. Through ArtsSmarts, the community centre presents two-hour weekend classes in sculpture, design, painting, pottery, papier mâché. The kids, says artist Larry Finn, are "ravenous" for such opportunities, and the classes are always packed. Board chair Sawsah Berjawi comes every Saturday with her own son, and volunteers as a helper. "Similar programs are done elsewhere, and done better," says co-ordinator Don Smith, "but people here won't go elsewhere. So the kids start here, and go elsewhere for better programs later on."

A particularly powerful, life-changing community arts program is The Language of Life project supported by CAPES and delivered by Servants Anonymous Society of Calgary, which targets desperate young women working as prostitutes or at risk of becoming prostitutes. The society's goal is to enable these young women — who *should* be in school— to leave the streets. It provides housing, education, job-training and follow-up support. Its success rate is an amazing 78%.

The Language of Life project uses creative writing — poetry and journalling — to assist students in changing their behaviour, recognizing and ending the cycles of abuse in their lives, and forming healthful attitudes towards themselves and others. This is art as healing, as tool-making, as wrenching, fiery personal reconstruction. Does it work? Listen:

Please don't leave me.
Is that what love looks like?
running around with knives?
Please don't love me.
Is it always going to be like this?
yelling
screaming
crying
Please don't love me
if that's what it's all about.
Love me.
Love me.
Please don't leave me.

The Language of Life differs from most ArtsSmarts projects in its raw urgency, its focus on youth whose experience has made them old beyond their years. And a similar lack of innocence characterizes *No Way Out*, a short video on bullying produced by the students of Bishop Klein School in Saskatoon, facilitated by Thirza Jones:

27. JORDAN GETTING READY TO SHOOT. AN ARM COMES IN AS HE IS ABOUT TO SHOOT.
28. BACKBOARD AND A BASKETBALL MISSING IT.
29. C/U OF AN ELBOW INTO JORDAN'S RIBS — JORDAN BENDS OVER.
30. SHOT OF FEET — KID GETS TRIPPED AND FALLS. WE SEE THAT IT IS JORDAN.
31. W/S OF THE PRACTICE — JORDAN LAYING ON THE FLOOR — TEACHER BLOWS WHISTLE. KIDS HEAD OFF TO THE DOOR.

No Way Out is a gritty, unsentimental little film; at the end, when another often-bullied student named Kim asks Jordan whether he thinks high school will be the same, Jordan shrugs sadly. But the power of *No Way Out* is that very grittiness and honesty. Several Saskatchewan schools have used it to start discussions of the corrosive nature of bullying. As a kids'-eye view of the issue, it has great classroom credibility.

Formation: the ultimate curriculum

No Way Out and The Language of Life evoke the ultimate curriculum, known in the Catholic tradition as "formation" — the process by which a person's social, moral and spiritual character is fabricated. The word implies not only an exterior process influenced by church, home and school, but also an interior process of reflection and resolution which generates a self-sustaining dynamic of personal growth.

Formation is the reason for studying the large themes of culture, racism, respect, environment, democracy and responsibility, and for nurturing the large competencies of risk-taking, communication, critical thinking and imagination. It follows that the worst schools are not those which make errors or shake up the established norms. The most insidious damage to students probably occurs in schools where things *do not* happen, where students come to understand that learning is boring, or irrelevant, or simply not for them. In such schools, formation is almost prevented.

Artists understand formation intuitively, because the process of becoming a serious artist is itself a profound process of formation. And so the artist also teaches the deepest curriculum by example — by a ferocious, self-abnegating concentration on the work to be done, by an insistence that only the best is good enough, by living and breathing the ineluctably social nature of the artistic enterprise.

Thus it is a real indicator of success when students say that they want to be artists when they grow up. Some may become artists; most won't. But any student who can entertain that thought has experienced formation— has learned that work should be fascinating and challenging, that it should include a quality of play, and that careers which offer no opportunities for such work are not good careers to pursue.

"You have to listen to kids, and find out what their deeper needs are, what they need to grow," says Alison Diesvelt, a teacher who also serves as artist-in-residence in several Vancouver schools. "You wouldn't believe what they can do. I've done philosophy courses with children where I found myself listening to five-year-olds discussing the difference between mind and brain. We had a project called *Fables and Photos* where the kids wrote fables that had to express some moral principle they'd learned from their families, and had to photograph the family members who'd taught them. They captured amazing things. The faces of grandparents are completely open when their grandchildren are holding the camera."

The real question, says one teacher quietly, is not whether the arts develop children, but whether we use the arts boldly enough. Do our projects have too much breadth and not enough depth? Are we helping students at the levels where they really live, where they are hurt and bewildered and ecstatic, where they need to confront their weaknesses and terrors, and vanquish them?

Video production project at Harriott Curtis Academy, NF.

A century ago, Joshua Slocum sailed from tiny Westport, Nova Scotia, on the world's first single-handed circumnavigation of the world. In Freeport, within sight of Slocum's village, students have been studying Slocum's route, his era, his achievement — not to mention oceans, navigation, ships and dreams. This is only the most recent in a string of ArtsSmarts projects which have involved dance, theatre, music, drumming and weaving.

On this sunny afternoon, Paula Swift's Grade Six students are reflecting on all this. What have they learned?

"That we're weird. We think about all this weird stuff all the time — using our imagination, thinking about characters."

"Getting along with each other, because we're doing more things together in groups."

"You learn your own talents, like sewing or making music or acting or dancing. A lot of us didn't know we could dance."

"Better thinking."

"You get better at something when you do it more."

"We're not as shy now. We're not so timid — we'll try things."

And try things they do, volunteering to do dramatic improvisations on themes like "positive and negative," or "driving a car." The driver of the make-believe car is a boy named Michael, an exuberant and extroverted kid who has played an active role in the discussion.

And then Paula Swift talks about what she's learned herself.

"It's helped me to become the kind of teacher I've always wanted to be — the kind of teacher who makes a difference to her students. The kind of teacher who really knows who the students are. A teacher who's in contact with all the world out there, and brings it into her classroom, brings it alive. When you teach through the arts, you don't just talk about the subjects. You experience them."

"I think differently about what school should be. You know, school should be exciting! It should be active, it should be entertaining, it should be interesting".

Michael speaks quietly from his desk. He almost seems to be speaking to himself.

"School should be surprising," he says.

Watercolour project at Dunne Memorial School, NF.

The ArtsSmarts Story by the Quebec City Team

The ArtsSmarts program was implemented in Quebec City in the fall of 2000, coinciding with ongoing provincial education reform. The integration of arts with non-arts subjects in the school curriculum has become recognized as vehicle for learning and an important way to revitalize education. This approach is being embraced by teachers in schools across Quebec.

By putting students in the very centre of process of creation, the ArtsSmarts program complements an initiative subsidized by the government, entitled *Artists and Writers in Schools*, which was implemented in Quebec a number of years ago. The Fondation communautaire du Grand Québec, became an ArtsSmarts partner in 2001 and has already funded 11 school projects. The Foundation is also working with five school boards, four francophone and one anglophone, to fuel and encourage collaboration between the community, education and artistic sectors.

At Quatre-Vents Elementary school in Beauport, Quebec, students have learned about the human body through dance. Their external, physical bodies are not the only thing they are discovering through dance movements; they are learning about the inner workings of their bodies as well. Dancer and choreographer, Daniel Bélanger helped the students create dramatic dance works in which students become red and white blood cells who must face invasions from 'virus' classmates. Each class has studied, and become a different part of the body and joined their efforts to create a stage performance for their parents.

At the Ste-Famille de l'Ile d'Orléans Elementary School, students learned to express their emotions in the exaggerated gestures, grimaces and pantomimes of clowns. Guided by Marie-Hélène Ouellette, the children created a circus - complete with jugglers, acrobats and clowns. They have created costumes, designed sets and learned about all of the elements that go on behind the scenes in performing arts. Through this project, teachers and students alike saw personal barriers come down and a sense of team and community develop within the student body.

Without a doubt, the key to success is the team of artists and educators that champion a project. Even with the support of school administrators and the School Board, these artists and educators have to match their passion against increased workloads and extended hours; often creating and achieving far more than the original intent of the projects. The motivation and passion they employ to bring a project to fruition is the very foundation for its success.

Daniel Bélanger with students from Quatre-Vents school.

photo: Don Robinson

Silver Donald Cameron is one of Canada's most versatile and widely-published authors. His 15 books include novels, social and literary criticism, travel and nature writing and humour. His essays and articles have earned four National Magazine Awards, and he has won numerous other awards for his work in radio, television and the stage. He was formerly a columnist with *The Globe and Mail*, and currently writes a weekly column for the *Halifax Sunday Herald*. Dr. Cameron has taught at four universities, and been writer-in-residence at three more. He was the first Dean of the School of Community Studies at the University College of Cape Breton. As a citizen, businessman and consultant, he has been intensely involved with community economic development in Isle Madame, Nova Scotia, where he has lived since 1971. He is also a popular speaker who uses humour and storytelling to enliven his provocative thought on a variety of issues.

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