

CYCLICAL MENTORSHIP IN ARTS EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

Insights from Emerging and Veteran Leaders



A CONVERSATION BETWEEN

CARYN COOPER AND MARGIE J. REESE



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ABOUT & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

About Americans for the Arts

The mission of Americans for the Arts is to serve, advance, and lead the network of organizations and individuals who cultivate, promote, sustain, and support the arts in America.

Founded in 1960, Americans for the Arts is the nation's leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts and arts education. From offices in Washington, DC and New York City, we provide a rich array of programs that meet the needs of more than 150,000 members and stakeholders. We are dedicated to representing and serving local communities and to creating opportunities for every American to participate in and appreciate all forms of the arts.

About the Arts Education Program

The Arts Education Program provides leadership development, networking, research, and tools that empower individuals and organizations to create equitable systems and strong policies which strengthen the arts education ecosystem. We seek to unify diverse stakeholders, including arts education professionals, cultural and education sector leaders, the business community, parents, and young people, to create change in their communities, states, and the nation.

About the Emerging Leaders Program

The Emerging Leaders Program identifies and cultivates the next generation of arts leaders in America. Through professional development and peer networking opportunities on the national and local levels, members contribute their enthusiasm, creativity, and potential to strengthening the arts in America and building the next generation of arts leaders.

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INTRODUCTION

Arts education programs nationally are challenged to serve an ever-diversifying student population. As trends in the field of arts education are maturing to reflect demographic shifts, leaders of these programs must facilitate meaningful and comprehensive succession planning to prepare the next generation of leaders in this important sector.

Unfortunately, while established and robust arts learning programs emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, **leadership in the field still does not adequately reflect youth served or communities in which the programs operate.** The challenges faced by these organizations could be aided by leveraging the strategies employed throughout the field of arts administration to diversify and broaden the leadership pipeline, empowering future leaders while simultaneously honoring and harnessing the great work of current leadership. These strategies can and should be explored to promote intergenerational dialogue and cyclical mentorship among arts education leaders.

RESEARCH APPROACH

As the population of students served continues to change and grow in their challenges, needs, and demography, research shows that national organizations—such as Americans for the Arts—have a responsibility to broaden the leadership pipeline and build future leaders through intergenerational dialogue. A community-based participatory approach to research should be taken to connect youth, emerging and mid-career leaders (adults), and veterans (adult elders) to leverage effective strategies to honor community differences and develop sustainable missions. Among others, the higher education and nonprofit sectors have led strategic investments in capacity building of multi-generational teams for purposes of fostering dialogue to engage the next generation of leaders in a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable way.

In 2017, Americans for the Arts conducted research to illuminate effective practices of emerging and seasoned leaders in the field of arts education. The research was intended to inform the development of programming to assist in cyclical mentorship, intergenerational dialogue, and to support the broadening and diversifying of the pool of new leaders in the arts education field.

Research was led by emerging leaders and supported by mid-career and veteran staff and was deployed in a community-based, participatory manner. Researchers used a form of simultaneous storytelling and data gathering with participants to gather perspectives and generate authentic discussion. The following documented interviews are transcripts of the dialogues.

“You will be the very best at what you do when you build relationships one at a time”

Jean Tokuda Irwin,
Arts Education Program Manager,
Utah Division of Arts & Museums

FINDINGS

The overall findings from the research were grouped in several categories ranging from transformative moments in leaders' own development to suggestions for tackling systemic barriers to equitable leadership development.

Participants shared anecdotes about their times of growth and moments of challenge as leaders in the arts education field. For some, this moment of success was with an effective mentor and for others it was overcoming a systemic barrier challenging their race or socio-economic status.

All participants felt that systemic barriers impede the development of diverse leaders in the pipeline. They offered solutions such as shifts in the culture of internships, payment structures, certifications or inclusion of alternative qualifications, and changing certain aspects of the culture of arts or educational leadership.

Additionally, participants believed in the power to grow and change as emerging, mid-career, or veteran leaders through professional learning and leadership skill development. Suggestions included: building stronger relationships among broad swaths of individuals, engaging in inquiry-based research and management, developing a more 'facilitated' leadership style, and mobilizing your own practice as a student of your surroundings.

In a session held at the 2017 Americans for the Arts' Annual Conference, the topic of **'cyclical mentorship'** was proposed for consideration in a participatory session discussing the future of arts education leadership. This proposed cycle of mentorship begins as young people are mentored by adult arts educators, emerging leaders are mentored by both elders and youth, and elders are mentored by both emerging leaders and youth. This concept engages the broad concepts of intergenerational dialogue and artistic skill development to engage each other in shared learning and to have shared responsibility for the future of our field by way of the pipeline built to enhance leadership.

The following case study will highlight perspectives on these broad themes and is intended to inform and inspire emerging, mid-career, and veteran leaders to engage in this work.



Emerging Leader in Arts Education

CARYN COOPER

DANCE EDUCATOR, ADMINISTRATOR, WRITER, AND PERFORMER

Caryn Cooper is a dance educator, administrator, writer, and performer from Long Island, NY. She has been working in the field of arts education administration for the past five years in the Greater New York City area. As an administrator, she has worked for a number of arts organizations such as the 92Y Harkness Dance Center, New York City Center, and Flushing Council on Culture and the Arts. There she has been working to bridge the gap of arts education for every child through providing access to performances, interactive workshops, and long-term residencies for students, and professional development workshops for teaching artists and public school teachers. Under the

direction of Dr. Martha Eddy, she is a Moving For Life Certified Instructor (MFLCI) where she teaches dance to those dealing with various chronic illnesses such as breast cancer, arthritis/joint pain, heart disease, and diabetes. Her writings have been published by BroadwayWorld, ARTSBlog, Teaching Artists Guild, and Dance/NYC on various trends affecting the field of dance and arts education. Caryn holds an MA in Dance Education from New York University and a BFA in Arts Management from LIU Post. She is also the proud recipient of the 2017 Jessica Wilt Memorial Scholarship for Arts Education through the Americans for the Arts.



Veteran Leader in Arts Education

MARGIE J. REESE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WICHITA FALLS ALLIANCE FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

A native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Margie Johnson Reese brings exceptional skills in cultural policy planning and implementation design. Margie's career has included arts leadership in Dallas and Los Angeles. Currently Executive Director of the a newly created Wichita Falls Alliance for Arts and Culture, Margie has responsibility for establishing arts policy, artists training programs and creating new grant making programs to service Wichita Falls, Texas and the surrounding areas. Margie served as a grant maker for the Ford Foundation in their Office for West Africa as the Program Officer for Media, Arts and Culture. In that capacity, she led the ongoing efforts of the Foundation

focusing on heritage preservation, conservation, museum education, governance and cultural policy. She cites among her major accomplishments funding the restoration of the slave castles in Ghana and Nigeria, and providing funding to preserve the ancient Arabic manuscripts of Timbuktu in Mali. Prior to her work with the Ford Foundation, Margie served as General Manager of the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs; and as Director of the City of Dallas, Office of Cultural Affairs. Margie is a long time board member of Americans for the Arts and is Chair of the Board's Diversity and Inclusion Task Force. She is an active grants review panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts, and continues to serve as an adviser to the Association of African Museums in Nairobi, Kenya. Margie was recognized with the 2014 National Guild for Community Arts Education's Lifetime Service Award for her lifelong dedication to increasing young people's access to arts learning opportunities, both in and out of school; and for her powerful advocacy and action for equity and diversity.

She began her collegiate pursuits at Southern University in Baton Rouge, and transferred to Washington State University in Pullman, Washington to earn a BS in Speech and Theater. Margie holds a Master's of Fine Arts in Theater from Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. She is a Fellow of the Salzburg Global Seminar in Salzburg, Austria and an adjunct professor at Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland where she teaches Public Policy in the Arts.

Q: Please reflect on a transformative moment for you as an arts education leader from a mentor or mentee.



CARYN: Sure, well I guess, for me, I don't think I've really had a moment from a mentor that works in arts education. I have other mentors that may work in the arts whether they're in a different part of the arts or they work in the non-profit sector, but not necessarily specific to arts education. But I guess a moment that I've had toward someone I've mentored—I had an intern about two years ago and she really didn't have any knowledge about arts education in the nonprofit sector in an arts organization. Throughout the internship program, I tried to teach her and tell her what the work is all about. She had to write a paper at the completion of internship and one of the things that she mentioned was that she really didn't have an idea of what she was getting herself into but she could see this work being part of her career path moving forward. So that made me feel good—that I taught someone and inspired someone to pursue this work.



MARGIE: I jotted down some notes so I could try to sift through all of the “moments”, and the one that I want to share is the moment I realized that I needed to move my mentee or all the protégés that I was working with towards policy conversations. The passion for arts and arts education is there. They see the power of the arts, and the power of the arts for kids. But they also helped me shift my own thinking about what they needed from me. And I believe that—maybe this was 7 or 8 years ago now—I decided that I needed to get away from conversations about the “why” of arts education, “why” kids should have access to the arts—and start helping young advocates think about the “how.” How do we encourage leadership in the field? How do we get more funding for the arts? How do we help promote policies that lead to more inclusive program development and of course, attract more funding to support arts learning.

Q: Are there systemic barriers to leadership within the field of arts education? What is one suggestion on how we might tackle it?



CARYN: For me, personally, I find that a lot of arts organizations tend to have a limited capacity so there's not really a lot of room for growth which is something I know that I'm feeling at my job currently. I like what I'm doing and I want to do more but there's no room for me to move up the ranks. There are no ranks. And I find with a lot of my peers that we have that similar issue. It's like you're either the junior staffer or the senior staffer. There aren't any mid-management roles for us to grow into so a lot of my peers end up moving from one place to another for career growth and mobility as opposed to staying in one place and growing within that one organization. I guess part of that could be linked to limited funding opportunities for general operating support. Because you know, that would generally go towards employee salaries and

stuff like that. Since a lot of the funding goes to programs, they tend to limit the percentage that you can use—that programming funding—for administrative costs. I guess as a suggestion for how we can tackle that is, we can advocate as a field for more general operating support and funding for general operating support.



MARGIE: While I do agree that funding overall is challenging. So for folks that are in leadership positions, department heads and management—the wiggle room is very narrow. So often opportunities for leadership growth is just very narrow.

So my thoughts around this, has to do with specific initiatives—I think that emerging leaders have so much on their plates already. They get handed the research jobs, the grunt jobs, or the jobs out in the field and so they're working 60 hours a week and their opportunities for moving up the ladder are few. So my thoughts are around encouraging younger leaders to be seen and to participate in activities that allow them greater visibility. So serving on panels, and as workshop leaders, informing the field on how arts education has changed. So the question is—how do we step aside give them more and relevant visibility? It's just selfish of us to keep the emerging leaders from being exposed to new opportunities and possibilities.

So, maybe my organization can't afford from a budgetary position to move them up the ladder as quickly as we may want. But why can't we develop systems that bring those younger voices to the table so they can get consulting jobs and they can get opportunities to apply for positions in other organizations. So, I think are ways to provide more opportunities for their rationale and new ideas to be shared, and not just have them in the background collecting data. I think there's something that can be learned from these young leaders and the more chances we give them to be visible the better for all of us. That's not going to pay their bills but it might put them in a position where they can advance their careers and be in position to be recruited by another organization.

Q: What is the virtue of broadening the leadership pipeline for the field of arts education?

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CARYN: I would like to see the field just be more visible as a viable career option because I feel it's a secret sometimes. I kind of fell into this work accidentally but once we got into the work, we like what we do. But we didn't go to school in mind saying that we wanted to do this necessarily so I feel like if we had more of a visibility then it could be on more people's radar that this does exist and the idea that I can make a career out of this work.



MARGIE: I think for me, it has to do with making the work relevant to the young people that we say we serve. So by that, I mean, contemporary social issues, the ways that young people learn and the ways that they experience the arts and expression, the narrative that young people have—first grade through college—is a self-designed narrative. I wonder if perhaps some of us

who are clogging up the pipeline may not be able to interpret that narrative authenticity in order to be better advocates. So, I think the emerging leader voice as both an interpreter, as a thought partner, are voices that would help those of us who've been in the work a long time. Maybe we are better advocates because they are our partners in designing programs, in implementing programs, etc. So, I don't think that it's time to put me out to pasture but it is time for me to have more people to think about things with me. Perhaps young leaders can help bring the voices of kids to the table in ways that are a lot more realistic. So - we can't expect for kids to be thinking about the same things that we were thinking of when we were young. Just imagine the changes technology and the media that young people have access to. So I just believe that it's going to have to be a shared solution.

I really appreciate hearing your view about making arts education visible as a viable career because I also think that we're going to have to help those of us that have the power of the microphone to start sharing the microphone. And, so, I think it's learning on all sides. We don't know everything just because we're "the leaders"—we don't know everything because things keep changing. The demographics of communities have changed. The needs of young people and the ways that they talk about those things have changed. So I don't think I can be the advocate that I was, even twenty years ago, without listening and hearing from another generation of leadership in the field.

Q: How can the public sector, like local arts agencies or school districts contribute to (or hinder) this conversation?



CARYN: I think local arts organizations and other service organizations can contribute to the conversation just by having the conversation and inviting people to be a part of it. And really just providing those opportunities for everyone's voices to be heard—whether it's a networking event or a roundtable or something like that—first having the conversation. But I guess a way that it can be hindered is if we have these conversations and we have all of these great ideas and then there's no implementation behind it all. You know, it's all talk but no action.



MARGIE: Well said. I agree, I think the advice is to be overly prepared, to be patient when patience is called for, and to be forward moving when you need to be. We also need to be ready to allow leadership change to occur. I would want the emerging leader in the field, not to have to look at their work from the bottom-up all the time. They should know that some of us in the field that are listening and depending on them to stand up and take charge. We need to keep planning and thinking and strategizing and always looking at the evolving landscapes in education so that we are prepared to allow the changing of the guard to occur. Sometimes we don't see things coming, we don't see administrations shifting. But I think that we have got to have more than one plan, more than hope, we've got to have more than one answer. And that requires us accept contemporary leadership styles; and adapt our own thinking to meet our younger colleagues where they are, and when necessary get, out of their way.

Q: What types of skills do you feel have a long-lasting impact on the development of leadership in your work?



CARYN: I think that, first, having a love for art or whatever specific art form it is that you're interested in because I think that's what keeps the drive going of wanting to do the work that you're doing. I also think that having a love and a passion and a concern for the people that we serve, whether they're students or seniors or people in-between, having a love for and wanting to see them grow. And then finally, just being well-spoken about the field and I guess what I mean when I say that is, I find a lot of times I'm often advocating to a lot of different players. Whether they're school administrators, teachers, elected officials, funders, parents, just being able to eloquently speak to all of these people and speak their language and have them understand and gain a mutual appreciation and understanding for the field.



MARGIE: Well, I agree 100%. I think she's saying it all. My notes for myself say, "how to work a room." How to negotiate, how to facilitate conversations, how to find that common place where you can have a conversation about equity without allowing the conversation to be derailed. How you can have a conversation with someone that has a different opinion, how you can adjust your temperament and your tone, requires a little bit of psychology there, but I think the bottom line is knowing how to facilitate a good conversation because if you're an advocate for arts education, that means you've accepted a responsibility to represent that constituency. So, knowing how to stay in the game, stay in the conversation, and get your message across—I think that's a skill that will help advance the field.

Q: Do you have advice for future leaders in the field of arts education? What is your hope for the future of leadership in arts education?



CARYN: Well I guess my advice for future leaders coming into the field is that—they just come into this work because they love it and understanding that the work that we do isn't always going to be easy and fun because there's always going to be those set-backs whether funding gets cut, or a teacher is not on board, the school doesn't want to do the program anymore, the list can go on. And just not being discouraged about those setbacks and always remember why you're here. And so I think the second part—I guess my hopes for the field are to work together, intergenerational-ly, to further advance the field, that there's not a gap between "us and them" to single in on. But just that we can work together to further and advance the field.



MARGIE: Well said. I agree, I think the advice is to be overly prepared, to be patient when patience is called for, and to be forward moving when you need to be. But to just be prepared because the leadership change is occurring and I would want the emerging leader in the field not to look at their work from the bottom-up all the time. That there are some of us in the field that are listening and depending on them to stand and take charge. The hope, you know, I don't do hope very well. I understand aspirational thinking and desires for change and I am empathetic—so in addition to hope, we need to keep planning and thinking and strategizing and always looking at the changing landscape so that we are prepared. Sometimes we don't see things coming, we don't see administrations shifting. But I think that we have got to have more than one plan, we've got to have more than one answer. And that requires us to do some thinking and planning so that we are prepared to invite them and accept their leadership styles and adapt our own thinking to meet the where they are, and when necessary get out of their way.

Washington, DC

Americans for the Arts
1000 Vermont Ave NW
6th Floor
Washington, DC 20005
202.371.2830

New York City

Americans for the Arts
One East 53rd Street
2nd Floor
New York, NY 10022
212.223.2787

www.AmericansForTheArts.org



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