

CYCLICAL MENTORSHIP IN ARTS EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

Insights from Emerging and Veteran Leaders



A CONVERSATION BETWEEN

SARAH ZEGREE AND JEAN TOKUDA IRWIN



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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

SARAH ZEGREE

FREELANCE ARTIST AND ARTS EDUCATION ADVOCATE

Sarah Zegree, born and raised in Kalamazoo, MI, received her Bachelor of Music Education from Western Michigan University and her Master of Arts Administration from Columbia University Teachers College. She currently lives in Chicago where she works in several administrative roles for arts organizations and music festivals, in addition to teaching choir and vocal jazz at the middle and high school level. Sarah freelances as a pianist, music director, arranger, and singer. She is a passionate advocate for the arts and the accessibility of arts education.



Veteran Leader in Arts Education

JEAN TOKUDA IRWIN

ARTS EDUCATION PROGRAM MANAGER, UTAH DIVISION OF ARTS AND MUSEUMS

Jean is a naturalized American citizen and holds a B.A. and M.A. from the University of Texas/Permian Basin. Since 1991, Jean has been the Arts Education Program Manager for the Utah Division of Arts and Museums. She led three initiatives funded by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) (arts education in Utah's underserved communities, dance education and media/film education). She has served on grant panels for the NEA, and in Ohio, Kentucky, Idaho, Arkansas and Wyoming and as frequent panelist for the President's Committee for Arts and Humanities Youth Program awards. She was a member of the NEA/National Assembly for States Arts Agency's Arts Education Leadership Taskforce. In 2009 and 2011, she was appointed to the Coalition for Minorities Advisory Council to the State Board of Education. In partnership with universities and professional associations, she facilitates statewide professional development activities in arts education for K-12 teachers. Her life focus always seeks diversity, inclusion and equity. She served as Individual Development Commissioner and Vice-President of Programs for Utah PTA. Under her tenure, dance and film video were added to Utah's Reflections Program and later adopted by National PTA. She also served on NPTA's Board of Directors, the national Reflections Committee and served on the NPTA's Diversity, Inclusion and Outreach Committee. Her work appeared in the 2002 Winter Olympics Cultural Olympiad Women Beyond Borders exhibition. Her assemblage, The Goddess of Hysterectomy has been featured at the Art Access Gallery and in various publications.

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



SARAH: So, mine would probably be the first time I visited Arts Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C. which was actually, only three years ago. I was in my first year of grad school and my entire upbringing and education up to that point had been in music education from the educator's perspective, and then when I got to grad school, I discovered an interest in policy and it all kind of clicked. That that was the year that we were talking about the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and it was before it was in place and then the following year, it was in place and we were able to thank legislators. You know, before I knew it, I was in their offices talking to them and I really credit Laurie Baskin at Theatre Communications Group for igniting that spark. As someone who's been doing that work for years and she keeps going back again and again every year because that's what the work is and I've been going back every year since.



JEAN: Oh wow, do I feel like a granny here. My transformative moment took place back in the 80s when I participated in national fellowship opportunity at Colonial Williamsburg. It wasn't an arts education event but where I encountered Sherry Kafka Wagner, who I later viewed as a mentor. She was a writer, urban planner, and historian who has also worked in design, film, and theatre. She made a comment one day when talking about the future of the arts/history and working with communities and families. She said two things that have stayed with me and guided me throughout my entire career: "You will be the very best at what you do when you build relationships one at a time....It's hard work...but to sustain it, you have to take the time till you have garnered their trust..." The second comment—"Everyone has something to contribute to your journey." That struck me and I truly believe that. Sometimes those "everyones" are people that nobody notices or knows at all but they're people in the field, people in rural communities, people in institutionalized communities, parents, clergy, school secretaries, etc. I've never forgotten that. Through the years, when I didn't do something right, it was because I hadn't taken the time to build relationships or listen to the "others."

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



JEAN: I think one of the hardest things to deal with in the systemic sense is the continual turnover in leadership. Whether it's an election year and key legislators leave, committees change, the local school board/state school board turns over as do leaders in schools and districts—whether it's a superintendent or the principal. We work so hard to establish those relationships and support for arts education. One moment: a certain principal leaves and arts education is out

the window because the new one loves technology, etc. It is one of the most difficult things to deal with on a daily basis. When you're working with any type of educational institution, you are constantly dealing with the challenge of "Wow, we must educate this principal/dean/faculty over again. I've got to establish this relationship."

In our state, we have a new school board of arts education neophytes. I'm thinking, "holy moly, we're starting all over again." This new board just eliminated the requirement for the arts, PE and health in middle school. So to me, systemically, the decision makers who make the decisions and call all the shots whether its policy, laws, budgets or define priorities, whatever, it's a moving target all the time.



SARAH: Yeah, so, my view kind of goes right off of that. I am sure there are many suggestions, but I feel so strongly that until students have equal access to high quality education starting from elementary school (and even before elementary school), then the barriers to leadership and teacher training and administrator training won't change either. Similar to what you said, if a student grows up in a school system that doesn't have any support for the arts—it likely doesn't have an arts program at all—then they don't even realize what they're lacking in their terms of education and if a student from that school ends up being a teacher, an administrator, a superintendent then of course they don't see the value in the arts because they didn't have it themselves growing up. So, I just think that when students lose out on their quality education then that cycle continues and I'm saying this as someone who—I go into hundreds of classrooms a year and I also teach part-time in two different schools as well—has seen this from almost every angle and I think it has to start really in the roots with the young kids.



JEAN: I think in terms of how we might tackle it, I think it's never losing sight of that whole cycle of continual professional development for K-16 educators. Also, not just offering professional development but opportunities for educators, parents and community advocates to learn and develop their own artistic goals. We do a program where educators can apply for a grant to spend one-on-one time with an artist because we know that if that individual falls in love with an art form, they can't help but implement it in the classroom or community setting in some way. I've seen educators that are on the verge of hanging it up, then we provided them an opportunity to make art. Now, they are ready to go for another ten years. I never get tired of seeing that. Those learning opportunities for adults are important if we want to ensure learning opportunities for kids.

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



SARAH: I think it comes down to the fact that the world is bigger than we think it is even with all of the access we have to it with the internet and communication. It's just obvious that humans

are still struggling to relate to one another and the arts do more unifying than almost any other area. I think there's a connection basically.



JEAN: I agree with the Sarah in the terms of the larger world, I think sometimes we think in terms of leadership pipeline in the field of arts education, as being teachers, administrators, artists and elected officials who care about and want to foster arts education. Beyond that, there are so many other people that can contribute to that leadership process whether it's a priest in the local parish who wants art making in their after-school program, folk artists embedded in communities, teaching artists, advocates, all who care about the arts and want arts education in schools and community settings. We overlook everyday people who we never invite to the table to be part of a solution. We go into a school and we work with a teacher and principal but how often do we say, "Who are some of the parents in your community that are also artists or work in a related field or are patrons who support the arts?" Even the ones that make costumes for the school musical or retired engineer grandparents who build sets for the musical?" I think too many times we overlook many that aren't associated with the school in the formalized component of arts education but can emerge as major leaders and certainly as advocates, as panelists, as advisory groups, as focus groups...I have seen individuals from these sectors emerge as the arts coordinator for a school district or community. When we need voices to support us, we often have waited too long to make that appeal to a wider community. What we should have done is have that wider community at the table all along helping us with this process and counting on their ideas, perspective, and different world views.



SARAH: Absolutely! And that'll build onto having greater diversity in the arts, as those students benefiting from that community will grow up as well, so everyone's not getting funneled into an orchestral training program, for instance. They could go out and be studying a different type of music or a different type of art form.

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



JEAN: Relationship building and simply exploring. It's been easier for me, particularly since my kids are grown and I don't have the day to day family responsibilities. However, I've also included my family many times. I am a visual artist but I go to the theatre, dance performances, chamber music events, the opera, festivals, literary readings, workshops. Thanks to Utah, I'm also an independent film junkie. One Saturday, I went to a Bolivian national celebration, a Peruvian independence-day event, and a Samoan dance festival. I feel it is incumbent on those in similar arts education roles to have knowledge of many artistic disciplines. I seek to experience our state's artistic richness. I've tried to build my Rolodex of artists, community advocates, knowledge of

artistic and educational resources, so I could communicate and connect with and work with those that love, support and engage in all of the arts.

I had to work at this. I am an INFP (Meyers-Briggs). My preference—home, bed, book, unplugged and quiet. I made myself go where I know nothing and made myself say “yes” when I didn’t have a clue what I was saying yes to - community work in equity, social justice, PTA, Indian education, homeless shelters, prisons, and refugee centers. I had to move beyond NASAA, AFTA, NAEA, MENC and talking heads. I’ve worked to live and model lifelong learning. Teaching me to write my own poetry made me an advocate of poetry workshops. This journey has been what continues to inform my work and gives me the vocabulary to engage others.



SARAH: I love everything that Jean just said. I would also say, flexibility, which kind of goes with being a life-long learner and also having a yes attitude and being positive. I just heard someone say in an interview recently that “what you see in the world is a projection of what’s inside you” which really makes sense if you think about it. If you see positivity in a situation, it’s easier to attain those results

Q: Consider institutional training or networks? Is certification or network membership a barrier or an asset?



SARAH: I think it’s an asset when one has access to them – to networks and certification programs—I’m completely honored and grateful for this conversation with such an experienced leader in arts education but I’ve also been privileged enough, myself, to go to college and grad school and get myself to events so I can meet people and attend Arts Advocacy Days and meet these amazing people and none of these experiences were free so I already have a huge advantage. So to me, these networks are totally a huge asset but that usually means a barrier to someone else and I really want to make sure in my life that I can constantly find other people to bring with me so more people can have the opportunities I’ve been fortunate enough to have.



JEAN: I don’t know how to approach this one. I think that training and networks are always great and the opportunity with colleagues are valuable as I cherish the times when arts ed people get together to learn from each other. I guess what I think would be ideal is if we could personally design a learning journey that could result in some sort of certification. It would support individual learning styles. Some people learn best by going to conferences, listening and reading endless PowerPoints. I don’t, I learn best by doing something that gives me “ah-ha” moments. I agree with Sarah in that some have many opportunities to attend conferences—they have institutional support—my agency sends me often but sometimes I feel “fire hosed” or get a tired bum. I’m getting ready to go to the LEAD Conference on Arts and Disabilities because of WESTAF’s dollars. Others don’t have similar support. Some might benefit from formalized distance learning. The right mentor

could help. A learner could create a network and similar to what schools call professional learning communities. In a school, 3 or 4 teachers might get together and discuss lesson plans, try new projects, conduct action research, etc. Vermont College has a great model—self-designed degree program that feeds into a larger network with accountability and the support of faculty/mentor. It could be a combination of conferences, workshops, personal activity. I hate “one size fits all” kinds of things—nothing fits all, including panty hose. I’m in favor of designing one’s own learning journey by owning strengths and weaknesses and how one learns best. Hopefully, such activity is then supported by certification or at least a star in the middle of the forehead.

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?



JEAN: I don’t know if I have anything to add to what I’ve already said in terms of constantly expanding the horizons. As many years as I’ve been in the arts and humanities field, I learn something new every day. For me, that’s the only hope for building leadership is understanding that if you emerge as a leader, you can nurture new leaders who understand that this is a journey, not a destination. As Sarah mentioned earlier, remain flexible, and know that “okay, today I need to go to this session.” I attended a day where we learned about changing demographics in Utah and its impact on the political process. I thought, “We have much to do to accommodate new Utahans, including refugee and non-English speakers. How we can expand our work?” I also met many community leaders who we need to bring to the table to help with this journey. I suppose, my best advice “learn every day and explore what we don’t know to best inform our work.”



SARAH: Well, again, echoing everything that Jean said and adding to it, I think it’s important to also remember what got you into the field in the first place and like I said earlier, I am a music educator and I make sure to still find ways to work as a music teacher in addition to working in the administrative side of things. And it keeps me connected to students and to other teachers and also just grounded in my passion. But I also aspire to be more like Jean and saddle in all of the different art forms and staying involved and keep a foot in all of the work. And my hope for the future is just the hope that we can continue to expand access to arts education exponentially. It’s happening and it’s been happening but we need to find support to make it happen faster.

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