CYCLICAL MENTORSHIP
IN ARTS EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

Insights from Emerging and Veteran Leaders

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN

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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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Suggested Citation

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.
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

ALIZA GREENBERG

ARTS ENRICHMENT COORDINATOR, LEARNINGSPRING SCHOOL

Aliza Greenberg is the Arts Enrichment Coordinator at the LearningSpring School, a school for students on the autism spectrum, where she teaches the arts and coordinates cultural partnerships. Aliza is also the Project Leader for Supporting Transitions with the Museum Access Consortium, a project to increase cultural opportunities for adults with autism. She has worked as a consultant with Trusty Sidekick Theater, CO/LAB Theater, Wolf Performing Arts Center, and other arts organizations. She also serves as co-chair of Continuing the Conversation for the Arts in Education program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Previously, Aliza was a Program Manager at the Metropolitan Opera Guild where she managed the Students Compose Opera program, the Teaching Through Opera program, and was a Project Director for a USDOE AEMDD project investigating the impact of opera-based learning in schools. Aliza has also held the position of Education Program Manager at Roundabout Theatre Company where she managed Roundabout’s school partnerships. Aliza served on the faculty for the Project Zero/Silk Road Ensemble’s Arts and Passion Driven Learning Institute in 2016 and participated in the National Guild for Community Arts Education’s leadership program (CAELI) in 2012. B.A., Bryn Mawr College (Psychology, Education); Ed.M., Harvard Graduate School of Education (Arts in Education).

Veteran Leader in Arts Education

AKUA KOUYATE-TATE

VICE PRESIDENT, EDUCATION, WOLF TRAP FOUNDATION FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Akua Kouyate-Tate oversees all of Wolf Trap’s Education Programs including the nationally recognized Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts and Wolf Trap Internship Program.

Prior to joining Wolf Trap in 2001, Ms. Kouyate-Tate worked for more than 25 years as an administrator, educator, and professional artist with arts and disability organizations and government agencies including Memory of African Culture, Inc.; Young Audiences - DC Chapter; DC Public Schools; United Cerebral Palsy; the National Endowment for the Arts; and the Library of Congress. She also has served as an Adjunct Faculty member of Dance Major programs at Howard University, University of Maryland, American University, and George Mason University; as a grant review panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts and other state and local arts agencies; and regularly presents at national and international conferences on arts education.

Ms. Kouyate-Tate holds a MA in Arts Management and a BA in Performing Arts-Dance from American University, and is a recipient of a Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Award and a 2015 BEYA STEM Global Competitiveness Conference K -12 Promotion of Education Award. She has conducted postgraduate research in African Cultural Studies at Howard University and in the countries of Mali, Senegal, and the Gambia.
Please reflect on a transformative moment for you as an arts education leader from a mentor or mentee.

**ALIZA:** I guess I’ve had a lot of mentors as I’ve been kind of finding my way as an emerging leader in arts education. One transformative moment was when my mentor, my professor in grad school, helped me make a big life decision. I had been working in arts education/non-profits on the administrative side and I was presented with the opportunity to move into the classroom and become a classroom teacher and it definitely wasn’t the picture of leadership that had been presented to me in the field of arts education. When you go to conferences or in service organizations, it’s mostly individuals from cultural organizations or universities that are presented as leaders. There’s not really a lot of classroom teachers as models, as leaders, and especially arts classroom teachers. My mentor encouraged me to dive into working directly with students in this way, and stressed the importance of teachers as leaders. He said that he believed everyone should teach and that teachers are the lifeblood of the work. So that validation of the path allowed me to make the leap and now that I’m in the classroom teaching, I think that our arts education field should definitely recognize teachers more in the leadership conversation. It’s not something that’s apparent when you’re at the gatherings and on the administration side of things.

**AKUA:** I’ve had many mentors over my career and so I’m going to speak about one in particular: Dr. Sherrill Berryman-Johnson, now an Ancestor, was the former chair of the International Association of Blacks in Dance and also head of the Howard University Dance Major program. As a faculty instructor for the Howard University Dance Program, as well as a dance artist working and performing in the community, I was able to shadow Dr. Johnson and work directly with her for various projects—whether they were with students or professional artists or community organizations, I was working right by her side and learned so much.

One particular project that I want to talk about was when we led a group of adult learners and university students on an international education and cultural arts excursion to Senegal and Mali. Dr. Johnson was a stickler for instituting a detailed approach to how you handle any type of project. Before we even began to plan our travel itinerary, we had in place classes with nationals from the countries we were visiting to understand language and culture. We had an outline that was very specific on how we would spend each day and how we would engage with family and community members. We intently worked with individuals and organizations, both on this side of the water as well as in Senegal and Mali, to ensure that it was going to be a really substantive experience for all.

When we arrived in the countries, we were conscientious about having experiences that would be of mutual benefit for our group as well as the people we interacted with in the host countries. This meant that our group as visitors, as well as the families, artists and other individuals we
met would share genuine opportunities of exchange. When we returned back to the US, we designed multiple opportunities for our group to present and share what we experienced and the students and adults alike were entrusted and charged to present exemplary work to demonstrate and speak about what they had learned and gained from their involvement in the cultural exchange and how it was impacting their continued development.

And so, through this particular project, but also with anything that I did with Dr. Johnson, I was able to take from the experience that you must have a comprehensive approach that provided the best opportunity to ensure that the project would yield success; and every project would yield meaningful interactions and learning for everybody who was a part of it. I also realized that you have to set high expectations to ensure for positive outcome, regardless of the age and development of the participant—whether they were the little babies that we worked with in the communities who were preschoolers or kindergarteners or they were college students at the universities or elders in the community who were engaged with us. Everyone had this expectation for success and experiencing positive outcomes.

And finally, with everything that we did—critical analysis was a key element, throughout our process as well as afterwards. It was really important that we took a look at our work, that we critiqued ourselves and others, so that we were able to build and learn from the experience, and certainly be able to make adaptations and changes so that the next one would be better than the last.

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

ALIZA: I think there are many barriers to leadership in arts education and I think financial barriers remain a big one—maybe one of the biggest barriers—because financial barriers lead to gaps in representation from certain groups where financial barriers might just be too great to overcome. Entry level positions in arts education are still very low-paid. Internship opportunities which are often required to enter into the field of arts education are still often unpaid or low-paid. Graduate programs in arts education are very expensive so I think those who can’t afford to start in this field are facing huge barriers. We need more training for different groups of people in different communities so that they can rise to leadership roles.

I work specifically with individuals with developmental disabilities and about 85% of individuals with developmental disabilities are unemployed so I think we need to really look at what communities are not represented in our leadership and how can we take away some of those barriers for those individuals. For people with disabilities, in particular, the barriers are around training but also just an openness to on-the-job support which people may need to enter the arts education profession. While that support is available through job coaching and other programs, I think organizations are still either not aware or taking advantage of those supports. So I would say getting different and diverse people working in our profession is a big barrier.
AKUA: Absolutely, we definitely know that funding and economics can be barriers to leadership. However another barrier is not tapping into our various communities where we are—particularly the ones that we’re serving—to recognize that there’s leadership from within. Sometimes the leadership we seek may not be specifically in our field as arts education leaders. Nevertheless, they are in our field as people who understand, value and appreciate that there needs to be substantial education opportunity all around.

There are a couple of things that must happen when we want to tap into community resources. We have to be willing and able to hear what are the priorities in the communities where we serve; be able to recognize who are the people doing the work on the ground; and how they can be at the table when it comes to making decisions about how to have arts education access and opportunity. There may be opportunities that require some level of information sharing. Perhaps there is a need for them to see and experience great arts education wherever it is. Perhaps there’s information that we can share through research, through various opportunities to speak with various members of the community. But nevertheless, if we can be part of a broader discussion about the value of arts education and get that information out, we will find more and more people who are invested in it as well. Community members must have a say about what needs to happen in their communities and we should be open to having a much broader conversation with people who are coming across the various sectors of our communities so that they too can contribute to the arts education field and ultimately, to the success for students and children.

We have a responsibility in all of this to ensure that understanding of what great arts education is and represents—whether we’re bringing it to people or we’re going out and seeing it in places that we might not usually go to see or experience arts education—requires involvement of community members across sectors. Therefore inclusion and development of community leaders across sectors is critically important.

ALIZA: I agree wholeheartedly and I think one of the factors that goes hand-in-hand is our approach to scale. I feel like some organizations, programs, or communities really want to scale what works and bring it to the greatest amount of people, but I think when we’re doing the kind of work that Akua is calling for and delving deeply into communities, seeking out quality models that exist and really listening to the communities around us, we have to give up the idea of scale so that we can really dive deeply into what is working. So often grants or program development calls for great scale and I think that can actually be a barrier to the high-quality work that Akua was talking about.

AKUA: I think what you’re speaking of is really contextualizing—because when you think about it, it’s not that we shouldn’t share best practices—we should. We should share what we have seen from one place to another that is really excellent and we need to share it in so many ways. We worked recently on a one-pager that points to what the field is saying about early childhood education and the value of it as being essential to make sure that children are successful
throughout life. We also talk about how arts education, particularly, and providing professional development for teachers is an important factor because teachers, who are the ones that have the frontline after the parents, need to be able to tap into building their own skills so they can be successful with children. However, with that said, we must take in information and then really figure out what is the need for where we are at a particular site. What are our issues? What are our concerns? That means that it’s not going to be a cookie cutter type of sharing out of the work. It’s got to be something that serves a particular community and what that community wants to have happen.

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

**ALIZA:** I think that it comes back to representation and better representing the populations we serve in our leadership. As we were talking about, bringing up people from our communities as leaders is so important and creating the pipelines for people to move from participants in programs to leaders in programs. I also think valuing the teaching profession—and the teaching artist profession more—is very important.

We talk in our professional development gatherings about how the communities that we serve are doing such incredible artistic work and how we should hold that up as a learning opportunity. I think the teachers and teaching artists in the profession are also doing incredible work and they should be on the frontlines of leading professional development for each other. Often when we have learning opportunities in arts education, it’s usually an administrator leading an experience for a group of people who are teaching artists or teachers on the ground and I think if we have more peer-led professional development, we’ll also be more in touch with the communities we serve and the students we’re reaching. Even having students come and participate in these professional development opportunities would be beneficial. We need to listen to the voices of our students as well in figuring out what’s needed in terms of leadership in the field.

**AKUA:** Even as we’re talking about the field of arts education, let’s understand that arts education is part of education. It’s not separate from it. The investment for education of children and of adults requires everyone’s involvement. Certainly, we’re in a place in time where our communities are ever-evolving and changing in their representations of people across sectors, across ethnicities, across cultures, across economic abilities, across thought processes. Our communities are so varied, and so it only means that it’s important that the leadership pipeline is representative of who we are, all of us. That representation is critical because we need to have the multiple perspectives represented across all of our sectors in how we continue to advance arts education. That includes not only the parents, students, and educators; it also includes the business community. It includes the other sectors of social agencies and health agencies.
The fact is when we utilize education in its most appropriate way, we’re not talking about education in a silo. We’re talking about skills and development that have an impact on our lives across disciplines. The same applies to the arts. We can certainly be learning the arts and the concepts of an art form. However, it is going to engage us in so many ways that the impact of the learning is not going to be in a simple, singular place but it’s going to impact our very lives. Let’s be open to recognize that truly effective leadership would be representative of all of the sectors that are a part of our lives. That’s what is really important about broadening the leadership pipeline. That’s the virtue—that there’s clear representation so we have those multiple perspectives to address what true educational success is and arts education success is for all of those who are participating.

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

**ALIZA:** I think just as Akua was talking about, having multiple fields and sectors involved in our work. I definitely think the ability to reach out and engage with people in different fields is a critical skill and through my work, working with people with disabilities, I’ve been very involved in the disability community and organizations who provide services for people with disabilities and I think that has made me stronger, just being able to navigate those other areas of the work and broadening my horizons. And also, just every time you go into a new school, it’s a new culture and a new group of people and set of experiences. So, being able to navigate different settings and different sectors is hugely important and I think one of the key skills that goes along with that is listening and being a good listener and taking in what the different communities and different sectors are telling you and being changed by that information and moving forward based on what you find out. Approaching things with a real curiosity and openness to learning.

**AKUA:** I couldn’t agree with you more, Aliza. The way that we’re going to have that broad participation is really to get those thought leaders from across those sectors together so that we can learn from each other, so that we can be assured that what we’re doing is on point in terms of where we want to go and how we want to continue to develop. The skill of bringing people together who can contribute to the process and the people who have the information—that’s really critical.

Certainly, the next step to that would be truly collaborating, let’s not stop with the conversations but really interacting with other individuals, entities, organizations, to do the work that’s needed. And collaboration is not necessarily easy but if we’re going in with the mindset that everyone has value, everyone has something to contribute, and everyone can learn—then that opens up the opportunity for a true exchange and sharing of information and learning and skills. Collaboration is truly important as you’re working towards leadership development.
Third, I would say, and I mentioned it early, specifically critical analysis, evaluation and assessment of our work. We have to be able to look critically at what we do and have others look at it. Whether it’s research or some ongoing formative analysis of what we’re doing in a peer-to-peer setting, we have to be able to look at that work and also the children themselves. The children, the students, the learners can share out as well. There has to be a way of assessing to know goals and expectations are truly met, not just outputs but outcomes. Evaluation and assessment is really important.

And finally, all of us are learners at all times—as long as we can breathe, we are still in a position to learn. That means that we have to be willing as Aliza said, to listen. We have to be willing to listen, we have to be willing to learn, we have to be willing to grow and yes, possibly change. As long as we realize that our goal is the highest quality of arts education and services and experiences for all of the participants. If we can keep this in mind, then it really is available, possible and plausible to develop and expand leadership. Current leaders need to think in this manner; change is inevitable and we can all benefit when we recognize this.

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?

ALIZA: I guess it goes right along with everything we’ve been talking about but my advice would be: Don’t be afraid to be the only arts person in the room. I think it can be extremely scary to be the only one representing a certain area at the table but I think it’s extremely important to be in those conversations with those other stakeholders. So just to enter into those settings where you’re the only person from the arts education field with determination and openness and willingness to listen and be changed would be my advice.

As an arts teacher, by nature, you’re in that situation. You’re usually the only arts teacher in the building so you’re constantly in conversations where you’re representing that perspective. But I think also you may find out that while you might officially be the only arts person in the room, many others are artists and have an interest and a background in the arts and we should use that and mine that for whatever that can bring to the learning. But definitely seeking out and mining those opportunities to be in diverse conversations with different people.

I guess my hope would be that we have more conversations where there’s varied people in the room, people from different settings and different sectors. I also think my hope for leadership would be to lift up these varied pictures of what a leader is and that leadership conversations happen with teachers and students and teaching artists and people from all over and think about how can we share out those leadership conversations and live the idea that leadership is not a position but that people are engaging in leadership activities all the time.
AKUA: That truly is a wonderful statement, that we all have that opportunity to engage in leadership at all times. With that I’ll say, participate. Be an advocate for arts education on multiple fronts and with multiple constituents. Be present, be engaged, speak up, speak out and make sure it’s happening in various settings. Not only in the arts community but in general education, in the business sector, in community services, wherever there is synergy for arts education to be a viable factor, to be able to contribute to the success for education for others—be there. Be a part of it.

And in order to do that, be informed. Do your work. Understand what it is that you stand for, understand what it is that you’re talking about. Really be informed about that which you bring to the table and the willingness to learn from others who bring something to the table as well. So that’s really critical.

And finally, my hope is that this active leadership clearly represents the diversity and is inclusive of the multiple perspectives of our national community, of our society. That inclusiveness and representation is from all of those different sectors and that people see this as the norm because we value the uniqueness that we all bring. We can learn from each other and learn to engage in a way that allows us to continue to grow and develop. This is what I would hope for.