

Young Emerging Leaders Forum - Welcome and Introduction

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Please let me formally welcome you to the inaugural Young & Emerging Leaders Forum. I am pleased to begin our presentations with “Redefining Leadership: Results from a Global Study on Leadership in Arts and Cultural Education.”

My name is Jeff M. Poulin and I am the managing director of Creative Generation, based in Washington, D.C.

The goals of my presentation today are to:

- Share the findings of a global study on leadership in the arts and cultural education field;
- Interrogate a re-orientation of leadership within the field; and
- Map tangible actions for emerging leaders and others seeking to disrupt or reimagine the pipeline to leadership within the field.

But, before I begin, I wanted to share a bit about myself. My journey in the arts education field is probably not unlike many of your own. I began learning dance, music, and theatre at a very young age – starting tap dance lessons at the young age of 2 and a half. I quickly found my way to community theatre stages and eventually on tour around the United States. Simultaneously, I channeled my energies, passionate about advocacy and policy change, towards leading efforts for youth voice within the educational decision-making bodies of my home state of Maine. Together with youth around the state, we advocated for legislation that would ensure youth seats on the Board of Education at the state and local levels. Through this process, I learned that the skills and capabilities I gained through my study of the arts enabled me to drive social and policy change in my community.

Eventually, I found my way from the stage and legislature to the nonprofit sector and educational institutions working for performing arts organizations in New York City and Dublin Ireland as a teaching artist, and education and audience development officer. Most recently, I

led a national arts education program in Washington, D.C. advocating for policy change to increase access to arts education for America's learners. Today, I teach on the faculties of arts management at two Universities: Carnegie Mellon University and American University.

In April of last year, I founded Creative Generation, which is an international NGO works to inspire, connect, and amplify the work of young creatives who catalyze social change, and those who are committed to cultivating their creativity. We are pleased to be conducting new research, supporting projects like the Young & Emerging Leaders Forum, and sharing the work of young creatives from around the world.

Last October, I traveled in Frankfurt, Germany to share the underpinning research of Creative Generation at the World Alliance for Arts Education's global conference. Here, I met incredible people, all passionate educators, artists, advocates, and researchers. I presented on a panel of incredible young leaders – we, in fact, were some of the only younger people at the whole event. This was not unlike my own experience at many conferences, however, we were determined that create a space where younger leaders in the field of arts and cultural education could come together and grapple with an ever-changing field.

In the intervening year, we have established the Young & Emerging Leaders Forum which is intended to provide a space for young scholars, emerging leaders, and new colleagues to the field of arts education to share their work, network, and develop a community of learning in order to expand opportunities and broaden the leadership pipeline in the global field of arts and cultural education.

However, through this process, we constantly grappled with the question: What *is* leadership in arts and cultural education?

So, working with the leaders of the 2020 Summit planning team and the Executive Forum of the World Alliance, we began a global study – utilizing the supports of Creative Generation – to explore this question as a prompt for today's (and future!) events.

We began with the literature and came to understand that there are myriad models for leadership in both the cultural and educational contexts.

Similarly, there have been a few studies – particularly in the United States – on leadership in the arts education field. One of which – the circular diagram on the left of the slide – I led for 4 years. The “12 Core Competencies of an Arts Education Leader” was published in 2019 by Americans for the Arts and was the most expansive and exhaustive study on the concept of leadership in the arts education field, limited to the American context. Other, smaller, regional or local studies have been conducted, like the one shown here in Los Angeles County, California.

What we learned from the literature was that there are three assumptions we needed to adopt in order to scope our inquiry:

- First, that leadership is defined in field-specific, contextual, and culturally specific ways;

- Second, that leadership is often cultivated at the municipal, national, and global-regional levels;
- And finally, that leadership assumes mastery or expertise in the field-specific topic.

With these in mind, we designed a global study using a community-based participatory approach, which included three cities, three countries or states, and three global regions.

We chose three cities: Houston, Texas in the United States; Bath and Bristol in the United Kingdom, and Nairobi, Kenya.

We then chose three countries or parts of countries: the United Arab Emirates; the seven states in the south and west of India; and Australia.

Finally, we chose three global regions: Latin America, consisting of 9 countries, Europe, consisting of 13 countries including the members state of the United Kingdom, and Southeast Asia with the 11 ASEAN member nations + their collaborators in China and the Republic of Korea.

We worked with 14 partners to make this happen: they helped curate invitation lists – seeking a balance in perspectives, especially considering key demographics and aspects of the arts and cultural education field. We hosted the focus groups and have recently synthesized the data collected to draw conclusions, which I am thrilled to share with you today.

The main thing we learned that there is a fallacy about the concept of leadership. As one respondent put it: Leadership is like a 5-legged sheep, we want it to have all of the attributes we desire, but know that it doesn't exist. Another analogized leadership to superheroes – articulating the assumption that we believe the perfect leader will appear to solve our problems with their key qualities.

However, what we heard from the field was a desire for change – not in the leaders we have, but instead in the concept of leadership itself.

Respondents from around the world articulated a desire to disrupt, re-orient, and re-imagine the current concepts of leadership as they didn't support the nature of the work in arts and cultural education happening in schools and communities today. Further, they believe that leaders can be transformative towards new models which inculcate justice through the work of arts and cultural education.

Additionally, respondents believed that we must engage in personal introspection to enable an environment which supports a new concept of distributive collective leadership – I will say that again “Distributive collective leadership – as it will be a recurring theme throughout the rest of my presentation. This concept seeks to disaggregate current models of leadership and reimagine interconnectedness between generations and mentoring relationships, employing a reframing of eldership.

In our research, we solicited dialogues about the qualities of a leader and gathered hundreds of data points. These informed key themes from around the world that were contextual, culturally specific, and informed by current event.

Further, we solicited a futures orientation whereby respondents visioned for the type of leadership they desired. Here, I share with you our mapping of those responses on a two-axis grid. On the x-axis you will see the dichotomy of taking space or sharing space, while on the y axis you will see disrupting norms or reinforcing norms.

What is important to understand here is that there is no connotation – no good or bad – about either of these axis. Rather, we must understand the time, place, relevance, and appropriateness for the employment of any of the extremes. Disrupting norms can be very important in certain circumstances, but may not be the path you choose when in a life or death emergency. Similarly, in some instances, taking space is required to speak up about voices unheard, while in others, it may be more appropriate to share space with others. This framework, we hope will enable leaders to begin their introspection and critical reflection about how they currently or wish to lead.

Originally, we thought we would establish a check list of the qualities of a leader. However, with what we heard from the field, we chose to articulate this in terms of a journey – or a path for those in leadership capacities – to enable the concept of distributed collective leadership. This started with an approach from leaders who wish to engage in their own growth and development. It then continues with 5 steps:

1. Unlearning,
2. Bridging,
3. Responding,
4. Holding Tension,
5. Distributed Collective Leadership,

The approach is important, because those wishing to embark on this process need to be mindful of the journey. We found that two approaches were necessary:

- The inward concepts of introspection about how one feels about this work and critical reflection about one's previous work.
- Also, the outward concepts of compassion towards others on their journey and empathy towards others with whom you are working.

The first stage of this journey is unlearning – which we have represented by an individual questioning or interrogating their own ideas. Across the field we heard that unlearning can manifest in such actions as:

- Question the *status quo*, norms, and current definitions of leadership;
- Reflect on how privilege and advantage has impacted your own positionality in the field; and
- Interrogate the pathways, credentials, or assumed qualities of leaders in the past.

The second stage of this journey is Bridging – which we have represented with a bridge connecting two pieces of land. Across the field we heard that bridging can manifest in such actions as:

- Build connections between self and others;
- Create pathways between communities of practice; and
- De-silo arts/culture, education, and allied fields of practice.

The third stage of this journey is Navigating – which we have represented with a river twisting and turning. Across the field we heard that navigating can manifest in such actions as:

- Respond to the broader issues on your context (community, nation, world);
- Demonstrate flexibility among changing circumstances;
- Remain resilient with goals in mind; and
- Vision for the future.

Finally, the fourth stage of this journey is Holding Tensions – which we have represented with a see-saw, a rudimentary kinesthetic activity that seeks to balance wight between two players.

Across the field we heard that holding tension can manifest in such actions as:

- Balance divergent or converging influences on your work;
- Honor differences and drawing on similarities between people and experiences; and
- Do work, while seeking to make yourself redundant.

Finally, we end at the concept of Distributed Collective Leadership. In this newly envisioned models, we combined the well-researched practices of distributed leadership (the act of flattening governance structures and assigning decision-making based on expertise) with collective leadership (working in combination with others). Some key principles emerged from our research, including:

- Power over vs. Power to – the idea that collectives get their power from their accountability to people with whom they are working, rather than exerting their power over those with whom they are working.
- Leadership is a collective task which brings people together.
- Individuals bring expertise to the collective which makes their work stronger.
- Such expertise shifts based on the work and can represent a number of areas, such as:
 - Arts/culture, education, or other areas of knowledge;
 - Business acumen; and
 - Communications and storytelling.

From this work, we learned a lot and hope that it can spur you all into action – into new and different ways for viewing your role or future role in the field. We also hop that the field may shift to more deeply integrate the following ideas:

- Re-orient towards **Distributed Collective Leadership**:
 - Collaborate with each other to foster leadership as a collective task; and
 - Honor the expertise of individuals within the collective.
- Cultivate intergenerational relations: **Mentorship and Eldership**:

- Engage in mentorship relationships to share expertise and transmit knowledge; and
- Foster eldership, which is open to multiple possibilities of truth.
- **And finally, we hope as a field, to animate others** engaged in the work:
 - to inspire enthusiasm and empower others through leadership;
 - to create democratic spaces to make work together; and
 - to spark momentum.

With that I close out with one final question for you to begin your own introspection and critical reflection: How are you enabling the environment for distributed collective leadership?