

(re)Marking Time/(re)Examining the Social History of a Community School of Visual Art

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Abstract

In this paper the author argues that education researchers, artists, educators and arts agencies need to reexamine their policies and practices and grapple with the difficult knowledge of their embeddedness in the problems they seek to resolve. The author identifies the narrative research methods and post positivist analyses he employs in constructing a polyvocal history of an arts education agency. Drawing on fifty-five years of agency meeting minutes, promotional catalogs and news clippings as cross-read within/against the oral testimonies of participants in a community school of visual art, the author critically reflects on the ways community-based arts institutions navigate the dynamics of social change regarding issues of race. He concludes that only as art education and social/historic researchers come to confront their roles in the construction and operations of problems they seek to resolve will they begin to conscientiously work toward the ends of social justice in their programs of art study.

Introduction

Recent research regarding artists and cultural institutions' interventions into the lives of children and communities "at risk" (Davis, 1993, 1996; Harper, 1998) assert many U.S. arts organizations are committed to issues of social and cultural justice. Arts-based education reform initiatives are repeatedly touted for their impact on the "disadvantaged" child, and "low performing" student (Dobbs, 1998; Wilson, 1997; Wilson, Corbet, Noblit & Adkins 1996; Noblit, 1997; Shookhoff, 1996), promoting the notion that arts-informed ways of teaching and art-centered learning can enliven and inspire heightened academic performance. While these initiatives may illustrate the arts' intrinsic value and service to the work of education and social change, their aligned research largely fails to question the often-unstated normative values of the arts/education agencies authoring these reforms and interventions or the researchers' gaze.

Judith Butler notes, "social power produces modes of reflexivity at the same time as it limits forms of sociality" (1997, p. 21). Considering the multiple sites where art is taught and revered as one terrain on which social meaning and values are created and contested, I argue for a "pedagogy of the humanities as the arena of cultural explanations that question the explanations of culture" (Spivak, 1995, p. 391). I hold that art education institutions may fail to critically examine their own social histories and cultural practice, or confront their roles in constructing and perpetuating the very social problems that have rendered children and communities "at risk." I propose that researchers and art education agencies' gaze be no longer fixed on the lived circumstance or academic performance of students at-risk – repeatedly framing them as the problem — but that our gaze be inverted to confront art education's complicity in social problems we construct.

At its core, this paper queerly questions how recent arts-centered change initiatives aimed at empowering students/communities through the arts also limit the possibility of change. Queer theory becomes queer when, as Teresa de Laurentis notes, it “conveys a double emphasis on the conceptual and speculative work involved in discourse production and on the necessary critical work of deconstructing our own discourses and their constructed silences” (Britzman, 1998, p. 82). In example, I center this discussion on a deconstruction of my own agency’s racial policy history, its discourses and social practices, towards the ends of (re)marking and mourning cycles of injustices and envisioning policies, art education programs and research practices that are consistent with the democratic social values we purport to preserve.

I have no interest in discouraging the work of scholars positioning the arts for engagement with social, cultural, educational and economic change, but offer this paper as a gesture of solidarity in the necessary but uncomfortable process of revisiting my/our past and revisioning its future. “How does one move from ambivalence and guilt to the ethical responsibility necessary to the work of mourning? How does one understand the implication that is loss? . . . How does anyone live with a knowledge that comes to late” (Britzman, 1998 p. 130)? I hold that it is not too late for art educators and researchers to unlearn the practices we have considered given, but maintain that until we confront the messy and sordid policies and practices of our past we cannot expect to cleanse the wounds that now infect our cultural body.

In the following pages I reconstruct my ways of working through the research and writing of my own institution’s social history, offering a slice of one part of the research as a means of illustrating the value of combining art education and social research. I begin by briefly summarizing the theoretical foundations and dimensions of

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my arts agency social history, the multiple methods used in collecting the data and the theoretical perspectives I employed in analyzing and cross-reading multiple texts. I will comment on the dilemmas faced in authoring a multi-vocal critical reflection of policies and practices as one embedded in their implementation, arguing that art educators and researchers must find new ways of grappling with such difficult knowledge. I will then explore how issues of race have operated within the programs, leadership and policies of my institution, citing the testimony of participants engaged in our programs and formal records of meetings and publications. Finally, I will challenge researchers considering community arts education initiatives and education reforms promoting the centrality of the arts in public education to reflect on and remark these institutions' social histories and consider how conscionable studies and programs of change might be developed to serve the ends of social justice and democracy.

Dimensions of Research, Methodology and Theoretical Foundations

My research centrally considers an urban southeastern community school of art that has been in operation since the mid-1940's. The school's policies, leadership, pedagogical practices and curriculum have shifted over the years, but the indelible social markings of race, class, gender and heteronormativity remain as palimpsestic traces that continue to shape and inform its current work. Drawing on institutional meeting minutes, promotional catalogs, news clippings and the oral testimonies of fifty –five board members, teaching artists and students involved with the agency during and following racial integration, I (re)mark on these times and critically recount the shifts in this institution's policy, programs and its participants' social consciousness.

In this paper my discussion of race is but one of the multiple and overlapping social regularities considered in my larger work on the social history of a community visual art school. I argue that art

education operates within a web of social regularities that both produces and constrains the ways the visual arts are perceived, taught, created, exhibited and used by multiple communities. I draw from Catherine Marshall's policy culture paradigm (1989) to assist me in thinking about the interrelationships between the values of arts/education agencies, their policies, programs, participants and personnel. I also employ Jim Scherulich's policy archaeology methodology (1995) as a tool for explicating how arts policy research traditionally shores up and supports the status quo rather than considers how the arts agency's role in community or education itself might be identified as a "problem."

In Marshall's policy culture studies (1989), the political culture, policy systems, power and influence structures all affect policy formation. I follow her method of combining comparative case studies with theory-based data collection and multivariate analysis to track how values become forces that influence policy. This involves identifying systems of interactions between and across communities involved in the arts institution and careful attention to the disputes and transactions between these groups as explicit expressions of their cultural values. I then consider how these values are transformed into policy action and practices within the school's curriculum, employment, board/committee leadership and patronage.

Scherulich's policy archaeology methodology (1995) focuses on the social construction of problems as inherently problematic. It is divided into four arenas of study which 1) examine the social construction of specific education and social problems, 2) identify the network of social regularities across educational and social problems regularities, 3) consider the social construction/range of acceptable policy solutions and 4) question the social functions of policy studies itself.

In retelling this history I seek to speak with the voices of art

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students, teaching artists, staff and board members working to extend discourses and studies of visual art in their myriad sites of production. I have enjoined participants in reflecting on their role(s) within the arts institution and the interconnections between leadership, programs, participation and patronage (Mattick, 1994; McCarthy, 1994), considering this research as praxis (Lather, 1986). I have examined the patterned speech and contrasting dialects of my fifty-five informants, situating their stories within a social theory of the self (Bakhtin, 1981; Casey, 1993,1995; Tierney & Lincoln, 1997). I have cross-read their testimonies within/ against the formal records of the agency's past and read again across a broad range of feminist, race, education, art and cultural theorists writings (Becker, 1994; Cahan & Kocur, 1996; Collins, 1990; Eagleton, 1990; Edleman, 1995; Fine, Weiss, Powell & Wong, 1997; Ferguson, Gever, Minh-ha & West, 1995; hooks, 1994, 1995; Lippard, 1990; McFee, 1998; Minh-ha, 1989, 1991, 1992; Patner, 1994; Prakash & Esteva, 1998; Williams, 1994; Warner, 1993) in order to consider how the larger social dynamics of the art school's past and present align with contemporary social theory.

By triangulating the textual bodies of participant narratives, published accounts and records, and cultural theorists' standpoints, the unresolved tensions and slippages contained in/between these texts came to the fore. Through the at times conflicting and contradictory evidence amassed, light is shed on the many ways the school is perceived and used by its varied participants and on how the agency's social practices regarding sexuality, gender, race and class fit within or against the larger cultural scene in which the school is sited (hooks, 1989; Marshall, Mitchell & Wirt, 1989; Minh-ha, 1989). By working through this at times difficult knowledge, my aim is to recount its operations and consider how its revision might serve our art school.

Rather than claim a metanarrative or some presumed "truth" of

this agency's history, I have instead attempted to construct a polyvocal and self-critical rendering of the past and one which attempts to sustain the richly varied standpoint and evolving narratives of participants involved in the school's fifty-five years of operation. This post-positivist position (Donmoyer, 1991; Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996; Lather, 1993) asserts that in the minds and lives of my informants, their narratives make sense regardless of their (mis)fit with others' tales.

I hold that like the work of art, participants' reading of an art education agency will be informed by the lives they have lived, their positions within the agency and the discursive and belief communities with which they identify. While recognizing that a school's work cannot be everything to everyone, I maintain that its practices can be opened up to allow greater numbers and varieties of citizens/communities to find a place within its programs and policy-making decision process. Finally I contend that art agencies, educators and researchers must have the courage to confront the ways such openness is now, or has been constricted in the past if new progress, programs of study, research or policies are to be enabled.

Problematics of Authoring a Multi-Vocal Critical Reflection as an Institutional Insider

Since 1987, as executive director community school of visual art studied, I have actively worked toward moving art education from the attic garret of the masters house to the margins of culture and in central positions with our region's public school. For over 23 years I've been active in craft, art, and education agencies and professional organizations on a local, state, regional and national level. These associations have informed my understanding of the diverse purposes and claims of art education, a perspective shaped almost exclusively by art and education funding agencies, theorists, philosophers and

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proponents of arts education. It was only during my dissertation research (1994-99), while grappling with the competing purposes of art education promoted by various camps, that I first became aware that I had never really considered the history of the very institution I directed.

In entering into this research, my theoretic premise is that teaching artists, staff and board members as well as students all contribute, transform, and adapt the programs of hands-on arts learning to fit their individual and collective-subjective community(ies)' values. Questions of subjectivity, agency and arrangements of power and authority are called into question in the process of implementing an art school's mission, in conducting each interview, and in analyzing and representing the stories of each informant. Considering research a dialogical exercise, I've sought to engage my subjects in the process of defining what questions were posed, as well as challenging each to reflect on the critical issues central to my social reading of the school's history. Through this process subjects have noted feeling reconnected to our school, with many illustrating their renewed interest in its work and engagement with multiple communities.

I recognize that as an insider and proponent of change affiliated with school in which this study is situated, my position of authority likely shapes the stories my informants tell. Knowing that my own political and social standpoints also influence the way I hear the informants' narrative, I have felt duty-bound to sustain a critically self-conscious awareness of the possibilities of misreading or misrepresenting these participants' stories throughout all aspects of data collection, analysis and re-presentation. I acknowledge that in the process of analyzing and reconstructing each subject's narrative, my voice unavoidably becomes co-joined with theirs. I make no claims to objectivity, but steadfastly forefront and trouble my embeddedness in the collective retelling of

this school's history, knowing that the stories I retell will impact these informants future involvement with my school and in the work of social and cultural production.

Alan Peshkin suggests, that "subjectivity operates during the entire research process" (Peshkin, 1982) and that researchers should "systematically identify their subjectivity throughout the course of the research." (1988, p. 17). Having maintained notes to myself throughout the research process, I have attempted to trouble how I "filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement." (Peshkin, 1982, p. 17).

Admittedly it is dangerous business for a non-profit agency to openly examine its past and present policies and programs, given financial stability of most agencies is dependent on a relatively select group of donors, corporations and funding agencies. While all funding agencies and donors call for periodic "assessments," final reports and self-evaluations, they assume that a funded agency would never consider their own benevolence a part of the problem. When told of this project, my local arts council president declared, "I want no part of your history. You are opening up a can of worms." thus confirming my worst fear, that potentially my critical analyses might jeopardize the very work I seek to improve. While I have not yet concluded how I will navigate these dangerous waters, I know that in some way I must acknowledge that our very reliance on a wealthy elite is, part and parcel of the classist tensions that are sustained in arts agency policies and programs.

Some of the most problematic dynamics within the non-profit art institution revolve around the economics of programming, corporate and donor relations and community perception. Given the aging of the donor community, planned giving and major gifts are now considered a

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growth market. It is thus difficult (if not impossible) for those primarily concerned with an agencies fiscal wellbeing to consider how candid discussions of racial segregation, patriarchal policies or self-serving cultural elitism serve the long-term interest of our institution. I argue, however, that unless arts agencies grapple with this difficult knowledge, the cycles of self-perpetuating elitism, privilege and exclusion will continue unbroken. But at what costs?

Recent Program Initiatives

Since 1991 my community's visual art school has continued its sequential curriculum of visual arts classes in-house, while developing programs which are delivered off-site within community centers, pre-school care facilities and schools across the region, both during and after school hours. This arts school also provides arts-based interdisciplinary and cross-cultural curriculum development in-service programs for public school teachers, funded largely by the State Arts Council. Since 1987 the school has witnessed a dramatic growth in enrollment, from under 2,000 to over 12,000 participants in the 1998-99 fiscal year. But to the best of my knowledge, until the mid-90's this growth largely excluded students of non-western origin, an exclusion I argue resulted not by intention, but as a result of unquestioned social and cultural practices and a critical neglect of our responsibility to serve the entire community.

In the mid-90's the art school experienced increases in minority participation, partially a result of increased scholarship awards and the faculty's reinvention of all course curricula to integrate cross-cultural art historic references and critical dialogue in hands-on courses of arts study. With Lila Wallace/Readers' Digest Community Arts Education Initiative support staff was also involved in professional development activities of their choice and participated a six-part series of conferences

and symposia designed to explore how race, ethnicity and class played out in contemporary U.S. art and culture. These conferences, led by visiting artists (60% of whom were artists of color), gave great momentum to the school's change initiatives.

Even with the momentum that gathered from symposia, staff development, scholarships and independent research, board and program staff regularly failed to meet their goals for in nominating diverse board leaders or hiring minority artists. I have been told repeatedly that, "they're just not out there" or "they're not interested in working with us," leading me to ask how long racism may still be embedded in our ranks. I then began to question how my institution's silent transition from racially segregated to integrated programming may have contributed to this denial of responsibility or the sustained perceptions within the African-American community that this art school is not their space.

What was/is the problem? Dare we speak its name?

In its first decade the Arts and Crafts Association was clearly the interest of a "white middle and upper-class community." None of the artist-teachers were paid, and most were women with college art degrees married to middle and upper class working men, or men working in commercial art who taught others "fine art" in their non-working hours. "How did we do so much with all those babies?" poses one instructor from the late forties, "We had a ball. I had full time help then – I was paid \$28 a week — it was disgraceful looking back on it." In these remarks I consider this gracious 76 year old woman artist as acknowledging that without the low-paid labors of Black domestics, her part (and unpaid labors) in the school's programs of art education

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might have been impossible.

A second white woman artist in those early days acknowledges, "I don't remember ever having a Black student, but I don't recall any policies in place that segregated students." By contrast, all of the marketing literature and class listings from 1945 through 1955 note, "classes for Negroes" will be held on Mondays. I suggest that while passage of time may cloud a subject's recall, what is operating in this instance is avoidance of the difficult knowledge that an agency now recognized for its commitment to cultural and racial equity had indeed operated as a mechanism of segregation in the past. This same artist noted her active role in civil rights protests and social change initiatives and yet, like four of my first five subjects, she separated her discussions of art/educational practice from her interests in social justice and political change.

The first decade of operation, the art school's programs were housed in an old high school in the heart of the old-wealth community, and later in upper floors of two businesses located near by. Collaborations with the local hospitals, libraries and the recreation department illustrated the founding mothers' concern with service to all, especially for children in the town. That this arts agency marketed its programs to the Black community illustrated an interest in serving the larger community, even if following Jim Crow practices of racial segregation. Such policies that came as a surprise a local African-American artist and curator interviewed for this project, who commented, "I'm surprised, but impressed that there was any programming at all for Black students." While on one hand this remark may seem a compliment, it may also be read as suggesting that white cultural agencies are not perceived as having ever shown concern for serving Black communities. I argue that this history must be told and that arts agencies must share such knowledge with their multiple constituents, especially those accounts

which illustrate the creative ways that artists and organizations worked within/against unjust social practices.

In the first month of calls to white artist-educators teaching during the days of racial segregation, I failed to find one who could recall when racial segregated classes were formally dismantled. I knew that my institution had preceded the larger community's racial integration by several years, but somehow this major policy shift seemed to be an event all my informants wanted to forget. It was only in carefully reading the organization's minutes that I began to note the wavering concern that the board and staff showed toward the non-white community, from board representation to staffing, scheduling of programs and sharing of equipment.

In the minutes of the Arts and Craft Association Board meeting of November 23, 1948, "Mrs. Marsh, Director, reported as follows: The attendance for the month of October was 1387. There were 361 registrations, with 94 Negroes registered." This demographic mix of 26% African-American and 74% Caucasian students was the highest level of ethnic diversity for in-house programming in the institution's history. I immediately wondered where we had gone awry and how such great levels of minority enrolment were accomplished. I found that firstly, there were no charges for participating in classes, secondly, programs were not centralized but offered in local parks and recreational centers, and thirdly, that the founding staff member had a deep and abiding passion not only for the arts, but for serving and teaching students of all races. It wasn't until the eighth interview that one informant pointed out to me that there on my list of the first board of directors was the name of the city's most prominent African-American educator (and the city's first Black Alderman). This link between governance representation, staffing, location and economics continues to define who has access or feels a part of programs of arts

study.

Given that at the time of this southern cultural agency's formation most all institutions (publicly elected offices excluded) were racially segregated, the presence of even one Black board member attests to the organization's interest in cross-racial service. There was, in these earliest years, a separate "Negro membership drive" with its own recruitment programs and recognition events. A separate "Negro workshop leader" was hired to recruit voluntary teaching artists and develop the curriculum, thus further ensuring that there was a sense of agency within the African-American community. In these multiple ways, Black students could see themselves and their community within our institution. But even with this sense of investment in the art school's work, white leaders repeatedly framed "Negro" participation as a "problem."

Framing the "Negro" Problem

The October 10, 1950 minutes address declining Black enrollment and the strategies considered to increase "Negro" participation.

Mrs. Bahnson announced that the annual meeting will be held Tuesday, October 23rd, combined with an Open House. The question of inviting negro membership was discussed, and it was decided to invite the negro membership to the annual meeting and have another special open house the preceding night for interested colored persons, not just members. Mr. Ball made the above motion and it was seconded by Mrs. Alexander. There was discussion about the negro program, too few negroes are taking part at this time. It was felt that after the open house especially for that group, we could tell more about it.

In these actions Arts and Crafts board begins to further disrupt segregationist practice by inviting African-American's to their annual meeting. But in this discussion, I note it is the negroes under-involvement, not white exclusionary practices that is framed as "the problem." Black students at that time had access to the facility only on one of the six weekdays courses were offered. While the gross numbers of white student participation was larger than that of the Black community, when one considers the facility hours available, Black participation at this time actually exceeded than that of the Caucasian community.

Curiously, at this same meeting there was a discussion regarding publicity. I note the carefully chosen words that precede the newsy update of that committee, and question how this introduction disclosed tensions between the school and its funding umbrella – an agency which, still avoids issues of race and has been repeatedly reproached in the media for its insensitivity.

Mrs. Bahnson reported that all publicity should be cleared with the Arts Council. She reported on the program given Saturday, Sept. 27th over WTOB. It was a series of interviews with colored students, made at the workshop in a regular Monday night class period. A newspaper story regarding new classes is ready for release, The scrapbook is being kept up to date, Mrs. Nissen said. Mr. Kimball commented on the success of the radio program and the possibility of a program regarding negro participation in Arts and Crafts, over WAAA.

Under the leadership of Mrs. Bahnson, and later Mrs. Alexander (note, unless unmarried, women had no first names in any of the meeting records until the mid-sixties) the board took an active role in recruiting and promoting the work of Black students. I read Mrs.

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Bahnson's remark about clearing publicity with the Arts Council as a subtle and likely unconscious note that too much visibility about negro involvement might dissuade white students from participating in the agency's activities. A more critical reading suggests that such volumes of coverage undermined the notion that the arts are a white privilege. But wait, I must check myself at this point and remind the reader that in interpreting minutes of an agency, even across multiple sources, I am still holding the past to present standards. In interviews with leaders still living from these years, I hear their accounts and commitments to inclusive practice authentically delivered. As the next entry suggests, they worked as best the current social circumstances allowed to foster greater minority participation, often with immediate success.

In the October 21, 1952 Annual Meeting Minutes, one reads,

The president reported that the Negro work at the workshop had fallen off considerably since Mrs. Marsh left. To try to build up the program again the Association sent letters to school faculty members and other interested Negroes asking them to meet at the Workshop to form plans. About 60 people came and as a result of an open discussion, five new classes were formed and volunteers secured to help with the instruction.

These minutes reflect the board's concern about declining "negro" participation and their strategy for sharing that "problem" with leaders within that community. As a result of this action a groundswell of support was inured and new programs were developed. This simple entry offers a second instructive lesson. As the president notes, "Negro" programming declined concurrent with the departure of Mrs. Marsh (the Workshop's director). I read this as confirming that the attitude of staff has a major impact on minority enrollment. As an artist of the program 35 years later echoes, "it is Jim's responsibility to go out and

bring in minority artists and students to the center." This notion, that an organization's professional employees must assume responsibility for socially just hiring policies and targeted marketing efforts, and pedagogical practices that engage a broad range of learners is central to my argument regarding how "at-risk" populations are served, and what steps are required to ensure full participation.

I remind the reader that during these first years of operation none of the artist-teachers were paid for their work at the school (the workshop leaders excepted). This meant that African-American artists and craftsmen, most of whom were employed in low-paying jobs, made extraordinary sacrifices to "volunteer" their talents and share them with others. In the November 19, 1952 minutes, it becomes clear that simply offering time and programs for the Black communities will not ensure their participation.

There followed a discussion on the problem of attendance on Mondays at the Workshop. Mrs. Williamson felt that there had not been enough information about the Workshop program and operation passed on to the Negroes by the Negro representative on the Board. She felt that if more Negroes were better informed about the Workshop there would be more interest. She also offered to visit churches and various organizations to solicit memberships into the Association if transportation could be provided for her. Mrs. Williamson said there was a great interest in weaving but the looms were usually full on Monday nights. Mrs. Alexander promised to see that the looms were available for use hereafter. Mrs. Williamson thought that she might be able to solicit enough funds from organizations in her community to pay for the salary of Mrs. Craige. It was suggested that the board approach the Negro YMCA with the idea of soliciting its help in advertising the Arts and Crafts program for Negroes.

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In this entry the lack of Black participation is at first blamed on the “negro representative to the board” and then on a lack of marketing efforts within the African-American community. While it is not clear whether or not Mrs. Williamson is Black within the minutes of the meeting, she notes her willingness to visit churches and organizations “if transportation could be provided for her.”¹ This entry raises an issue that faces not only this representative to the board, but all “negro students” who might seek participate in the program. While the institution is now located in the city’s major financial district (equally convenient to the still racially segregated neighborhoods and two blocks from the bus station), its location in the first years was clearly within white neighborhoods. Further, this entry into the minutes raises one of what I maintain may have been an entire complex of issues regarding access to equipment and materials for the Black participants on Mondays. Mrs. Alexander’s commitment to make looms available, and recognition that the group might need to pay a salary to the Black weaving instructor suggests that the board was willing to consider and accept some responsibility for declining minority participation.

Less than two months later the “problem” of Black enrollment is again the topic of discussion, as the January 14, 1953 minutes show,

Mrs. Alexander also reported that four or five negroes were being selected to serve on a committee to work on the Negro program. It was thought that it might be wise to change the day for the Negro classes from Monday to Wednesday. Form letters are being sent to Negro churches informing them of the program at the workshop.

Unlike earlier invitations of Black leaders from a wide range of organizations to come to the table to discuss their lack of involvement in Arts and Crafts programs, the board now “selects” those it chooses to work on the problem. I submit that this form of matriarchal control

further distanced the possibilities of success, as the white leader selects those she wishes to work on “the problem” rather than opening up the issue as a matter of discussion within that community. Further, the wisdom of the proposed change of day for Negro classes is questionable, given the traditions of Wednesday evening church services in both the Black and white religious communities at that time (it never occurred). And finally, the circulation of a “form letter” to the “Negro churches” raises questions about the level of authentic concern by the board. In prior approaches, meetings between races were held to develop strategies and recruit students, whereas here the interpersonal dialogical process is eliminated and made textual.

I hold that these depersonalized forms of contact and practices of cultural patriarchy (selecting, not recruiting leadership) may be read as either reflecting an apathy or ambivalence about the engagement of Black students in the Workshop’s programs. Alternately, this may be read as an attempt to really take hold of what was believed “the problem.” Regardless of one’s reading, seven months later the participation problem again resurfaces – this time framed as a triple-header problem involving a “lack of Negro leaders,” transportation, and equipment.

In the September 18, 1953 meeting minutes secretary Betty Yount reports,

Mrs. Alexander discussed the problem of Negro participation in the workshop. The lack of Negro leaders and the inaccessible location involving transportation expense were cited as the greatest drawbacks. It was suggested that we have a demonstration of crafts when their new Y opens and Mrs. Pleasants suggested the possibility of teaching crafts that needed little equipment at their Y on Monday nights. Further discussion was left open until we

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can see what can be worked out on this problem when the new Y opens.

And in the November, 1954 “Report on the Effort to Improve The Monday Programs,” declining Negro participation is now framed as a problem of Black professional staffing.

Traditionally the Workshop has been open on Monday for Negroes. In the early years attendance was good and interest sustained. In the six month period, October 1953-April 1954, attendance had shrunk to an average of 6 for evening classes and 3 for afternoon sessions. In evaluating this situation, a committee studying the whole Arts and Crafts program concluded that:

- 1) The location has proven unsatisfactory.
- 2) The cost of material influences choice of craft.
- 3) The quality of instruction does not measure up to that available on other days.

The admission that “location has proven unsatisfactory” suggests an awareness that the space where programming occurs has an impact on a community’s involvement. This issues is one which our organization continues to wrestle with – now offering programs within minority communities, as well as considering ways that the social space of our current location might be reconsidered an inclusive public space. While lack of Black leadership is recognized as a problem, the board never considers that after its only Black member’s term had expired, there was not another African-American elected to the board for almost thirty years. I hold that in part this exclusion of the Black community in governance or program design resulted in declining

minority enrollment.

Instead of looking at how the board itself might be part of the problem, they blame the Black instructor's lack of quality for declining negro attendance. "Acting on these conclusions, Mrs. Alexander, then President, gave the Negro supervisor notice just prior to June 30, 1953. She was paid through July and concluded her service in that month." It is particularly disturbing to note that while white faculty are always named in their removals or resignations from service, this "supervisor" is not even dignified with an identity in the formal minutes of the organization. While perhaps a simple oversight, I suggest that this anonymity reflects a larger institutional marginalization of the "negro" population and the value of its artists' and students' contribution to the Workshop. It is doubly curious to note that despite the June dismissal of this supervisor, there was still active enrollment by Black students in the fall. The board, in this regard, never links a lack of leadership or staffing in its separate programming with the declining Negro enrollment.

An artist-educator who was involved during the years preceding and after racial integration comments, "We had a group of people who would go to wherever art was being shown in town (an art appreciation class) and the library was one of those places. It played an important role as a safe space where everyone in the community felt they could meet." This same artist suggests, "I've never really known the difference between black and white. . . I knew a few people who stuck with a rigid view of society, but Mrs. Marsh (then Director) was bright and capable for everybody, so prejudice wasn't an issue." While idealistic and utopian in its tone, this "color-blind" position ignores the larger social practices of racial segregation, as well as class presumptions – for how one "fit" in the programs of art study was certainly a social issue and an unspoken barrier rarely transgressed.

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The “blue brochures” marketing classes during 1954-1955 continued to list “classes for Negroes on Monday nights,” but by 1956-1957 “classes for Negroes” are noted as “scheduled upon sufficient demand.” This shift from segregated programming, to no declared programming at all is but one of the signals that the “Workshop” had largely dismissed itself from any sense of responsibility to serve the Black community. Throughout the marketing history of the workshop, white artist-instructors and the courses they taught were always listed in detail, but by contrast, no Black artist or course is ever mentioned in the school’s publications until the late 60’s.

In an undated document “Report by the Planning Committee to the Board of the Arts And Crafts Association” the strategy and implementation approach of the organization’s move toward racial integration of all classes in the early 60’s is recorded.

The Five Year Planning Committee is turning its attention to the relationships of the Association and the community. The first consideration of the Committee has been the question of continuing our instructional program on a segregated basis. The committee met with outstanding representation of the community seeking advice and guidance. The committee felt that, in view of the direction in which the matter of desegregation is moving in this community, the Association would be best served by facing this problem before it becomes an issue in the community.

In our discussion three principles emerged which led to our recommendation. . .

- 1) We are a Community Service.

- 2) We are committed to raising the level of appreciation of the fine arts and crafts in this community.
- 3) We derive financial support from the community as a whole through the Arts Council.

Therefore the Committee recommends:

RECOMMENDATION: IN THE FUTURE STUDENTS IN THE ARTS AND CRAFTS ASSOCIATION BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT REGARD TO RACE, CREED, OR COLOR.

The committee would suggest the following points in implementing this recommendation:

1. The reference in our brochure to arrangements for negro classes be omitted.
2. There be no publicity given through any media to this change in policy and that a request be made of the newspapers to this effect.
3. That this change in policy be discussed with the teachers, on an individual basis by Mrs. Burke.
4. If problems arise that warrant it, the Urban League be consulted by the President in order that the Association and the League may work together toward solutions of such problems.

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J. Maxwell Little Chairman of the Committee.

While the placement of this policy memo appears preceding the September 1960 Board Agenda, it is not formally adopted until the July 12, 1961 board meeting, almost a year later.

After considerable discussion the recommendation that: in the future students in the Arts and Crafts Association be accepted without regard to race, creed or color was made. A suggestion was made that the President of the Arts and Crafts Association contact the President of the Urban League and discuss a plan for a gradual and orderly form of desegregation. Another suggestion was made that the recommendation be implemented when the above mechanics have been satisfactorily worked out. The recommendation was seconded and carried.

This effort to control every aspect of the transition to integration is a pattern later repeated in school systems across the South, as publicly elected school boards showed little concern for the African American educational institutions or their cultures of learning (Cecelski, 1994). Still unrecorded in the official records of this arts workshop are the tales instructors' recount regarding unofficial admission of "serious art students" who were Black. This artist-initiated integration denied the larger social practices of the time and in the tone and tenor of artist-instructors leading these courses, it is clear that they felt a commitment to teach any student who illustrated a deep commitment to arts study.

There is no formal discussion of "problems" faced in racially integrating classes, or mention of the "issue" of Black participation until the June 6, 1962 meeting.

Summer Classes for Children: The question of integration in children's classes was brought up. Dr. Little moved that Mrs. Burke should approach the teachers of these classes as to whether they would be willing to have integrated classes and convey their reaction to the executive committee. Mr. Sturmer seconded. Motion Carried._

Fall Adult Classes: The Board asked Mrs. Burke to contact teachers of other courses than those previously integrated for their reaction to accepting colored students. The Board felt some art classes might be opened. Mr. Sturmer moved that the Board should authorize the Workshop Manager to accept Negro students providing the number constituted a minority of the class. Mr. Boatwright seconded. Motion carried.

In these action I read an underlying fear that "Negro students" might overpower Caucasians in the classroom, and thus their numbers had to be formally restricted. But in subsequent reports the workshop leader never notes any real problems with racially integrating any class.

The trajectory of change at Arts and Crafts foreshadowed many patterns that took place in the public schools. While no longer banned from this white arts institution, the space African-Americans' entered were clearly defined and controlled by white social interests. The art school's doors might have been opened earlier than the public schools, but the spaces it offered were still largely foreign and uninviting to the Black student. I hold that over the years the lack of leadership in the board's governance, lack of input into the curriculum, scarcity of African-American art educators with whom they could study, inadequate access to equipment, and cost of materials were indeed the causes for declining "negro" participation – but these indeed were

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the white folk's problems. I contend racism still is a white (wo)men's problem.

Conclusion and Challenges

Many of the earliest initiatives of arts-based education reforms were sited in "at-risk." low wealth and minority communities, raising the question, "to what ends are these students and communities targeted for art interventions?" Levi asserts that the arts answer "basic human needs: the need to communicate with others and share experience, the need to find a place in the stream of time and be reminded of things worth remembering, and the need to be reasonable in deliberations about matters of importance" (Levi and Smith, 1991, p. xiv). But I must question whose needs are being served? Whose time is being remembered? And whose values are embedded in the arts we teach?

Who determines what is "worth remembering?" And in whose court are deliberations of "matters of importance" considered? Have those agencies of arts study, research and education reforms who design interventions into our public schools questioned their own embeddedness in the social problems facing the "at risk" students and disadvantaged communities they serve? Like the teaching artist from the 40's who now acknowledges that the poverty wages her domestic help received were "disgraceful," can our major cultural institutions with their board leaders whose fortunes were amassed on the backs of cheap labor begin to grapple with their own engagement in the problems their agencies now purport to address.

How do those working with the excess wealth of John Paul Getty grapple with his history of anti-Semitism? Why does an ivy league institution choose to cast its gaze on the work of community schools,

labeling their work “Safe Havens?” Do we trouble ourselves about recirculating normative middle-class values and epidemic logic as we explore the art’s impact in dangerous, poverty stricken and largely African-American communities? Are the portraits of our work in arts education really triangulated from multiple perspectives, creating three dimensional rendering of what’s going on, or are we simply repeating the official story? In my ongoing inquiry I ask, what does it mean when all the researchers in a qualitative study are white and almost none of the subjects are? Can our methods and models really assure our “objectivity?” Who really is the “problem” in our research? Dare we speak our own names?

In the preceding pages I have focused my discussion on just one of an incredibly complex and overlapping set of social issues facing art organizations and educators. By example I have challenged those within institutions to read the public records of their agency’s past and consider how reluctance to grapple with difficult knowledge of our past may limit the possibilities of our success in the future. I have argued that institutions and researchers both need to reflect on how problems are framed, and carefully attend to our position within that problem. As I have illustrated, even amidst a socially sanctioned segregationist settings strategies for success can be imagined. These successes should be celebrated, not swept to the recesses of our memory because the context of their occurrence is a matter our culture still can’t openly address.

When we look deeply beneath the sloganeering and pretense of caring about our service to all students and communities, we must ask ourselves, have we done more than symbolically gesture toward the problems we define? Are our organizations inclusive? Can our leaders truly relate to those communities their institution serves? These are questions that each reader will have to ask. I have no answers,

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but a faith that in the unending process of institutional self-reflection, adjustment, production and reassessment —with eyes wide open to the lives and stories shared by those we work with and serve — we might move closer to art education policies and cultural practices that serve our democracy.

No tes

1. In subsequent research I found a photograph of Mrs. Williamson from 1948 in the local news paper with a caption beneath it that identifies her as a “negro weaver.” I also found from these same years, a photograph of “negro potter, Miss Amanda Craig” and upon reviewing the roster of board leaders from that same year, noted that she was serving on the board of directors of Arts and Crafts.

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