

REPORT FROM WORK SESSION #1

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Community Arts Convening and Research Project at California State University

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Charge – Through analysis and the sharing of personal experience, we will understand more about the present historical era and its opportunities to advance social justice and cultural equity.

Participants included undergraduate and graduate students, university faculty, and leaders of community-based organizations and national networks – all of whom were artists. The session’s findings were linked to this rich mix of experience and perspective.

Definition of Cultural Equity – Culture is the distinct intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and material traditions and features of a people. Equitable is fair and just. Thus, cultural equity means that any culture, as a matter of principle, has the right to develop, expecting fair and just treatment in relationship to all other cultures. This was evidenced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, 1948: “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.”

Macro Analysis

- Before his assassination in 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was linking racial justice with economic justice, addressing the intertwined issues of race, class, and peace. King’s and the movement’s vision of unity, expressed in The Poor People’s March on Washington, was diluted with his assassination, beginning an era of social fragmentation.
- 1981, Ronald Reagan inaugurates thirty years of right wing policy that opposed the democratization of noncommercial art and culture.
- Reagan’s economic policies, including deregulation, begin a period of hyper-capitalism. In other words, capitalism on steroids. The distinctive feature: putting profit before people; market before community. Now, each one of us is stuck in the Hyper-Capital Box.
- During this thirty-year period, how has the public purpose of higher education been corrupted by hyper-capitalism? How does a trend for service-learning and civic engagement exist in an increasingly corporate university?
- To understand the present moment, we need more analysis of the current financial collapse, including the opportunities it provides for advancing our values.
- More generally, the arts and social justice field needs to strengthen its critical discourse. (By critical discourse we mean building and sharpening each other.) This discourse (including implicating ourselves and our institutions in the problem) will produce important new knowledge and increased accountability to our values.
- Overarching themes in the session’s conversations included the desire to use new technology for better communication and to develop better strategies to empower the next generation of artist-activists.

Strategies

To avoid high university overhead charges, establish a national fiscal agent for campus-community projects.

Develop a cultural equity/social justice audit for campuses. Given the increasing interest in community service and activism among teenagers, a ranking of the top institutions for social justice would serve as a recruitment tool to advance our field, as well as link arts students to other activists.

Build a coalition of community arts students, alumni, and new and veteran practitioners. Have local chapters on campuses, linking local to national and international networking. Such a “Community Arts Students Union” could be effective for sharing job opportunities, and for rallying change at universities.

In order to provide more opportunities for youth from our underserved and under-resourced communities to go to college, establish local, regional, and national advisory boards of senior faculty to mentor high school students.

Participate in visioning conversations for the future of the Community Arts Convening and Research Project and for the Community Arts Network.

Find more opportunities for joint presentations that represent the full spectrum of those involved in community arts and community cultural development.

So material can be broadly disseminated, develop ways around copyright issues, such as YouTube retaining rights to videos, and universities owning syllabi posted online. Creative Commons and Open Source were discussed.

Create opportunities for young people to reshape existing material about cultural equity and disseminate it in new forms of media.

Credential and increase visibility for national community-based institutes and programs already in existence, including Appalshop Immersion, Cornerstone Institute, Urban Bush Women Summer Institute, NALAC Institute, Alternate ROOTS Institute, and more. Google Maps could show a constellation of these institutes.

To resist fragmentation, collaborate more within our field and across sectors – for example, with the sustainability movement.

Establish a national university without walls.

- The values include pluralism, participation, and equity.
- Goals include: respect community knowledge; welcome a diverse faculty and student body; be cost effective; encourage peer-to-peer learning; utilize technology; develop the job market; advocate for the community arts field.
- Low-hanging fruit include creating a weeklong institute and linking courses and conversations through technology.

Get back the taxpayers money – *our* money – to build *our* communities.