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Supporting Arts Education

## YOUNG CREATIVES AS THE KEY TO OUR FUTURE



March for Our Lives, Washington D.C. 2018  
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The field of arts and cultural education in the last years has begun to showcase its outcomes with young people as aimed at crafting global and civically engaged youth who employ their creative capabilities to catalyze community and social change. Perhaps, these very young creatives could be the solvers of the latest challenges we are facing brought on by the global pandemic.

As I sit at my desk in early May 2020 in Washington, D.C., I can't help but imagine how the future may look in a few months, regardless of how it was intended to look as we imaged one year ago. I slowly tick through the rapid innovations I have seen in the arts and culture sector responding to the COVID-19 global pandemic: the ways theatres have moved performances online, art galleries have embraced virtual reality, and educational programs have moved to digital formats. I fear however, that arts education may be at risk. It has been noted by many in the arts and cultural sector, that throughout this rapid innovation and re-invention of our sector, we may have forgotten to center youth, and include young creatives within our problem solving (Wolf 2020). This revelation is particularly jarring because, for the past several years, the field of arts education had been making a turn - a re-invention of sorts - to articulate the outcomes of its work in a new globalized and civic view.

### Articulating a Problem in the Field

On March 24, 2018, I stood in my apartment in Washington, D.C. as the city was abuzz with the nation's latest protest - A March for Our Lives. Since fall 2016, Sunday morning protest had been a thing in the wake of the presidential election; people were mobilized. However, this march seemed different. In fact, it was different - it was led by students: young artists, creatives, and activists. I stood in awe as I watched a group of young people raise their voices to change the country for the better.

This led me to critically reflect on what it was about the arts education that these impressive young people had received that allowed them to drive a national dialogue about gun violence. We can today see similarly movements in other parts of the world, protesting against climate change and for the protection of the environment, for social inclusion and diversity, against racist and nationalist tendencies and so on. For years, I had worked as an arts education advocate and traveled the country touting talking points about the benefits of the arts. As an academic and researcher, I got focused and asked the question: How does the field of arts education, in the United States, talk about the outcomes of the work they do?

In short, the research revealed two things: First, the American academic field of arts and cultural education relied on talking points drafted in the 1990's, showcasing correlation between arts learning and academic achievables, like lowering dropout rates at universities, and increasing standardized test scores; second, the field of arts education leaders operating local programs did not believe these were the goals of their programs and desired a new language to describe their work.

From here we proposed a bold shift in language - what if we adopted a whole new vernacular for arts education? Instead of utilizing antiquated outcomes, we spoke in terms of the capabilities (adopting the approach pioneered by Nussbaum 2010; 2011) developed by arts and cultural education in alignment with the literature of the Creative Generation initiative, which originated in the consumer marketing field.

The term Creative Generation describes an intergenerational group of people who share common traits and interests, and when applied in the education sector - I argue - have the following capabilities through their arts and cultural education:

- Creative Thinking: the ability to identify challenges, and employ creativity to envision solutions (this definition is adapted from the [Creative Thinking Project](#));
- Cultural Consciousness: the process of understanding one's own cultural identity and developing a respect for, and often participation within, other diverse cultures;
- Connectivity: a commitment to remaining engaged with peer or social groups regardless of time or location, through virtual and interpersonal means; and
- Concern for Community: acting as a servant leader, regardless of means, to strengthen the communities to which one belongs.

So, we continued to develop our hypothesis, reformed our research questions, and expanded our scope of inquiry to examine how arts and cultural education programs, based in community, conducted their work and empowered young creatives to catalyze community action. We expect new findings forthcoming in 2021.

### Contextualizing within Global Policy

Now, I pause the discussion on research to take stock of the policies which impact this work, because without the cultural and education policies in place (and the funding supplied through those policies), arts education programs in communities around the world would cease to exist.

For almost 15 years, advocates have been discussing the formation of national policies in light of the 2006 Lisbon Roadmap for Arts Education and 2010 Seoul Agenda for Arts Education. Additionally, advocates can state that arts education is a fundamental right by tracing the policy and international doctrine lineage to the 1948 [UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR) and the 1989 [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC).

Within these international doctrines, everybody has the right to be equal before the law and entitled to no discrimination (UDHR, Article 7), the right to education (UDHR, Article 26), and the right to freedom of expression (UDHR, Article 19). Additionally, children specifically have the right to education (CRC, Article 28), the right to participate freely in cultural life and the arts (CRC, Article 31), the right to form his or her own views, and the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child (CRC, Article 12). Further, those member states ratifying the CRC agree to "respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity."

However, in national policies from around the globe, neither the sentiments of these international doctrines, nor the Roadmap or Seoul Agenda are often implemented.

To help address this, in October of 2019, the ninth World Alliance for Arts Education International Conference was held in Frankfurt, Germany. It gathered more than 200 people from 49 nations to shepherd a global dialogue around a call on UNESCO re-invent its ways to support arts education in a changing globalized world.

The end result was the publication of the [Frankfurt Declaration](#), which stresses the urgency to reform supports for arts education in nations around the globe and implores government agencies to take "transformative action for arts education as being integral to sustaining communities and meeting the needs of all people in the face of critical global challenges...[This] Declaration celebrates the unprecedented arts performances linked to (...) movements led by children and young people throughout the world. It asserts arts education as a right for all towards the nurturing of a paradigm of solidarity, cooperation and good living."

Through this declaration, the parties express their desire to hold a 3rd World Congress on Arts Education, which will foster the exchange of ideas and urge policy development to close arts gaps and fully embrace a new narrative of arts education as a fundamental, civil, and human right.

### Involving Young People

Just a few months later, in December, the World Youth Forum was held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. It hosted over 7,000 young people under-30 from over 180 nations, among them creatives, entrepreneurs, and budding diplomats. After several days of workshops and discussions, they announced ten recommendations for the United Nations and governments around the world (and the ways that Egypt's government would commit to them). One of them focused squarely on creativity:

Recommendation 9: Launching a global initiative titled "Arts for Humanity." "I want to issue a call for a new initiative focused on the arts in humanity. This will be a platform for young artists to create identities for their countries in an effort to increase cooperation and encourage institutions to call on creative innovators around the world to enable this process."

President el-Sisi went on to outline his plan to host a platform calling on the world's creative youth to submit documentaries that tell stories of creative social change in their communities and countries.

### Now to Today

After traveling through time and around the world, I bring us back to the present day, reconsidering the work of the arts and cultural field in light of COVID-19. It seems like every day the world is a different place with new procedures and new questions: Will theatres be able to open again in the next twelve months? Can choruses meet in person and sing without masks? Can dancers touch hands? Within just the last few months, the global arts education community declared the role of young creatives as the problem solvers of our future and the world's youth recommended governments to invest in these 'arts for social change' efforts.

I wonder, though, if there is a solution to our recoil from COVID-19 found in investing in our young creatives to help address these new challenges? Can we not leverage this time, as arts managers, to re-direct the language of our arts and cultural education programs? Might we finally recognize the role of young artists in addressing global issues?

Amid the global response to the pandemic, UNESCO celebrated [International Arts Education Week](#), and released myriad resources to enable the arts/ culture and education sectors to inculcate their learning and knowledge exchange. Notably, they recognized the role of arts education within UN's Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDG4 on quality education, SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG8 on enhancing opportunities for decent work and employment through culture and creativity, and conflict mitigation and peace-building, in the spirit of SDG 16). This new [articulation](#) is a positive sign - especially with a renewed focus on arts education on behalf of global cultural and education institutions.

While we remain confined to our homes, let us think about these shifts in language, in pedagogy, and in infrastructure. I ask you the question: How, as an arts manager in my community, can I support the next generation of creatives to solve the challenges of our future?

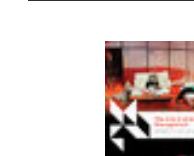
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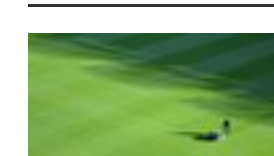
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