Eric David Love
10/11/13
GARED 6117
Professor Jenkins

Project Evenda

Communities in the modern age are often fraught with divisions brought about by different cultural identities. Such divisions as race, class, and gender are commonly discussed as the source of many community-affecting social problems. Another important division in communities that is not spoken of as often is generational division. Different age groups in communities have wildly different cultures, and that can have a negative impact on the cohesion of the community. With community art, we can begin to address these generational divisions with the most important players in changing communities - youth. By bringing different age groups of youth together, and teaching them the importance of community mentorship through the arts, they will carry on a self-sustaining tradition of generational collaboration and mentorship.

This greater sense of responsibility on the older youth will allow them to see the important role that they can play as both student and teacher. Together with older mentors and younger students, they will be able to create a piece of art far greater than what they could have achieved by themselves. In awe of the accomplishment that they have created with their community, they will be inspired to carry on with community art and generational collaboration. As one parent and community member has said, "My daughter's self esteem and self confidence have improved through the interactions that occur as a result of participating in same age groups and mixed age teams activities, assisting with newer participants, and dealing with random circumstances within a mixed age group." (Standley) In mentoring high school aged youth to mentor middle school aged youth, programs can not only create an outstanding public art project, but they can also begin to build the tradition of mentorship that will be key in uniting communities.

To run a collaborative program such as this, I will be utilizing existing resources in the community, namely an existing middle school and high school interactive theatre group. The primary recipient of this program will be the high school population already actively involved with their theatre group. In choosing this population to work with, I will be able to use their devotion to their theatre community as a springboard to achieving a devotion to the larger community to which they belong. This program will involve the middle school youth in the theatre group, instructors with pre-existing relationships with the youth, and the larger community in the final public theatre production. Research shows that "children and youth registered among people's top concerns and as one of the most likely issues to motivate community involvement" (Lake Snell Perry), allowing such a project to encourage the larger community to get involved and stay involved. Interactive theatre is also a unique tool to use due to the necessary engagement of the audience (i.e. the community) in the production itself. Interactive theatre productions have a cast that creates an environment with which the audience can interact as actors themselves. The youth involved in this program will have experience in engaging with an audience that does not always know its role in the production, thus offering a basis for the idea of mentorship.

At first, the program will involve solely the high school youth and their adult instructors, inventing and testing the production that they will eventually be running for the public. The first few classes will be spent doing preparatory work: creating necessary props and set pieces; doing acting lessons with specific roles in mind; developing story concepts and storyboards. At the conclusion of this first module, the high school youth will do a full installation and dry-run of their planned production. This will involve setting out all stage scenery, assuring that props and costume changes will be available at the appropriate cues, that any lighting and special effects are prepared, and that the cast can accomplish all of the goals it sets for itself. Following this installation and dry-run, the youth will come together for a community discussion about the strengths, weaknesses, and needed improvements as

related to their production. Throughout this process, instructors will be taking a hands-off approach, allowing youth to guide the production and the conversations in the direction that they desire. While they are facilitating this process, they will be taking notes on their own perspective of the strengths, weaknesses, and needed improvements. In doing so, the instructors will have a basis for evaluation during the program and at the conclusion of the program.

In the next few classes, the youth will be working on addressing the issues and concerns that they brought up in their dialogue, eventually coming back together for a second attempt at the installation and dry-run. Again, the role of the instructors will be that of observers and facilitators, not active contributors. In doing so, the youth are left to moderate their community strengths and weaknesses, and learn the process of helping out others in bettering themselves. Following that second dry-run and installation, another dialogue will occur. However, this time the instructors will contribute their observations of the process. They will illustrate the strengths and weaknesses they observed, the changes the group wanted to make, and the reality of their progress. Through this new dialogue, the youth will have a more impartial method of measuring their accomplishment.

The final in-group test run will take place via creating smaller groups within the high school youth to run smaller installations for one another, effectively having an audience to test out their installation on. In this manner, they will be better prepared for the next step in the process, bringing their production to their intended collaborators - the middle school youth. As the youth will now be accustomed to, the installation will be followed by a youth-driven conversation on strengths and weaknesses, both from the perspective of the cast and the "audience". To follow in this sense of repetition, the high school youth will then engage in a second version of their smaller installation within the smaller groups. The major intention of this piece of the program will be getting the youth into a comfortable cycle of testing, dialogue, and repeated testing. Essentially, the program is now giving the high school youth the tools they will need to teach the same methods to the middle school youth.

The final step of the program will involve the high school youth running the full production that they have planned with the middle school youth, thereby getting feedback from their collaborators on the positive and negative aspects of their production thus far. Following this trial run with the middle school youth as "audience", they will accept and learn from the feedback that middle school youth have to offer, thus modeling the manner in which the middle school youth should act when they receive feedback later on. At this point, the high school students will begin to go through the same process that they have just been led through with the middle school youth. The middle school youth will do dry-runs and installations at a slightly accelerated speed due to a great deal of the work already having been done by the high school students. Thus, high school students are not responsible for teaching the extent of the program they've been through, but a streamlined version that will allow them to focus on the methods of mentorship instead of the mechanics of theatre. The end goal for the high school students working with the middle school students will be the production open to the larger community that will allow the two populations and generations to work closely together to benefit their community.

In the final collaboration that the two populations will work on, they will achieve a theatre production and art project greater than what they may have accomplished in the past, rightly associating community involvement and collaboration with greater personal achievement. The pride that the youth will feel in their accomplishments will help to promote a tradition of mentorship between the generations, and as another parent in the community has said, "I think that what they learn from that is the value of doing something for others." The many different groups and populations involved in this program will help extend the impact of this new tradition. Not only were the high school students mentoring the middle school students, but they also received mentorship themselves through their instructors. Furthermore, the middle school students were given the responsibility of bringing the same production that the high school students brought to them, to the larger community. Through all of this cyclical community involvement, the program will begin the process of bridging not only the current

generational divides, but future generational divides, as well. A stronger community will emerge as a result and community art will become a self-sustaining tradition within the community, showing not only the current participants but all of the community that the greatest student is the teacher, and the greatest teacher is the student.

Works Cited

Standley, S. (2012, January 11). Interview by E Love. Larp testimonial.

Bauman, P. (2013, June). Interview by E Love. Larp testimonial.

Lake Snell Perry and Associates and the Tarrance Group, "Working Together: Community Involvement in America" (Washington DC: League of Women Voters, 2004).

Borrup, T. (2011). *The creative community builder's handbook*. (3rd ed.). Nashville, TN: Fieldstone Alliance.