

Intersections

Fall 2006



Upcoming Events

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Recent Events

[SJF 2006 Cohort Selected!](#)

[RCLA Presents at Conferences in the United Kingdom](#)

[Researchers from the Institute of Development Studies Visit RCLA](#)

[Weathering the Storm: Planning and Managing a Crisis in NYC](#)

[Using Narrative Inquiry to Measure Effectiveness of Executive Education Programs](#)

[Discussing Cooperative Inquiry at the World Congress on Action Research](#)

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A mosaic park bench in Ile lfe Park of the Village of Arts and Humanities. Mosaic design by the late James "Big Man" Maxon, a reformed drug dealer who served as a Tenured Artist and Operations Director with the Village until his death in 2005.

The Newsletter of the



Research Center for Leadership in Action

NYUWagner

[Printer-friendly version](#)

Welcome

News about RCLA's leadership transition.

Introduction

This issue of Intersections focuses on the interconnections between leadership and the arts.

Voices from the Field

Hear about how the arts have helped to bring hope and revitalization to a blighted inner-city community.

Try This!

Learn how story circles can be used to build communication and create new meaning in social change efforts.

Methodologies

Learn about "cooperative inquiry," a powerful tool for advancing leadership and social change.

Recently Published

Read about a recent publication from RCLA on the power of arts in social change leadership.

Welcome

There is a great deal happening at the Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA). Here, we are pleased to present this latest issue of our e-newsletter,

Photo credit: Lily Yeh

New Projects!

[New RCLA Projects!](#)

RCLA Programs

[Leadership for a Changing World Program
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[Next Generation Leadership Alumni
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[Leading Large Scale Change in the Public
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***"The arts help create and
bring life to ideas and
make values visible."***

***- Can the Arts Change the World?
Report***

Resources

[RCLA Publications](#)
[Intersections, Summer 2006](#)
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Our Team

RCLA is supported by a [team](#) of full-time and part-time staff, a number of whom are NYU Wagner graduate students:

Sonia M. Ospina, Co-Director
Amparo Hofmann-Pinilla, Associate Director
Millard "Mitty" Owens, Associate Director

Jessica Brooks*
Daniel Butchko*
Angie Chan
Julian Cyr*
Frank Colaianne
Meghan Daigneau*
Jennifer Dodge
Waad El-Hadidy
Erica Foldy
Jason Franklin
Sheila Harris
Meredith Herr
Luciana Mermet*
Andrés Munoz*
Lauren Passalacqua*
Amudha Rajendran
Sanjiv Rao*
Angel Saz
Avra Siegel*
Selima Taylor*
Thalia Theodore*
Karen Tili*
Erica Waples*

*Part-time staff

Intersections, focused on leadership and the arts, which is introduced below by RCLA's associate directors, Amparo Hoffman and Mitty Owens.

At the Center, as some of you may already know, we are in the midst of a leadership transition. This past summer, Marian Krauskopf, our co-director, decided to move back into the public sector, taking an exciting new position as Director of the Cancer Prevention and Control Program of the Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention and Control in the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

For three years, Marian provided tremendous leadership here at NYUWagner, helping to establish the wide range of research and work that RCLA does today. As the Center is focused on developing practitioner-relevant knowledge, it is not surprising (to us at least!) that our staff, and even our co-director, would move back into the world of practice. All of us at RCLA miss Marian's energy and insight, but given our grounded perspective on leadership, in some ways, she hasn't really "left."

That said, NYUWagner is in the midst of identifying a new executive director for RCLA. We look forward to announcing our new leader in our next issue of *Intersections*—along with the usual and helpful analysis, information, and resources you can use to strengthen your understanding of leadership in the public and nonprofit sectors.

Sonia Ospina, Co-Director

Introduction

Think of the arts, and you may think first of museums or music, culture and entertainment. Increasingly, however, there is interest in how the arts can make a difference in the world—how it can change not only our attitudes, but transform our communities. In this issue, we focus on the variety of ways the arts can influence and strengthen public and nonprofit leadership. Several recent research projects here at the Research Center for Leadership in Action have explored how the arts and arts-related initiatives have helped leaders engage key stakeholders and develop innovative approaches to community change. We have found that the arts create opportunities for participation, communication, and inquiry. And we have discovered that the arts can be a rejuvenating force for social change leaders themselves.

This continues to be a rich and productive area of interest for RCLA. During the summer, RCLA researchers contributed their insights on this topic at two different [conferences in the United Kingdom](#), sharing learnings with both practitioners and other researchers. This fall, RCLA will produce several publications and related research as part of its contribution to the [Leadership for a Changing World \(LCW\)](#) and [Next Generation Leadership \(NGL\)](#) programs. We look forward to extending our exploration of how leaders can use the arts to bolster grassroots organizing efforts, strengthen nonprofit organizations, and influence public policy. Even closer to home, we also hope to build on our experience with [story circles](#), using them to kick off some of our [cooperative inquiry research projects](#).

Lily Yeh, a participant in one of the LCW projects described here, says "beauty is a right," for all people and communities. We echo that sentiment and encourage those interested in leadership to consider how the arts can be made an essential and animating force in social change initiatives.

Amparo Hofmann-Pinilla, Associate Director
Millard "Mitty" Owens, Associate Director

Voices from the Field

Given RCLA's commitment to amplifying the contributions of leaders in the development of new knowledge, each issue of Intersections features a brief article highlighting a leader or leaders' point of view on a particular issue. This issue's "Voices from the Field" examines the work of Lily Yeh and the transformative power of the arts in the community-driven revitalization of North Philadelphia.

"Everybody has an inner light. Each is equal, and together we can burn like a big torch."—Lily Yeh, Artist & Community Organizer

In North Philadelphia, a community-driven development process to revitalize 250 city blocks has, since the mid-1980's, brought together local people—children, teens, adults, reformed drug dealers and storekeepers—to create change. Notably, it is not traditional economic development activities, but art created by the community and for the community that has been the engine behind this local transformation.

At the center of this decades-long effort has been LCW awardee Lily Yeh, an artist and community organizer, whose work is documented in the recent RCLA publication [Can the Arts Change the World?](#) Until her retirement in 2005, Yeh was the leader of the Village of the Arts and Humanities, a community-greening arts-based organization providing neighborhood development and social services to the people of North Philadelphia. As Yeh has noted, the arts are effective, not just for their beauty, but for their ability to help people connect. “We don’t want [people] to just go and paint,” she said. “We want to engage [them]. [It is] a process of working together.”

In 1986, at the invitation of renowned African American cultural worker Arthur Hall, Yeh, a professionally trained artist born and raised in China, came to North Philadelphia to clean up an abandoned lot and transform it into an art park. What began as a summer project, turned into her life’s work and the development of the Village of Arts and Humanities, which encompasses multiple blocks where trash strewn lots have been made into art-filled spaces, parks and gardens. “We take where it’s broken and begin to work on it by planting seeds, which are inspired ideas,” said Yeh. Today, the original project, Ile Ife Park is luminous, filled with mosaic sculptures, gardens, pathways, an outdoor stage and three-story mural.

This arts-driven initiative evolved eventually into a wider range of service provision, including a health program and daycare center. Most recently, a next generation of leaders has created a “Shared Prosperity Initiative” designed to expand the Village’s impact and promote community-driven development in North Philadelphia. As noted in *Can the Arts Change the World?*, this has not been a development process driven by the vision of city planners. Yeh and the community “created, not a frontal attack, but a more subtle lateral move that did its job before people in power noticed.”

Part of the power of Yeh’s approach has been to use art to reframe challenges as opportunities. “Turn the deficit in the neighborhood and make it work for you,” she says.

In addition to the publication, *Can the Arts Change the World?*, Yeh’s work is featured in an LCW ethnography called *Piecing Together the Fragments*. For the full report, go to: www.nyu.edu/wagner/leadership/reports/ethnography.html.

Try This!

Story Circles: Inspiring and Supporting Social Change

Cultures around the world have long employed storytelling to transmit important values and beliefs and build community. In nonprofit or social change contexts, the “story circle” model of storytelling can be used as a powerful tool to bring people together on an equal playing field, allowing participants to be co-creators of a community’s consciousness. Personal stories invariably lead to a level of engagement in which participants transfer the story circle model to other aspects of their lives. Often, this leads them to realize their own role as leaders.

The story circle process was originally developed by the Free Southern Theater, the predecessor of Junebug Productions, a nonprofit cultural organization founded to enable artists, community members, and students to share their experiences of the Civil Rights Movement. Through its Color Line Project and other work, Junebug founder John O’Neal and longtime colleague Theresa Holden—both Leadership for a Changing World awardees and participants in RCLA’s research—use stories and storytelling as a way for people from social justice movements to identify, reflect upon, and express their perceptions of history and reality.

Junebug Productions has used story circles to develop plays about the experience of the Civil Rights movement, and, in the classroom, to enable students to make personal connections to the topic being studied. It has also been used often by community organizers to bring new groups together and help people learn about and feel

comfortable with one another.

Story Circles: The Basics

Whatever the objective, the basic story circle methodology is always the same. All participants sit in a circle free of barriers—there are no tables or other objects inside the circle—and share their stories one at a time. Sometimes the group's leaders suggest a theme; other times they let the theme emerge as the circle proceeds. After everyone who wishes to tell a story has had an opportunity to do so, participants may engage in cross talk, ask questions, or comment on the stories of others. The process not only allows for greater participation and sharing than more traditional meeting structures, but is an opportunity to create a powerful foundation upon which to build a change effort. For more information on story circles and Junebug Productions, please see: "[Using Art and Theater to Support Organizing for Justice](#)," a document based on a series of interviews and observations that the Research and Documentation component of LCW conducted with Junebug staff and collaborators.

Methodologies

RCLA develops new understanding about leadership practice by facilitating an equal exchange between practitioners and researchers. Our research methods create frameworks that invite practitioners into deep conversation, "level the playing field" with social scientists, and generate new and useful knowledge. Here, we feature "cooperative inquiry," a method in which RCLA has developed expertise over the last several years.

Cooperative inquiry (CI) is an exciting participatory research technique that RCLA employs and teaches with powerful results. As a leader in the CI field, RCLA provides training in the process and helps numerous groups use the technique to create new knowledge grounded in practice, deepen the participants' leadership potential, and strengthen relationships among group members. In addition to [Can the Arts Change the World?](#), a cooperative inquiry report featured in [Recently Published](#), RCLA's [Next Generation Leadership \(NGL\)](#) program formed a CI group that also focused on the issue of art and social change. The group produced the report "Art, Creative Practice, Action and Leadership," which will be available soon.

Cara Page, founder and artistic director of Deeper Waters Productions, national director of the Committee on Women Population and the Environment (CWPE), and a member of the NGL group, described the power of CI this way:

This reminded me of how art is an action-based way to heal, evolve and bring voice to the nameless. For me this is the quintessential reason why this CI came to be...[it] was the need to measure and value how artistic process critically shapes our movements in finding the nuances and identifying the complexities of what moves us to do the work for change. If we do not know ourselves in the work, how will we know when we have achieved transformations?

Peter Reason, author of *Doing Cooperative Inquiry*, elaborates on the political power of CI.

Participative forms of inquiry start with concerns for power and powerlessness, and aim to confront the way in which the established and power-holding elements of societies worldwide are favored... This political form of participation affirms people's right and ability to have a say in decisions which affect them. (Quoted in www.livedlearning.net)

About the CI Process

In CI, a small group of participants use their own experience to generate insights around an issue that is of great concern to all of them. Participants formulate a question, agree upon a course of action, individually engage in action through their work, and then collectively make meaning from the data generated by their actions. This cycle of reflection-action-reflection is repeated several times until the group feels it has successfully addressed its concerns. In RCLA's inquiries, core research team members facilitate the groups to ensure that its members use the process to its full advantage. Facilitators and group members co-author reports to present the findings of each inquiry, which are then shared with anyone interested in practitioner-oriented

research.

In addition to the NGL group, RCLA has facilitated numerous other CI's on a variety of topics including: The Role of Arts in Social Leadership; Effective Movement for Social Change Leadership Success; and Integrating Human Rights, Social Justice, and Sustainability. RCLA recently organized a [CI training for staff](#) and is available to implement training of this type at other organizations or institutions that wish to learn more about CI. To read more about RCLA's CI work go to: www.nyu.edu/wagner/leadership/reports/cooperative.html. To arrange for a CI training for your group, please email [us](#) or call 212.998.7550.

Recently Published

Perspectives on Arts and Social Change

Can the arts change the world? In an America torn by distrust, poverty, wars abroad, and laws that ever more support the power of corporations over people, the arts may seem beside the point. Yet we, as a group of community-arts activists and others who organize locally to take on the lot of the disenfranchised, have turned aside cynicism and answered, "Yes, the arts can change the world."

This is the opening statement in a new booklet, [Can the Arts Change the World?](#) from the Leadership for a Changing World (LCW) program. Written by participant Abby Scher, in collaboration with other awardees who participated in the process, the publication documents the learning and lessons from a cooperative inquiry process around leadership and the arts. In 2004-2005, eight community-arts leaders from the LCW program and two facilitators came together to discuss the self-devised question, "How and when does art release, create, and sustain transforming power for social change?" Their findings are powerful. As one of the participants notes:

We saw how art could provide an open space to transmit possibilities. We saw that you can give people fertile ground for creative freedom. And a group that comes together around a mural can do other things—clean up a corner, register voters.

Through site visits and discussions during face-to-face meetings, the participants—community organizers and artists—saw the arts transform communities in Chicago, Philadelphia, Seattle, Los Angeles, Brooklyn, and Oakland. They witnessed their work through each others' eyes and learned, among other things, that:

- Community arts can create a safe space that allows us to trust and be open to change.
- Surrounding ourselves with beauty communicates that we are important and mean something in the world, while offering a vision of what we are working for.
- Art can honor our past by creating a record of what we have done, thus anchoring us for our move into the future.
- The arts can make us comfortable with the role-shifting that is part of community transformation.
- Through the arts, we can deal with harsh realities and transform them through the act of creation as a spiritual practice.

As Scher concludes:

The arts help create and bring life to ideas and make values visible. If we, as organizers, are to join the battle, we need to pay more attention to the creative aspect of organizing and allow community arts activism to transform all of our social justice organizing.

Read more about the people involved in this work and this powerful medium for transforming communities by downloading [Can the Arts Change the World?](#)

Can the Arts Change the World? The Transformative Power of the Arts in Fostering and Sustaining Social Change: A Leadership for a Changing World Cooperative Inquiry. Written by Abby Scher with Arnold Aprill, Elise Holliday, Fahari Jeffers, Nobuko

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Miyamoto, Abby Scher, Diana Spatz, Richard Townsell, Lily Yeh, Lyle Yorks, and Sandra Hayes.

Other RCLA leadership stories of interest, developed using the narrative inquiry process and featuring LCW awardees:

“How Theater is Building Bridges in Diverse Communities” is a report on Cornerstone Theater Company, an arts organization engaging crucial community issues. Please go to: www.wagner.nyu.edu/leadership/reports/files/3.pdf.

“Promoting Self-Sufficiency Among Homeless People: A Continuum of Care and Social Policy Alternatives” focuses on Project H.O.M.E. in Philadelphia and its major policy struggles. Please go to: www.nyu.edu/wagner/leadership/reports/files/24.pdf.

Photo credits: Top, L to R: Deb Rothenberg, Deb Rothenberg, Sarah May

The Research Center for Leadership in Action at NYU's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service translates personally held practitioner experience into shared expertise and leadership theory into useful instruments. Through a variety of programs, seminars, and research, RCLA is committed to creating new and cutting-edge knowledge by addressing real leadership problems...from the ground up.