THE DREAMSPACE PROJECT

A WORKBOOK & TOOLKIT FOR CRITICAL PRAXIS IN THE AMERICAN ART MUSEUM
introduction

We begin our collective journey of The Dreamspace Project Workbook with an excerpt from Judith Baca’s “Whose Monument Where? Public Art in a Many-Cultured Society” (1996). She describes the origins of her mural the Great Wall of Los Angeles:

“One of the most catastrophic consequences of an endless real estate boom was the concreting of the entire Los Angeles River, on which the city was founded. The river, as the earth’s arteries—thus atrophied and hardened—created a giant scar across the land which served to further divide an already divided city. It is this metaphor that inspired my own half-mile-long mural on the history of ethnic peoples painted in the Los Angeles river conduit. Just as young Chicanos tattoo battle scars on their bodies, the Great Wall of Los Angeles is a tattoo on a scar where the river once ran. In it reappear the disappeared stories of ethnic populations that make up the labor force which built our city, state, and nation” (1996, p. 133).

The story she weaves is enchanting, threading together multiple terrains of geography and history embodied in human movement, memory, and creative expression. Baca’s narrative captures the way we trace and carve lines into the earth to create divisions, to remember who won, who belongs, and who is kept out. At times, we build to create bridges and break down barriers. There is a vivid sense of a physical lineage between land and earth, our bodies, and our histories. Our construction of these terrains reflect our worldviews, and the institutions and systems we put in place to develop and maintain our sense of place.

You may wonder why we begin here, tending to this concept of landscapes. The first chapter of The Dreamspace Project Workbook, “Contextualizing: Mapping and Navigating Terrains,” introduces the practice of developing critical self-awareness, building knowledge of the many ecologies we inhabit, and expanding understandings of our roles and responsibilities. To support art museum educators in their journey towards critical consciousness, this workbook will focus on mapping and navigating the terrains of the Dreamspace: global, institutional, and self.

Contextualizing our selves in the terrains of the Dreamspace is all about relevance and interconnectivity. We dive and dig into how racism is relevant to our work and practices as art museum educators, pushing beyond justifying why. We unearth the many and complex ways that our life and work not only intersect with, but are controlled and manipulated by, global systems of oppression. The content of this workbook pushes beyond symbolically advocating for social justice; it emphasizes the necessity of actualized critical action.
introduction

The Dreamspace Project Workbook begins from the inarguable premise that to live in the United States in the modern day is to be complicit within a network of global systems of oppression including, but not limited to:

- racism/White Supremacy
- western-centrism
- sexism/patriarchy
- heteronormativism
- cisgenderism
- ableism
- capitalism/plutonomy
- war
- colonialism
- classism/privilege

All of these are interwoven and built into the foundation of our society not only historically, but persistently fabricated and upheld by our own (in)actions and (in)decisions. The American art museum is implicated in this. Regardless of our well-meaning intentions to present our museums as spaces for public learning and enjoyment, our society and institutions are founded upon these flaws. Therefore, our roles and responsibilities as critical art museum practitioners goes beyond advocating for diversity or inclusion; what would be the purpose of trying to build in equity and diversity into a fundamentally oppressive institution?

If we consider our selves responsible, we must delegitimize and dismantle oppressive systems of power and hierarchy in our institutions. We must radically reimagine and reconstruct new models for inclusive, equitable, and socially-just American cultural institutions and society.

In this chapter, we begin with the core concepts of race, racism, colorblind racism, Whiteness, and White Supremacy to introduce ideas, perspectives, and language that are foundational to our work. The work of critical praxis extends far beyond acknowledging racism as a pressing issue, and necessitates active rethinking and transformation of our institutions, disciplines, and practices.

Thus, critical reflection and analytic understanding of racism and White Supremacy are not the long-term goals of this workbook, they are our starting point and baseline for understanding.

Each core concept will be introduced with a quote, followed by some questions for reflection. The questions are modeled on our Framework for Openness, in order to cultivate critical reflection and study of our world, our institutions, and our selves.

* Please feel free to print out the next page (5) and use it as a poster!
Everyone is complicit with racism

As a consequence of the society you live in, you exhibit symptoms of White Supremacy—some that you may be able to notice and fix, and some that are deeply ingrained behaviors and biases that will take more time. No one is “in the clear,” and it is everyone’s responsibility to be attuned and counteract these streams!

Bring it up

These may be difficult conversations to have with colleagues and supervisors. But if you have trust and respect, speak your truth—this is a real opportunity for learning, teaching and growth. Staying silent on these issues doesn’t help anyone grow, and there may be someone in your midst sensing things that you don’t even notice. Openness is key.

Framework for openness

Encourage criticality and consciousness

Learning about racism and systems of oppression is an emotional and painful process. Don’t let these emotions take control. If you feel fear, anger, or frustration, you are on a path to learning something that is changing your core. Breathe, stay calm, and keep going.

“Listen with your skin”

Professor Carla Rinaldi of Reggio Emilia coined this phrase in an interview. It brings to mind the image of a creature molting, and the notion of listening with your entire being, growing and shape-shifting in the moment. When concerns regarding racism come up, be ready to put all assumptions and biases aside, and listen for understanding. Be open to being challenged and look for ways you can be supportive.
Race

“Fabrication implies the workings of human hands, and suggests the possible intention to deceive. More than the industrial term ‘formation,’ which carries connotations of neutral constructions and processes indifferent to individual intervention, referring to the fabrication of races emphasizes the human element and evokes the plastic and inconstant character of race” (Haney-López, 1995, p. 196).

What has been your personal experience with race?

What emotions are tied to your personal understandings of, and experiences with, race?

What assumptions and biases do you hold concerning race?

How have art, material/visual culture, and media been used in the socio-cultural fabrication of race?

Is your art museum having critical conversations about race? How can those conversations be started, fostered, or improved?

Racism

“I propose that we think of racism as a system of power with four domains” (Hill Collins, 2009, p. 53).

| A structural domain of power that shows ... how racism as a system of power is set up, and how it is organized without anybody doing anything. |
| A disciplinary domain of power where people use the rules and regulations of everyday life to uphold the racial hierarchy or to challenge it. |
| A cultural domain of power that manufactures the ideas that justify racial hierarchy... through the media in particular ... constructing representations, ideas, and stories about race and racism as a system of power. |
| An interpersonal domain of power that shapes race relations among individuals in everyday life ... where people accept and/or resist racial inequality in their everyday lives. |

What is your current understanding and working definition of racism?

What have been your personal experiences with racism?

What kinds of emotions, images, and memories does the term racism trigger for you?

Have you ever felt or exhibited resistance to acknowledging your complicity with racism? Why do you think racism is a difficult reality to accept?

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Do your current understanding and experiences with racism align with any of these quadrants? How do these quadrants expand your understanding of racism?

How is racism related to power? In considering racism as a system of power, who gets the power and who is disempowered?

How have art, material/visual culture, and media been used to perpetuate racism?

Looking at these quadrants, in what ways is the American art museum complicit with racism?

Colorblind racism

“... an impregnable yet elastic ideological wall that barricades whites off from America’s racial reality—an impregnable wall because it provides them a safe, color-blind way to state racial views without appearing to be irrational or rabidly racist ... Today there is a sanitized, color-blind way of calling minorities niggers, spics, or chinks ... the language of liberalism ...” (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 305).

Have you ever heard of the term colorblind racism? What is your current working definition of colorblind racism?

How does the supposedly “well-meaning” intent behind colorblind racism impede or create a barrier to addressing the persistent reality of racism?

What is the harm of ignoring or sanitizing racism?

How does the supposed neutrality of the art museum mask its perpetuation of racism?

Whiteness

“... as long as whiteness is felt to be the human condition, then it alone both defines normality and fully inhabits it ... the equation of being white with being human secures a position of power .... overwhelmingly because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal.” (Dyer, 2002, p. 12).


What is your current understanding of Whiteness?

How does Whiteness relate to skin color?
How does Whiteness go beyond skin color?

What is considered normal? What kinds of assumptions and biases are part of the construction of normalcy?

How are Whiteness and normalcy interconnected?

How does the American art museum construct, perpetuate, and disseminate notions of Whiteness?
White Supremacy

“In order for white racial hegemony to saturate everyday life, it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions, and policies that white subjects perpetrate on people of color … white racial supremacy revolves less around the issue of unearned advantages, or the state of being dominant, and more around direct processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 137).


What are some of the ways in your life that other people hold, control, and exercise power against you? What are some of the ways that you hold, control, and exercise power against people?

What is power? Where does power come from?

What does it take to maintain power? What is the relationship between power and dominance?

What are the similarities and differences between racism and White Supremacy?
Even with our work within the specific context of the American art museum, it is essential to begin our journey of critical praxis with an understanding of our existence within a global community. We have constructed so many ways to distance ourselves from the suffering of fellow human beings. It is much easier for us, in an act of self-preservation, to express outrage at injustice, and to convince ourselves and others that we are part of the solution—or at least that we are *decidedly* not part of the problem. But we are living out the contemporary and ever-present legacies of historical oppression, and the choice of whether something is "related" to us or our jobs is not ours to make. In *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the foundations of a movement*, Angela Y. Davis argues the necessity to emphasize the relationships and interconnectivity of global social justice movements:

“One of the things I’ve been thinking about in relation to the need to diversify movements in solidarity with Palestine is that, the tendency is to approach issues about which one is passionate within a narrow framework. People do this whatever their concerns are ... The question is how to create windows and doors for people who believe in justice to enter and join the Palestine solidarity movement. So that the question of how to bring movements together is also a question of the kind of language one uses and the consciousness one tries to impart. I think it’s important to insist on the intersectionality of movements” (2016, p. 21).

Another way I think about this interconnectivity between global social justice movements is Audre Lorde’s assertion:

“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives” (2007).

We cannot pick and choose which issues are relevant to us, what we decide to advocate for, and what situations we opt out of. Any sense of (opt)ions are mere illusions generated from the comfortable safety of privileged distance. Challenging the status quo may not be listed under our job descriptions, but rather than thinking of one’s professional career and this journey of critical praxis as two separate paths, it is a matter of centering our professional practice in purposes and values grounded in social justice. As educators in the twenty-first century, we must consider ourselves accountable to our larger global community.
While studying our connections to the global community, first and foremost, start from where you are at. We are anchored by our commitment to anti-racism and social justice but acknowledge that we are all unique individuals, starting our journey at different places. Much of this work is about mapping and navigating tensions within one’s self, one’s institution, and pushing our thoughts and actions to extend to the larger global community.

At times, you may come across content that triggers strong emotions or resistance. That’s great; sit with those emotions, take a breath, and reflect. This workbook is an opportunity for you to learn this content at your own pace; take advantage of this “safety,” be brave, and nudge your self towards greater discomfort and criticality.

There is not one right way to go about this work. Mapping and navigating the global terrain is tied to the ecologies of infinite communities but our actions invariably hinge on our subjective selves. Rather than providing any templates or frameworks to limit the scope of your learning and research, here are some ideas for exercises and strategies to practice:

- Keep up with global current events. Consider these events as symptoms of intersecting systems of oppression. Trace these events back to their historical contexts and analyze the ways in which you are personally connected to them.
- Research and reflect on the human experience of diaspora across the world and over time. How does this inform our work as educators in multicultural communities?
- Track global injustice, human rights cases, and social justice movements.
- Map the objects and artworks in your collection. Without relying on gallery titles and categorizations, spend time investigating where the objects in your collection are from and how they came to be at your museum.
“Museums have been complicit in the construction of physical and cultural hierarchies that underpinned racist thought from the Enlightenment until well into the twentieth century, in marked contrast to the inclusionary role that many now seek to fulfil ... There is nothing ‘post’ about colonialism as a view of the world that persists” (Lynch & Alberti, 2010, pp. 13-14).

The Dreamspace Workbook is written to examine, interrogate, and act against the oppressive, racist, hierarchical foundations of the American art museum. We will critically examine the art museum and problematize its status quo of normalcy, and look for ways we can ignite institutional change.

It is not enough to acknowledge the dark legacies of our institutional histories and disciplines. We must always remember that these violent and problematic pasts have ignited colonizing, dehumanizing processes that serve as the foundation of our current practices. It requires more than noticing, or trying to avoid, things that seem overtly or blatantly racist. We have to understand that racism is foundational and fundamental to our institutions, practices, and lives; they are not restricted to the few or extreme exceptions. We need to be more perceptive to the infinite and intersecting ways that global systems of oppression infiltrate and determine our actions and decisions. This influences everything from who gets to enter and participate in these spaces, how we conceive and engage with visitors and the public, how we think about learning and education, and where we place our values - in objects, or our fellow human beings.

We begin this process of reflecting on the construction and control of the art museum space in the “let’s take a walk” series analyzing specific aspects of place, space, people, voice, and engagement within our institutions.
“Learning is and can be a value if we are aware that learning - which is pursued by each individual in times and ways that cannot be programmed - is a ‘relational place’ that makes us reflect on the meaning of education itself and search for new paths in educating and personal and professional development” (Rinaldi, 2001, p. 141).

Working in the fields of arts, education, and museums, we have so much theory, data, and research available for us to study and glean from. While investigating existing information is a vital way to pursue further learning, I want to underline Rinaldi’s call for educators as active agents conducting their own research, documentation, and reflection. She advocates actively engaging in self-study, learning, and discovery, not passively consuming information to program our selves.

Alongside this notion of active research and critical reflection, I want to encourage us to constantly check our self-awareness on external and personal biases, assumptions, and expectations. Problematize any and all notions of normalcy and status quo; just because “that’s the way things are” or “that’s the way things are done,” does not necessarily mean that they are socially-just or equitable practices. When working on exercises throughout the workbook, remember that norms, protocols, and behaviors that might seem natural for some in the art museum space are not obvious and relevant to, or inclusive of, all peoples.

In the “let’s take a walk” mapping exercises:

1. Document!: Take notes, doodle, or snap some photographs to capture and log concrete visual evidence
2. Be specific: Back up your ideas with visual and physical examples
3. Look twice: Take this as an opportunity to explore your museum with new eyes, and with this new lens of critical consciousness in development
4. Question everything!: Ask yourself and colleagues, “Why is this like this? Who is this for? What is the purpose? Can this be better?”
5. Over Time: Make these exercises a long-term practice or habit, not just a one-off!
Draw a map of the area surrounding your art museum. You can make this as broad or specific as you wish. Maybe start off with the neighborhoods, sites, and communities within a 3-mile radius, and expand from there.

1. Reflect on your art museum’s location within a historical and national context.
2. Acknowledge the Indigenous peoples whose land is now occupied. Who lived where the art museum now stands?
3. Where do you live in relation to the art museum? How do you get to work? What is the path you take?
4. What are five words you would use to describe the city/neighborhood surrounding your art museum?
5. What are the areas of the city that you are most familiar with? What is attractive to you about these places?
6. Are there any areas of the city that you have not yet been to, or avoid? Why?
7. What are five main strengths that your city/neighborhood has to offer?
8. What are five key challenges that your city/neighborhood is facing?
9. What are the relationships between your museum and its local/regional communities?

“Place incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning” (Tuan, 1979, p. 387).
Examine the physical space of your art museum. Take the perspective of a visitor and imagine what they may see or experience.

1. What are five words you would use to describe your art museum?
2. Spend some time analyzing these words. What kinds of meanings and associations do they suggest?
3. What kinds of emotions does the space provoke?
4. Are there other buildings in your city that look like your art museum? What kinds of buildings have similar architecture?
5. What kinds of people, businesses, activities, organizations do these buildings contain?
6. What types of experiences does your art museum space allow for?
7. How is the art museum organized?
8. Take a moment to analyze the style of organization/categorization: who came up with this framework; does/would it make sense to a first-time visitor; whose perspective does it represent?
9. How is the space controlled and monitored?
10. Is your museum a public place?

“... that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it...” (Foucault, 1979, p. 201).
Whose identities are represented in the art museum? Consider factors including - but not limited to - race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, ability, socio-economic, religious, and educational background.

1. Who are the people who work at your art museum? Is there equal representation of people of diverse identities and backgrounds?
2. Who are the artists represented in your collection? Who are the people/figures featured in their artworks?
3. Whose stories are being told? From whose perspective are these narratives constructed? Look for specific examples.
5. When you think of your art museum’s “audience” and “community” who comes to mind?
6. Who is included in your intended audience? Who is excluded?
7. Is your intended audience reflected in your actual visitorship?

“Audiences are never ‘others’—they are always very concrete selves. In other words, it is impossible to plan a participatory experience and take steps to make it public without also making some assumptions about those who will eventually partake in it” (Helguera, 2011, p. 23).
Walk through your art museum focusing specifically on the lens of voice.

1. What does “voice” mean to you? What does it mean to be able to have or exercise voice?
2. What kind of voice does your art museum present? Is it welcoming, friendly, helpful?
3. To whom specifically is the art museum directing its voice and message?
4. How many languages does your museum speak?
5. Is the voice of your museum inclusive to diverse visitors and audiences?
6. What is the art museum saying throughout its space and in its galleries?
7. Does your museum ask enough questions? Are these questions sincere and open to critique? Do they invite genuine inquiry and dialogue from the public?
8. Is there a balance between institutional voice and visitor voice in your museum? Are there any places where visitor voices are permanently represented in the museum?

“Censorship is saying: ‘I’m the one who says the last sentence. Whatever you say, the conclusion is mine’” (Weiwei, April 2012).
Observe what people are doing in your art museum. Consider not only their actions and behaviors, but whether the museum is supporting visitors with opportunities for engagement.

1. What forms of engagement would you like to see in the galleries?
2. What does quality engagement look and feel like for you? What are some behaviors associated with this?
3. What are your standards for quality engagement? Where did this criteria come from?
4. What are the things you value in your visitors' art museum experiences?
5. Describe the forms of engagement you actually see in the galleries.
6. What kinds of interpretation and guided experiences does your museum provide?
7. Do these opportunities for engagement guide/direct visitors toward certain outcomes, or allow for creative agency?
8. Does your museum encourage both individual and social experiences with art?

"Forging a learning community that values wholeness over division, disassociation, splitting, the democratic educator works to create closeness. Palmer calls it the ‘intimacy that does not annihilate difference’" (hooks, 2003, p. 49).
The process of critical self-examination in *The Dreamspace Project Workbook* was inspired by the essay, “To search for the good and make it matter” by Estella Conwill Májozo. I found this particular section most captivating:

“The dream space of the soul is the real terrain that we should map. If not, then nothing else that we are fighting for or against has any possibility of transformation ... None of these concerns can be taken on unless they are examined, acknowledged, and confronted within the inner territory of the self, the earth that, in fact, we are. The soul is the seedbed of our actions. Everything that we conceptualize, create, or destroy has its beginnings there” (1995, p.88).

I return to this text again and again to reflect on her description of what seems like a forgotten harmony and connectivity between our selves, to one another, and the earth. As I thought about this piece in relation to my work in art museums, an important message emerged. I often find myself in conversations about community outreach, extending the art museum to diverse audiences.

The trajectory of speech and perspective is external. With *The Dreamspace Project*, I take the approach that we can only truly extend our selves as far as we have dared to examine and interrogate inward; to cast an eye not only upon the world and others, but to spend time critically studying our selves and the many layers and identities we hold. I have come to realize that the bulk of the “work” we must engage in is primarily self-work.

To pursue critical individual and institutional practice, it is essential to turn our outreach inwards; the transformation of our society is inextricably linked to the transformation of our selves. It is the many terrains within that we must examine and interrogate before we consider any impact on the world. In this section you will find exercises to take you through mapping:

- personal identity in relation to global systems of oppression
- museum road map
- on education
- roles, responsibilities, and accountability
- care and fear
Mapping personal identity in relation to global systems of oppression

“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.” - Audre Lorde

Take some time to consider your self in relation to global systems of oppression. How do these systems work against you? How do these systems work in your favor?

* The factors of identity and global systems of oppression shown above are not meant to be comprehensive or reductionist, but a way to begin to think about our selves in relation to larger social justice issues.
Draw a road map of your museum experience. Where are you coming from, where have you been, what you have seen, and what you have done? All of these insights and experiences inform your practice and perspectives.

1. When did you first realize your passion for art? For museums? For education?
2. Where did this journey begin?
3. What are some of the memories you have tied to why you became interested in this path?
4. Where has this path taken you? Which cities? What experiences?
5. What have been some of the most significant sites and experiences in your journey?
6. Have you ever been lost? What was that experience like? What did you do to get your self back on track?
7. Have you discovered unexpected roads and paths along the way?
8. How did you get to your current position and your current institution?
9. Where do you see your self headed to next?
We envision the dreamspace as the zone of overlap between the three terrains (self, institutional, global), as well as where our roles, responsibilities, and accountability intersect. The alignment of roles and responsibilities is not a new concept, but this self-mapping exercise is meant to deepen our practice to encompass our interconnectedness and accountability to our global community.

1. How often do you consider your self as part of a larger global community?
2. In what ways does this affect (or not affect) your daily decisions, actions, and life?
3. What are some of the difficulties in being a responsible, global citizen?
4. What are some ways that we can hold our selves and one another more accountable to global social justice?

1. What is your role in the art museum?
2. How do you envision your role in the larger art museum/education landscape?
3. How do you see your role in society, or in your community?
4. In what ways do these roles overlap and intersect? In what ways are these roles separate from each other?
5. For each question above, consider to whom you are responsible.
Take this time and space to do some doodling and dreamscaping. Reflect on the relationship between your cares and fears. How do they shape our decisions, actions, and work as developing, critical art museum educators?

What do you care about?

What are you afraid of?
This workbook is written with the hope that people generations from now will stand where we are today and see a vast forest. This is all part of a larger, iterative process; we are not looking for any particular “right” answers. We want you to engage openly and honestly starting from where you are at. Take the time for critical study of our world, our systems and institutions, and our selves. As arts educators, we always cast our gaze both forward and into the past, outward to people around us as well as unto our selves. We want to cultivate a practice of critical reflection that is not merely one-time, retrospective, or sporadic but a constant humming, breathing organism within the dreamspace of the self.

1. Feel free to share this workbook with friends, family, and colleagues! You can read and actively engage on your own, or you can start group meetings and gatherings at work to discuss further.

2. Take notes and doodles, whatever makes sense to you! Be sure to document your process and practice of self-study so you can always return to reflect on growth over time.

“Growing a forest takes time. At first, you do all this work and nothing happens. But the most important thing you can do is try to plant as many forests wherever you can” (V. Iyer, personal communication, September 17, 2016).


Chapter 2
Deconstruction
Deconstruction examines the existing traditional, oppressive, normative, and dominant models in museums, and encourages building new frameworks and structures into institutions. Decolonization explores the way our institutions are products of colonization, and opens up space for reconciliation, truth, healing, and justice in our work. Democratization focuses on matters of inclusion and access to public space, and what it means for museums to authentically engage and co-create with their publics.

It is crucial to emphasize that our deconstructive work is not a destructive force. It is an emergent and generative force that deepens our practice, and challenges us to build the transformation in our spaces that we seek.
introduction

Each section of this chapter addresses this Deconstruction framework from a different lens.

In **core concepts**, each page will cover a foundational idea to ground and spark further thinking throughout the chapter. The core concepts are: knowledge and power, (not//un)learning, whiteness, cultural capital, intersectionality, and access.

In **museums as institutions**, we examine the ways the structures of the museum uphold systems of oppression and think through ways museum practitioners can begin building their own justice-oriented values and vision into their work.

The section **the role of the educator** encourages critical self reflection in order to better understand and navigate the challenges we face in our practice.

The final section **designing for learning** presents a design process for visitor experiences that centers the variability of learners and their needs. It also builds in justice-oriented purposes and themes to ground and inform our design.

How should I use the workbook?

1. The workbook is written to serve individual readers as well as groups of practitioners working through its contents together. A combination of personal self-reflection and group discussion is encouraged!
2. Feel free to use the questions and exercises on each slide as a starting point. The purpose of the workbook is not to produce “right answers”—or even answer all the questions posed—but to ignite and catalyze critical thinking and action.
3. Take notes and respond in whatever way works best for you, but make sure to find a way to document both individual and group thinking/learning.
4. This is a work-in-process draft of the workbook. It will continue to go through a series of expansions and refinements. If you have questions or suggestions, please feel free to leave comments in the slide deck, or email the author Alyssa Machida at dreamspaceworkbook@gmail.com
5. Have fun and enjoy!
After determining deconstruction as the guiding and underlying framework for this chapter, I sat for a long time with the question, what needs to be deconstructed in museum education? When thinking of building space and capacity for critical, inclusive, and anti-oppressive practices and pedagogies in art museums, what is the "curriculum" that needs to be deconstructed?

It was clear from the outset that the content of formal museum education was not the only thing that needed troubling and interrogation. Nor was education the only relevant department. Oppressive modes of engagement and inequitable distributions of power are foundational to how our institutions have been constructed, and how they continue to operate.

This requires us to probe and scrutinize every purpose, value, and argument we uphold for the biases, judgments, and assumptions at their root. We need to better understand the museum as a construct. Only once we understand the complexity and layeredness of our institutions can we begin navigating and activating authentic transformations and change.

To continue digging deeper, the core concepts for this chapter are:

- knowledge and power
- (not//un)learning
- whiteness
- cultural capital
- intersectionality
- access

Each core concept will be introduced with a quote, followed by some questions for reflection. Take some time to review and respond on your own, and then gather some colleagues and thought-partners to discuss together!
knowledge and power

“But knowledge is never neutral, it never exists in an empiricist, objective relationship to the real. Knowledge is power, and the circulation of knowledge is part of the social distribution of power. (p. 149).

Fiske, J. Reading the Popular (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 149-50.

1. How do you personally define knowledge?
2. What kinds of knowledge do you possess and share at your museum?
3. Where does this knowledge come from?
4. Does your museum draw from diverse cultural sources of knowledge?
   a. How did you access this knowledge?
5. What qualifies as valid knowledge at your museum?
6. Is any of the knowledge at your museum considered contested or controversial? How so? From whose perspective?
7. Who at your museum is seen as “knowledgeable” or “expert”?
8. When you think of a potential “knowledgeable” visitor to your museum, what are the qualities and characteristics of that individual?
9. What kinds of expectations do we place on visitors to value and engage with our knowledge, and to perform their own knowledge?
10. What are some ways that we empower and disempower through the construction, distribution, and validation of knowledge at our museum?
Learning how to not-learn is an intellectual and social challenge ... It consists of an active, often ingenious, willful rejection of even the most compassionate and well-designed teaching ... Over the years I’ve come to side with them in their refusal to be molded by a hostile society and have come to look upon not-learning as positive and healthy in many situations” (p. 2).

“Not-learning and unlearning are both central techniques that support changes of consciousness and help people develop positive ways of thinking and speaking in opposition to dominant forms of oppression” (p. 23).

whiteness

“Spaces acquire the ‘skin’ of the bodies that inhabit them ... Spaces also take shape by being orientated around some bodies, more than others. We can also consider ‘institutions’ as orientation devices, which take the shape of ‘what’ resides within them. After all, institutions provide collective or public spaces. When we describe institutions as ‘being’ white (institutional whiteness), we are pointing to how institutional spaces are shaped by the proximity of some bodies and not others ...” (p. 157).


1. What is your current definition and understanding of Whiteness?
2. What is your current definition and understanding of White Supremacy?
3. What are the ways your museum upholds and embodies institutional Whiteness and White Supremacy?*
4. What does being in your museum feel like to you?
5. Is your museum a comfortable space? For whom? By whose standards?
6. Is your museum a safe space? For whom? By whose standards?
7. What kinds of objects and artworks are in your museum’s collection?
8. Who are the founders, funders, collectors, and leaders in your institution’s history?
   a. What kind of museum did they establish?
9. How do the objects in the galleries determine the look and feel of the space around them?
10. What makes a space public?
    a. Is your museum a public space?

* Check out this amazing resource: White Supremacy Culture
"CRT [Critical Race Theory] shifts the center of focus from notions of White, middle class culture to the cultures of Communities of Color ... A traditional view of cultural capital is narrowly defined by White, middle class values ... CRT expands this view ... community cultural wealth is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77).

intersectionality

“... thinking about discrimination which structures politics so that struggles are categorized as singular issues ... imports a descriptive and normative view of society that reinforces the status quo” (pp. 166 - 167).

1. Why is intersectionality an important concept for museum practitioners working towards social justice?
2. What does diversity mean to you? How do you define diversity?
3. When your museum discusses issues of diversity, what are people talking about? What are people not talking about?
4. What does inclusion mean to you? How do you define inclusion?
5. When your museum discusses issues of inclusion, what are people talking about? What are people not talking about?
6. What forms of discrimination exist in your museum? For visitors? For staff?
7. When you think of what is considered acceptable, normal, or ideal in an art museum setting—what comes to mind?
8. What kinds of assumptions, expectations, and biases about what the museum is for and who the museum is for is embedded in this thinking?
9. What does it mean for you personally to be able to be your full self?
10. What would need to change for all visitors to be able to be their full selves in the museum? What might that look/sound/feel like?

“The public world is the world of strength, the positive (valued) body, performance and production, the non-disabled, and young adults. Weakness, illness, rest and recovery, pain, death, and the negative (devalued) body are private, generally hidden, and often neglected... Much of the experience of disability and illness goes underground, because there is no socially acceptable way of expressing it and having the physical and psychological experience acknowledged. Yet acknowledgment of this experience is exactly what is required for creating accessibility in the public world. The more a society regards disability as a private matter, and people with disabilities as belonging in the private sphere, the more disability it creates by failing to make the public sphere accessible to a wide range of people” (p. 40).


1. What are different ways one can access a museum?
2. What are visible and invisible barriers to accessing a museum?
3. When you think of “accessibility”, what comes to mind?
4. Do you make a distinction between access and accessibility? Why or why not?
5. Is accessibility a fundamental part of your museum, or is it marginal and peripheral to the general operations?
6. Does the museum’s approach to accessibility differ in the context of galleries and exhibitions vs. programming?
7. When you hear the term “disability,” what comes to mind?*
8. In what ways do the needs of your learners and audiences shape your individual and institutional practices, processes, and output?
9. Is your museum an accessible workplace for its staff and employees? How so?
10. What could a fully accessible museum look like?

*To learn more about able-bodied privilege
museums as institutions

In an institution like a museum, there is usually a clearly laid out mission with core purposes, values, and a vision for the future guiding its operations. All of these inform how the museum is going to invest its time and energy in projects and initiatives to move towards its envisioned future. The problem with museums is not in the clarity of its messages. Rather, tensions arise from questions such as:

- Who developed this vision?
- Who benefits from this vision?
- Who was this future vision built for? Who is excluded from that future vision?

This section on institutional mapping is an important exercise for museum educators who are engaging in social justice work. The issues we raise, and the people we are fighting for, fundamentally change the nature of these spaces. We are fighting for a change and transformation to the way the museum exists within society, who it serves, what it does with its collections and resources, what kinds of spaces and experiences it provides.

So what would museums look like if the vision of museum educators were brought to life? The role and responsibility of the museum educator goes beyond content and teaching in the gallery. By occupying a position within a cultural institution, we are the movers and shakers and change-makers in these spaces. As an educator:

- What is your future vision for your museum?
- What is your future vision for museum education?
- What does it look like? What does it feel like?
- Who is alongside you in this future vision?

While museum educators may not always be afforded the time, money, and power to directly and immediately change policy within the museum, we have the power to keep educating our selves, our colleagues, and our visitors to begin transforming the culture of the museum. The culture of the museum is how people think and operate in the space. Once that is inspired, we begin to shape the underlying practices, policies, and policies that uphold our institution. And by making those centered on inclusion, access, equity, and social justice, we affect greater change.
institutional mapping

Draw a map of your museum.* You can choose how to illustrate this map (spatially, conceptually, etc). This map should reflect your personal understandings and experiences of your institution. Think about how your museum is structured, in particular, keep in mind power distributions and dynamics. *This can be tied to a specific museum, or used as an exercise in thinking through the general structure of museums.
**current museum institution**

Use this slide to do some thinking on the WHAT, HOW, and WHYs of the museum institution as it stands now. Feel free to apply this framework to a specific museum, or to use it as a general thought exercise. Be honest about the reality of where museums are at. Dig into the entrenched and fundamental values, biases, and assumptions that shape and drive everything the museum does and WHY to exposes its philosophical underpinnings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>what is the museum for?</th>
<th>how does it achieve its mission and purposes?</th>
<th>why?</th>
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<tr>
<td>mission + purposes</td>
<td>experiences + initiatives</td>
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<th>what does the museum teach?</th>
<th>how does it teach?</th>
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<tr>
<td>content + curriculum</td>
<td>pedagogy + values</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>who is the museum for?</th>
<th>how is this cultivated?</th>
<th>why?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>visitors + audiences</td>
<td>access + barriers</td>
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your vision for an inclusive, socially-just museum

Based on the work you did on the previous slide, document your vision for how to transform museums into an inclusive, socially-just space. For this exercise, imagine the ways your museum’s WHATs and HOWs will be shaped by justice-based values and commitments (its WHYs).

what is your museum for?
mission + purposes

how does it achieve its mission and purposes?
experiences + initiatives

why?

what does your museum teach?
content + curriculum

how does it teach?
pedagogy + values

why?

who is your museum for?
visitors + audiences

how is this cultivated?
access

why?
We started off this chapter with the question: What needs to be deconstructed in museum education?

It must be emphasized that there is absolutely no point in attempting critical pedagogies and practices while continuing to uphold the same oppressive structures and systems currently in place.

This means we need to have a serious examination of the role of education and the educator in the museum not only from a philosophical standpoint but in relation to real issues of time, pay and salary, space, resources, and mentorship.

There is real passion and momentum collecting among museum educators to engage in the work of social justice from within the institution. Museums are voicing their declarations of commitment and support. But are museums as institutions actually providing support and opportunities for their staff to enact the transformative change they invoke?

1. How is education structured and organized in the museum?
2. Who are the educators at the museum?
   a. What are the different roles that educators have there?
3. What is the distribution of labor across education departments?
4. How many full-time, part-time, and paid/unpaid positions are there?
5. How are roles and responsibilities spread across education departments and staff?
6. What are the various formats and structures for "learning" in the museum?
7. What structure and support (time, space, resources) is currently given to the work of educators?
8. What structure and support (time, space, resources) is currently given to pursue critical, social justice work?
9. How can this be improved?
10. How would you restructure your museum?
“I think we need to be wary: we need to work against the danger of evoking something that we don’t challenge ourselves to actually practice” (hooks, 2003, p. 163).

What is a community? We hear the word used often in our work. It has entered the modern museum lexicon yet what it truly means and what it is meant to stand for in the museum context is still unclear. The word is often used as a code for People of Color (POC), but what is the true meaning of community? What distinguishes a community from a group of people? Why are communities important?

When using the term community in the museum context, it is often in reference to communities of people outside of the institution. It is less frequent for us to take time to cultivate and build communities within and among museums. How can we possibly connect and build sustained relationships with communities of people outside the museum when folks internally within the institution are not yet working together?

1. What does community mean to you?
2. Is there a sense of community within the museum?
3. Is there a community gathered (or gathering) around issues of social justice in the museum?
4. How are people organizing?
5. What are some strategies to continue cultivating a sense of community among staff across the museum?
6. When museum staff refer to community (or communities), who are they talking about?
7. Does your museum have ties to local/state/national/global communities?
8. What are the ways your museum connects with these various communities?
9. What are some ways the museum can reach out to connect with more communities?
10. What are ways the museum can continue to build sincere and sustained relationships with these communities?
on quality

Just as the structures of the museum need to reshape around new values and forms of critical practice, we also need to recalibrate our understandings and measures of quality. When our work authentically centers core principles of justice, anti-oppression, and liberation, our processes and outcomes will change in response. This will directly engage our ideologies on what the museum is for, what it should (or should not) be doing, and what it means for a museum to be successful.

Building radical frameworks into modern museum institutions does not mean overthrowing all sense of structure and quality. It deepens our commitments in practice. It asks harder questions and holds us sincerely accountable to the claims we make as public spaces for art and learning.

Take some time to reflect on the various ways that museums, educators, and visitors may understand and measure:

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<th>Quality</th>
<th>Success</th>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Failure</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>What is...?</th>
<th>How do museums define and measure this?</th>
<th>How do you define and measure this?</th>
<th>How might visitors define and measure this?</th>
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<td>quality</td>
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the role of the educator

“The right kind of education begins with the educator, who must understand himself and be free from established patterns of thought; for what he is, that he imparts ... To educate the educator—that is, to have him understand himself—is one of the most difficult undertakings, because most of us are already crystallized within a system of thought or a pattern of action ... ” (Krishnamurti, 1953, p. 99).

Continuing with our Deconstruction framework, we examine and unpack the role of the museum educator. There is great weight and urgency on all of us to engage in individual and collective critical praxis. We are required to navigate a dynamic and challenging terrain of learning, not-learning, and unlearning from which to build our strategies for critical action.

We explore how we each make sense of our roles, spaces, and work, in order to unearth the purposes, values, biases, and ideologies at their root. The more we dig in order to understand our world and our work, we are brought closer and deeper into understanding our selves.

Our internal self-work and the work of transforming our institutions are inextricably linked. At times clear and harmonious, at times murky and discordant, the relationship between the two requires listening. The various exercises are meant to serve as starting points to help us be attentive to the various sounds and energies in our midst.

The questions raised may feel deeply personal, but they may also resonate with many people around you. Feel free to take the time and space to reflect on your own, but encourage your self and each other to gather and discuss as a group!
What does education mean to you?

What does learning mean to you?

What does teaching mean to you?

How do you envision your role as educator?
How do these questions connect and relate to one another?

What is the role of the museum in the larger landscape of education?  
What is the role of the educator in the museum?  
What is the role of the museum in society?  
What is the role of the educator in society?

What is the role of [   ] within the larger landscape of education?  
What is the role of [   ] in museums?  
What is the role of [   ] in society?  
What is the relationship between the educator and [   ]?

How do these understandings and reasonings inform how we approach our work?

* [   ] = your museum’s content area (art, science, history, etc.)
your education story

Our own past and future are ever-present in our current right now. How often do you think of your own story as a museum educator?

- How did you develop this passion?
- How did you come to this work?
- How has your story changed over time?
- How much does your museum/education upbringing factor into how you approach your role and practice as an educator?

At this crucial moment in our individual practice and for our field, it is important to remember how we got to where we are in order to re-author our individual and collective paths forward.

Write or map out your story as a museum educator. Include any memories, places, mentors, experiences, artworks, and anything else that is, or has been, personally meaningful to you.
personal mission statement

In museums we often have institutional mission statements and strategic plans, but how often do we get to craft our own statement?

- If you were to have a personal mission statement as a museum educator, what would it say?
- Would the mission statement relate to the work of your entire department? Or just you?
- Do you think that this mission is in alignment with that of your institution?
- Where are there similarities and overlaps?
- Where are there some differences?

Try to craft one sentence or one paragraph to capture your mission statement.
personal core values

1. What are the core values or qualities that ground your practice as a museum educator?
2. What does your institution value in terms of quality education/learning experiences for visitors?
3. How do these align and differ from your own core values?

You can do this activity individually and share with a colleague! It may be an interesting exercise to map out and compare:
- Personal values
- Departmental values
- Institutional values
- Community values
- Social Justice values
centering exercise

Write the core values you developed for your self on the previous slide into the circle below. How will these core commitments shape your practice as an educator? Determine at least four actionable steps of how you can make changes to your practice by prioritizing these core values in your work, and write those into the four boxes below.

my core values as an educator
During the summer of 2017, a formative time for this chapter, I received the recommendation to read the book *Confronting Silence*, a collection of translated essays by the Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu. His writing is so evocative, the experience of reading it felt like swirling in inspiration. His reflections made me slow down and sense sounds and rhythm I had not known or noticed before.

One section in particular stuck with me and became a driving force guiding my research. In the first chapter, he writes:

"Composition should be something that truly has being, something that should have arisen from the composer's own turbulent interaction with reality. For the composer, reality is nothing more than sounds. And for sounds to come into being they must reverberate through the composer, becoming one with him" (Takemitsu, 1995, p. 14).

The notion of the composer taking all of the turbulence of the external world and letting it filter and percolate through their own body and being to produce sound, to create music, deeply resonated with my idea of the educator.

One afternoon around the same time that these thoughts were brewing in my mind, my dear friend—a brilliant musician and educator—generously tried to teach me how to sing. (I am, for the record, quite an appalling singer.) Naturally my limited potential eventually turned our attention to discussing singing as an artistic and creative practice.

I asked her whether the ability to sing "well" came from an innate talent, or if anyone could develop a beautiful singing voice if they practiced enough. She explained to me that when you practice singing, you understand and connect with your body as the instrument; your voice is your sound. I was immediately enchanted by this notion.

I had always thought of instruments as tangible objects outside of the self to be learned and played to produce sounds and music. But the understanding of one's own body and being as an instrument immediately connected back to Takemitsu's conceptualization of the composer.

The combination of these two inspirations led to my understanding of the educator as both composer and instrument.
How often do we truly listen to ourselves and each other? Our voices are integral to communicating and connecting with one another. This exercise examines one’s voice as energy and an extension of the internal self, rather than just as the literal sound produced when you speak.

1. Do you ever find yourself at a loss for words?
2. When do you fall into silence?
   a. What are the causes? What are some results?
3. How can silence be an important tool for art viewing and teaching?
4. What does your voice sound like? What if you were to describe its personality?
5. Is there anything that keeps you from speaking up?
   a. Are there any situations that block your voice or cause you to shut down?
6. How comfortable with the sound of your own voice?
7. Do you let yourself express freely?
   a. Are you allowed to voice yourself freely?
8. Is your voice one that invites listening?
   a. Is your voice one that listens? In what ways?
9. Does your voice invite questions?
   a. Does your voice ask questions? In what ways?
10. As a listener, what kind of voice do you find helpful and inviting, allowing you space to think?
    a. As a listener, what kind of voice do you find unhelpful and uninviting, causing you to shut down?

"The tensions acquired through living in this world, as well as defenses, inhibitions, and negative reactions to environmental influences, often diminish the efficiency of the natural voice to the point of distorted communication. Hence, the emphasis here is on the removal of the blocks that inhibit the human instrument as distinct from, but not excluding, the development of a skillful musical instrument" (Linklater, 1976, p. 7).
Museums are complex spaces where many different ideas and ideologies come into contact. As we've explored in the preceding sections, working in museums raises big questions relating to our humanity.

With many different ways to think through and approach our lives and work, it makes sense that we are not starting from, or necessarily on, the “same page.” And achieving such a thing shouldn’t be our focus. Uniformity of thinking and complete consensus is not the goal. Difference and diversity of ideas and approaches are necessary. However, in museums we tend to sidestep or neutralize fundamental moral and philosophical rifts underlying our individual and collective practices. If we seek to forge a path towards justice, these fault lines need to be acknowledged and negotiated.

You can use the following slide to explore and map the various dialogues occurring in museums today. You can control the scope of how you want to approach this exercise by focusing on a single issue, or analyzing a range of issues across the broader field. Similarly, you can focus on cases of dissonance and resonance within your self, or examine them in relation to other people.

Feel free to use these questions as a starting point to guide your mapping on the next slide.

1. Where is there harmony and resonance in the museum?
2. What brings people together in agreement?
3. What are the qualities of harmony and resonance?
   a. What do they feel/sound/look like?
4. Where is there discord and dissonance in the museum?
5. What are the qualities of discord and dissonance?
   a. What does it look/feel/sound like?
6. What can we learn from moments of tension and dissonance? What do they teach us?
7. How can we engage in these spaces and moments of heat or tension to be productive and generative?
8. Are there things in the museum that cause you frustration? Stress? Fear?
   a. Dig deeper—what is the cause and situation for each of these?
9. Are there aspects of your practice you resist?
   a. Dig deeper—what is causing this resistance?
10. What are some strategies and tactics to navigate moments of heat, tension, resistance, and conflict towards critical action and/or resolution?
dissonance and resonance mapping
The term *interdisciplinary* is not new in the museum field—but what does this really mean in practice? What does authentic and rigorous interdisciplinarity of practice look, feel, and sound like in museums? How can we continue to challenge ourselves to learn from disciplines outside of the visual arts, museology, history, literature, and traditional forms of education?

1. How do you define a "discipline"?
2. How do you define the concept, "interdisciplinary"?
3. Which disciplines are already incorporated into museum pedagogy and programming?
4. What are some disciplines that you think would work well in museum education? Why?
5. What kinds of cross-, inter-, or transdisciplinary strategies have you not seen in museums, but may hold untapped potential?*

Brainstorm with some colleagues! Imagine a museum educator’s interdisciplinary toolbox. What are new tools, strategies, fields of interest—currently untapped—that we can work into our practice?

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To learn more about the distinctions and nuances of interdisciplinarity, check out *Defining Interdisciplinary Studies*. 

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“Interdisciplinary studies is a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline, and draws on the disciplines with the goal of integrating their insights to construct a more comprehensive understanding” (Repko, 2008, p. 16).
designing for learning in museums

The symptoms of systemic oppression that we face in our institutions and our lives are not random, nor are they surprising. It is important to understand they are by design. We often say "the systems are broken". Perhaps we default to this evasive maneuver because reality is not that simple, and it is harder to face the truth. Our systems are often, in fact, working very successfully to produce the sinister, criminal results they are consciously or unconsciously intended to generate. The role of the educator at this time extends beyond teacher; we must also be designers for social justice, dismantling flawed systems and building from our radical imaginings.

Every educator is working within a uniquely personal set of circumstances and constraints based on their own context. Rather than proposing a one-size-fits-all type of framework, this curriculum builder is meant to facilitate each educator digging deeper into understanding their own teaching and learning in museums. It aims to center diversity, equity, access, and inclusion the design process, rather than as hopeful outcomes.

The next six slides will take you through a series of thinking prompts. This is meant to be an iterative process for design and is only a starting point. Feel free to use it as a template and a jumping off point for your own practice, or to start conversations in your own departments!
If you are designing for a group you have worked with before...

1. What is their age range or grade level?
2. Are they part of a class in school? What subject?
3. How do they work together as a group?
4. Do they have their own objectives and intentions for their museum visit?
5. Do you have any ideas about their personal interests?
6. Are they developing any artistic or creative practices that you can incorporate into the experience?
7. Have they been to the museum before?
   a. How will this factor into how you structure and facilitate their experience?
8. What are their varied needs as learners?
9. What are their varied needs as human beings?
10. How will you structure your shared time, space, and experience to meet and support their needs?

If you are designing for a group you have not yet met or worked with before...

1. Is this a pre-existing group/community, or a group of people who have never met before?
2. What are some strategies to develop comfort and rapport among your learners?
3. What are some strategies to help you build connections and relationships with your learners?
4. What are some important strategies to acknowledge how your learners choose to identify themselves?
5. What are some ways you can help your learners feel welcome and comfortable in the space?
6. What are some ways you can critically frame the museum space for your learners?
7. Do you teach in a way that is accessible, supportive, and meaningful to a diverse range of learners?
   a. How are you defining/considering diversity and accessibility here?
8. Are you designing your learners’ experiences in ways that center diversity and variability among your learners?
9. Are you designing and teaching in ways that prioritizes the identities, experiences, or needs of some learners over others?
10. How would the structures of your experiences change if you centered diversity, equity, access, and inclusion in your design process?
We already have intentional purposes grounding and guiding the design of our learning experiences throughout the museum. Some examples may be:

- to facilitate discussion and dialogue
- to spark critical thinking
- to encourage close looking at artworks/objects
- to illuminate the artist’s process
- to communicate information and content

Embedded in these purposes are our personal and institutional values. What do we choose to center and prioritize in our time together? What do we bring to our learners' attention and what do we ignore?

Art museums provide lenses and metaphors through which we can participate in critical dialogue in public space. How would our practice as educators, and the experiences we design, change if our core purposes focused on justice and liberation?

What if, alongside our purposes of close looking and appreciation of artworks, we centered our design on purposes like:

- raise critical consciousness
- develop multicultural competencies/sensitivities
- facilitate critical dialogue on social justice issues
- challenge dominant/normative narratives
- make space for storytelling and counternarratives
- connect to a sense and understanding of place
- build community
- support spaces for healing
- foster identity formation
- nurture learner agency and empowerment

What are more examples of critical, social justice-based purposes that can ground your practice? Gather some colleagues to brainstorm together!

Choose one core purpose to design an activity around.
What would it be like if social justice issues and themes were central to our teaching in order to encourage more critical dialogue around artworks and objects in our collection?

Create a flowchart to map out all of your ideas.

- What are some common themes you already engage with in your practice?
- How can you dig deeper to connect these art or object related ideas to more critical themes and concepts?
- What topics and questions for critical analysis and dialogue begin to emerge?
The nature of your museum’s collection may raise challenges, but it does not inhibit an educator from being able to engage in critical dialogue with learners and colleagues around issues of social justice. In fact, many of our artworks and objects provide ample opportunity for such rich engagements. We must not only build our own critical literacy and capacity to facilitate such conversations, but also cultivate institutions that understand the place and value of such interactions in the art museum. Centering social justice does not compromise or water down the role of the art museum. On the contrary, it makes the space more honest, more true. It holds the museum up to the light for scrutiny and holds it accountable to every promise it made when it claimed itself to be public. It makes the museum a space truly dedicated to art again.

1. What kind of collection does your museum have?
2. How does your museum currently select artworks and objects for tours?
3. What is the criteria for selection?
4. How do you select the artworks and objects you teach with?
5. What is your criteria?
6. Which works in the collection are some visitor favorites?
   a. What are some of the reasons why these pieces are popular or favored?
7. Do you actively choose artworks and objects that represent the diversity and breadth of your collection?
8. What are some ways you can center the voices, stories, and works of artists of color, indigenous artists, and marginalized communities?
   a. Are there works in your collection that tell important and necessary stories that need to be listened to?
9. How often does the museum address and discuss its collecting and acquisition process (historical and current) with visitors?
   a. Is this a relevant topic you can work into a group discussion?
10. What artworks and objects in your collection speak to the purposes and themes you identified earlier?
Based on all these varied and important considerations, start designing your activity!

1. How much time do you have with your learners?
   a. How will you use your time?
   b. How much time is necessary for in-depth engagement with each part of your learners’ experiences?
2. Will you provide your learners with moments and opportunities to wander the galleries and explore artworks on their own?
3. Will you be facilitating individual learning experiences, group/social learning experiences, or a balance of both?
4. What kinds of learning styles will you engage?

5. In what ways are you providing opportunities for a variety of access points and forms of engagement?
6. In what ways are you providing opportunities for your learners to respond?
7. What kinds of engagements can complement the particular artworks you have chosen?
   a. Do the artworks feature a particular process that may be interesting for learners to replicate?
8. What are some of the constraints of the space you need to be mindful of?
   a. How can you still be creative and innovative with your activity while working within these parameters?
9. What are some tried-and-true activities that can be relied and riffed on?
10. What are some games/activities/formats that you’ve never tried before that you want to try?
A very wise educator once taught me an important lesson on self-reflection after teaching. He urged me to keep myself from the impulse to judge a lesson as good or bad; if it went “well” or “poorly”. Rather, he encouraged me to focus on being fully present during, and after the experience, to attend to moments of tension, dissonance, and friction. Instead of seeing moments of discomfort or heat as negative, failures, or things we need to make sure to avoid next time, we should take time to sit with those moments. What was going on? Did your facilitation help to guide and unpack what was in the space for learners? Did something unexpected come up? Having gone through that experience, what can you do to prepare and experiment in future? This form of self-reflection emphasizes the need for a critical, constructive, compassionate culture and community for educators.

1. Take some time to write down anything you want to remember from the session/experience.
2. Did you get any written or verbal feedback directly from your learners, teachers/chaperones, or your colleagues?
3. Did you encounter anything surprising or unexpected?
   a. If so, how did you respond?
4. In what ways did your learners surprise you?
   a. Dig into this a little more. What might this tell you about your own expectations and assumptions as an educator?
5. What challenges did you face?
   a. How did you respond?
6. Were there any moments of confusion, tension, heat, or dissonance—either amongst your learners, or for you personally?
7. What are some things you need help with for future sessions?
8. What are some things you can keep working on to develop and improve?
9. Who are the people either within or outside your museum that can help?
10. What are your main takeaways?
Building capacity for social justice in museums requires sustained attention and action dedicated to self-work, as well as institutional organizing. It means constantly and simultaneously navigating and facilitating learning and growth within, among, and beyond our selves. None of this work can happen in isolation. We cannot collectively move forward without laying bare our current disconnects and discords. Thus, the Dreamspace Project Workbook is meant to serve as a resource to help support and catalyze individual, departmental, cross-departmental, and institutional transformation.

Having gone through the first two chapters of the workbook, take some time to reflect:

- What efforts are currently happening at your museum?
- Do you have allies or like-minded colleagues that support you and your work at your museum?
- Does your museum currently have a genuine, internal community gathered around issues of social justice?
- How can we build or strengthen community within the museum?
- Are efforts at your museum occurring in isolation, in pockets, or holistically?
- What are some initiatives you can take as an individual to engage in this work?
- What are some initiatives you can build as a group or community within your museum to engage in this work?
- Do you need any further materials or support?
- How can The Dreamspace Project Workbook support you and your museum?

*Please feel free to reach out to Alyssa Machida at dreamspaceworkbook@gmail.com with any requests for support in adapting or implementing this workbook at your museum.
references


notes
links to more Dreamspace things

Inluseum Blog Post 1

Inluseum Blog Post 2

Inluseum Blog Post 3

Dreamspace Project Workbook Live Google Slides Link

"Building the Dreamspace in Museum Education"

Cultura Conscios Podcast Episode #3
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