Sustaining Communities of Belonging: A Collaborative Research Project

Zainab Adisa, Anyah Jackson, Tress Belesi, KT Todd, Ashlynn Salvage, Eleanor Anderson

ABSTRACT: EQUITY WORK THAT LASTS

Building Belonging: Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh received a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to conduct a participatory design research project that aims to explore and enhance the relationships between the museum’s educational practices and a sense of belonging for marginalized staff and visitor populations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

To support and examine the creation of racially equitable and sustainable practices, Pitt researchers will facilitate analyses & reflections about the ongoing organizational change efforts, guided by a framework designed to measure how racially equitable outcomes are reduced or replaced through processes of institutionalization and de-institutionalization (Anderson & Colyvas, 2021; McCambly & Anderson, 2020; McCambly & Colyvas, 2022). We aim to learn together about how persistent routines, norms, frames, policies, etc. are operating to support and/or undermine the fostering of communities of belonging and critical consciousness at the Museum. In addition, we aim to explore whether and how our collaborative approach can counteract pressures to maintain the status quo.

The figure below provides a visual roadmap of our analytic framework. Arrows indicate relationships of influence. Reading from left to right, in an effective, sustainable and equitable change effort, change strategies will be aligned to and influence or/and create self-sustaining structures which, in turn, influence targeted outcomes. For the purpose of collaboratively and iteratively redesigning an equitable change strategy at the Museum, Pitt’s interim analyses & workshops will work from left to right, starting from targeted outcomes, and following the order of the numbers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Grant Questions (Museum)
1. What participatory research tools and routines support the development of equitable educational practices?
2. How can educational practices support a community of belonging?
3. How does participation in participatory research influence museum staff’s critical consciousness?

Sustainability Questions (Pitt)
1. What types of relations can university-based researchers build with historically White institutions that are generative to advancing equitable change within these organizations and across the region?
2. How do self-sustaining structures operate within racialized change processes as obstacles and/or levers for change?
3. What is the status quo of the organization in relation to the funded project?

METHODS

Both the grant project and the broader initiative to study and support sustainability are structured within a participatory design research paradigm (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). An overview of methods is shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Museum team</th>
<th>Pitt team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical research</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity audit of current practice</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and staff listening and co-creation activities</td>
<td>Artifact analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journaling &amp; case studies</td>
<td>Co-created impact measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iterative design prototyping</td>
<td>Workshops</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

POTENTIAL FINDINGS & IMPACTS

This project will contribute to both research and practice by:

- Building knowledge about strategies for sustaining racialized change work.
- Positioning researchers as co-conspirators in racial justice efforts.
- Contributing to the Pittsburgh ecosystem, with the vision of all children and families having high-quality out-of-school learning where they feel a strong sense of belonging.

PROJECT TEAM

Zainab Adisa
Access & Equity Education Researcher
Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh
zadisa@pittsburghkids.org

Anyah Jackson
Access & Equity Education Researcher
Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh
ajackson@pittsburghkids.org

KT Todd
Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh
ktodd@pittsburghkids.org

Tress Belesi
Access & Equity Education Researcher
Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh
tbelesi@pittsburghkids.org

Ashlynn Salvage
Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh
muac021@pitt.edu

Eleanor Anderson
College Record


ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, grant MG-251989-OMS-22.