

JUNIOR COMMITTEE

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Reflections on Leadership: Shared Power in Practice

By Kimberleigh Costanzo

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Danielle Iwata/Kimberleigh Costanzo

As shared in the blog post authored by my brilliant Co-Chair Danielle Iwata, [Reflections on Leadership: Conversations as Power, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*](#) by adrienne maree brown has been a foundational text in our leadership of JComm over the past year. We've been guided by brown's wisdom in our approach to meetings and how we've tried to build the JComm community, as Danielle explained, but we've also used the text to guide our collaboration and co-leadership, which is what I hope to share about today.

Sharing power takes work

Danielle and I recognized that sharing leadership responsibilities for the Junior Committee would not necessarily be easy or intuitive. When we reflected upon the *artistic* environments we'd been a part of, there were many examples of collaborations, partnerships, and shared power; when we looked at the *administrative* structures of those same arts organizations, however, we saw hierarchies and struggles to share power. We called upon all of these examples-- both the shared leadership models we admired, and the many we knew we didn't want to replicate!-- to help us imagine our work together. And since our partnership was a new one, we had to navigate the hard leadership questions while simultaneously getting to know one another's styles, preferences, and approaches. We considered everything from the logistical (how would we decide who answered which email?) to the philosophical (what did we want our collaboration to *feel* like?), and began to work through those questions one-by-one (what is collaboration but co-laboring, after all?). Along the way, we called upon *Emergent Strategy* principles and practices as we developed the shared values that guided us through this work.

Communication must be radically honest

Danielle and I decided we would meet in person once a week to discuss and prepare for JComm meetings. These in-person meetings allowed us to get on the same page, catch each other up on the work we'd been doing, and-- perhaps most importantly-- establish a comfortable, honest, trusting dialogue. adrienne maree brown discusses the importance of "radical honesty" and over the course of our time working together, Danielle and I have had to learn to be radically honest with one another about everything: about our interests; about our fears and the challenges we imagined as we stepped into leadership; about our individual capacities to get a project done; about our differing levels of privilege, power, and access; about our biases; about our growing edges; and about when we need help. Trust and radical honesty were necessary building blocks of our working relationship.

Being honest about our capacity and our emotional states, in particular, has become even more important in the era of COVID-19. Danielle and I have been sure to allow one another even more grace and flexibility: we've shifted our weekly meetings to Zoom, we've been flexible about timing, and we've been mindful of one another's needs as *people first*. Honestly like that is what allows for interdependence and it is interdependence, not individualism, that gets us through movements of crisis.

Calling upon imagination

Another important theme of *Emergent Strategy* is around the power of imagination and creating possibility. In movement work, we often get stuck being reactive, responding to crisis after crisis without pausing to imagine what the tomorrow we are working to get towards really looks like. In addition to providing a space to build trust and stay in touch about our work, our weekly conversations also allowed us to dream together. We spent time thinking beyond the next meeting, or even the next year, and ahead to the future of JComm and to the future of the dance field. With space to think big together, we became clearer and clearer about how we wanted to respond in the moment and what our priorities should be. After all, we acknowledge that "the large is a reflection of the small," which means that what we practice as Co-Chairs will show up in the committee as a whole, and will ripple out to our larger dance community.

Recognizing limits and adapting as we go

Over the course of the year, and certainly within the last month and a half, we have had to re-start, re-design, and re-imagine countless times. Some shifts were made in response to feedback from members (another important leadership principle: actively solicit feedback because a leader's success depends upon their community being honest with them). Some shifts have been made in response to circumstances outside of our control like COVID-19, which led to cancelling our annual Town Hall and reimagining our professional development programs as wellness and self-care workshops. And other shifts were a result of one or both of us (or some other members of the committee) admitting that we were overwhelmed, at capacity, and simply couldn't take on more. We know that adaptation is a skill and we relish the opportunities we are presented with for developing it.

Even as the JComm year inches closer to its formal end, Danielle and I continue to deepen and strengthen our partnership and find more nuances within our understanding of our leadership together. The impact COVID-19 has had on our lives and on our communities has made this partnership feel even more important.

"It feels especially important now that we are in this period of immense change, where a lot of suffering and oppression is being unveiled... If we continue to pretend change is a linear process we can control, we will miss out on what's available to us now. Instead of reacting to current conditions and trying to push the pendulum back towards us, how can we use this opportunity to turn all of society towards justice, liberation, equity and equality?"

Have you been a part of a shared leadership model? Do you have questions about our approach? Or see ways to use this moment as an opportunity to open us up to more justice and liberation? We'd love to keep this conversation going.

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