

Mentor's Introduction to Anthony Woodruff

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It is my privilege to write an introduction for Dr. Anthony Woodruff's contribution to the *Marilyn Zurmuehlen Working Papers in Art Education*. The purpose of Anthony's dissertation, as summarized in this journal, was to explore the possibilities of museum educators working in collaboration with adults with developmental disabilities to create more inclusive experiences for these visitors and others.

Justified or not, the general public tends to hold a broad perception of museums as elitist institutions that struggle to appeal to and meet the needs of underrepresented populations of all kinds. Guided by his prior experiences in working with adults with disabilities in public school settings and as a former art director for Easter Seals, Anthony wondered what museums could do to provide more visitor-centered programming for this specific population. In creating and implementing such a program, Anthony strived to be as inclusive as possible—not just in his practices as a museum educator, but also as a researcher. That is to say, that he made every effort to conduct his research with persons with disabilities rather than about persons with disabilities—echoing the frequent call for nothing about us, without us heard in related policymaking discussions.

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For Anthony, this meant working with a small group of adults with developmental disabilities to participate in his dissertation, and to also serve as co-researchers who helped shape the direction of nearly all phases of his project. Working collaboratively, then, this group of researchers used their experiences in a museum workshop involving existing exhibitions and artmaking at the Yeiser Art Center (YAC) in Paducah, Kentucky to make recommendations for future programming for adults with disabilities. The findings of the dissertation stressed (a) the importance of staffing museums with educators who are appropriately trained on working with persons with disabilities, (b) taking the time to get to know and build rapport with all visitors, (c) directly involving adults with disabilities and their caretakers in exhibition planning, and (d) other conclusions related to the themes of accessibility, interaction, collaboration, communication, evaluation, and understanding. Because of his efforts to be inclusive throughout this project, Anthony learned just as much about collaborating with persons with developmental disabilities in research endeavors as he did about providing inclusive programming in museums.

In the end, Anthony Woodruff's doctoral research does what all good qualitative research should do; it leaves us with further questions and much work to be done (in this case toward inclusivity) while also providing the field with important findings to consider. Anthony's work is unique in that those findings have a broad scope that extend into the disciplines of museum education and visitor-centered curation, art education, and disability studies. I encourage scholars from all of those fields to explore Anthony's work in the pages ahead to seek inspiration and make efforts toward providing more inclusive practices for persons with disabilities. I am excited to see the ways in which both they and Anthony may shape our world—perhaps making it a better place—in the years to come.