Places of Memorialization—Forms of Public Pedagogy

The Museum of Education at University of South Carolina

CRAIG KRIDEL

The things in civilization we most prize are not of ourselves. They exist by grace of the doings and sufferings of the continuous human community in which we are a link. Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying, and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it.

—Dewey (1934, p. 87)

This quotation by John Dewey, the closing comments from A Common Faith and those words inscribed upon his tombstone at the University of Vermont, also serves as the defining statement for the Museum of Education at the University of South Carolina. Founded in 1977 as an archives/display area within the university’s McKissick Museum building, the Museum of Education was originally conceived to fulfill a rather conservative mission of preserving documents and artifacts of educational life in South Carolina (i.e., the conventional museum roles of collection, conservation, and exhibition). Roberts (1997) maintains that “many if not most museums have broken from their object-based traditions and have become idea- experience-, and narrative-based institutions—forums for the negotiation and the renegotiation of meaning” (p. 147) and, upon moving in 1985 to a 3,000 square foot facility housed in a portion of the education building at University of South Carolina, the museum began developing a more interpretive, critical voice and an active sense of social agency for the understanding of history of education in South Carolina. By its second decade, after establishing itself as a leading archives for material culture related to the field of South Carolina education, the museum continued to “conserve and transmit” the lessons of the past but, more importantly, guided by Dewey’s comments the facility sought to rectify and expand the examination of educational beliefs and values of our state and region.

In 2005, an administrative decision was made to shift the museum/archives, then a facility primarily engaged in archival acquisitions and assisting visiting researcher scholars, to serve exclusively as a museum with an emphasis upon exhibitions and programming. At this time the Museum of Education also redefined itself as a recognized experimental unit of the College of Education and reconceived its role as an educational cultural center at the university.
With allegiance to Dewey and the basic principles of 1930s progressive education (“democracy as a way of life” and implementative research), the museum began to explore new roles as an informal site of learning for its “patrons”—namely, arts, humanities, and social science faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, state and local educators, and selected members of the community.¹

In this new form, the museum established two important premises for all programming: (a) no activities would be staged as one-time events but, instead, would become part of ongoing programs correlated to preservice and professional development efforts of the College; and (b) programming would not be based upon the mere interests of our patrons (faculty and students or, for that matter, staff) but, instead, would arise from the careful articulation of personal and social needs. Students’ individual interests would be taken into account as programs developed, but social needs—normative assessments of what our patrons should experience for their future roles in society—were also brought into the dialogue. In what proved to be one of the major difficulties in the legacy of American progressive education, the museum sought to reconcile, or at least appease, the conceptual issues arising from “the conception of needs” (Committee on the Function of Science in General Education, 1938). Benefiting from three decades of history that brought a “gravitas of time and durability” without the “tyranny of tradition” and rigidity of traditional practices, the Museum could slowly expand a sense of trust in its efforts among students, faculty, area teachers, and the non-academic communities of South Carolina (Janes, 2004, p. 388).

While our educational programming remained flexible, at times we were overwhelmed with an array of theoretical justifications and a myriad of idiosyncratic terms and concepts when attempting to understand and ultimately harness public pedagogy. Curriculum studies and critical pedagogy had expanded our conception of exhibitions for the public square, and the recognition of informal sites of learning, public pedagogy, and the outside curriculum caused any and every gesture to take on educational meaning (Schubert & Lopez Schubert, 1980). The Museum of Education began in earnest to use memorials, a concept developed and defined for us by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, as a way to remain focused and to implement the rectifying component of our mission. We have found memorialization to bring a sense of significance and a power of place to the Museum of Education as we continue to explore further various forms of public pedagogy.

**Places of Memorialization**

“Sites of Conscience” seek to tap the power and potential of memorialization for democracy by serving as forums for citizen engagement in human rights and social welfare. Using deliberate strategies, public memorials can contribute to building broader cultures of democracy over the long term by generating conversations among differing communities or engaging new generations in the lessons of the past. (Brett, Bickford, Sevcenko, & Rios, 2008, p. 2)

Public memorials are quite common on any campus, and statues, art collages, building inscriptions, and commemorative events all prove meaningful and powerful as ways to honor the past. Unfortunately, many such tributes, regardless of their significance and sincerity, are often overlooked and forgotten in the midst of student and faculty deadlines, overcommitted schedules, and the changing cultural and political issues of any campus. For years the Museum of Education diligently prepared exhibitions and programs, from the perspective of a “reinvented museum” adhering to today’s sensibilities of dynamic, critical, and interactive displays (McLean,
2004). Our many projects and programs tapped the richness of experience, albeit solitary, and increased student, faculty, and community members’ knowledge of those many interesting and important topics related to educational life and culture in the South. We also recognized, however, that while hundreds of students enter the Museum of Education each week, many were merely passing through while en route to a class or meeting. We began searching for forms of memorialization that “arrested the interests” of our patrons and, in the vernacular of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, evoked a set of reactions from preservice teachers and educators, including pride in the profession, personal reflection, curiosity, and a sense of courage. Also, in accord with the fundamental beliefs of memorials and democracy, the programs must do more than teach young people what happened; they must also open new spaces for dialogue about how what happened related to young people’s experiences today. These spaces must help young people develop critical thinking skills, the courage to question, and models of nonviolent engagement—all foundations of a culture of human rights. (Brett et al., 2008, p. 15)

The following account describes three projects, representing memorialization and forms of public pedagogy, none fully fulfilled, all experimental and exploratory, and each in the state of becoming.

**Shared Experience and Shared Space: So Their Voices Will Never be Forgotten**

Too often museums lack a social consciousness. —Roberts (1997, p. 35)

The Museum of Education serves as the site for the South Carolina Hall of Honor, a memorial award program established in the mid-1980s to recognize posthumously distinguished educational leaders from South Carolina. The “hall” is more of a conceptual space and actually consists of a display area in the museum’s gallery; an induction ceremony occurs once a decade. Most recently, joining its three other members who all had been recognized for their leadership roles in founding important state institutions of higher learning, two civil rights leaders were inducted into the Hall of Honor, Septima Poinsette Clark (1898–1987), South Carolina teacher, Highlander Folk School staff, and founder of the South Carolina Citizenship Schools; and the Reverend J. A. DeLaine (1898–1974), school teacher and community leader who led the efforts to file the *Briggs v. Elliott* class action suit, the most crucial among those court cases constituting the Brown Decision.

The public ceremony, attended by members of the Clark and DeLaine families as well as students and teachers from Scotts Branch School, the focal point for the 1948 court case, served as the occasion to unveil the museum’s outdoor wall installation, a series of seven foot portraits and quotations in what has become a centerpiece for the museum’s outdoor “pedagogical pavilion.” Regularly used by students and faculty, this informal site of learning with its more subtle and understated tone permits students to become acquainted with those larger than life educators with their quizzical expressions and provocative quotations—portraits of Clark, DeLaine, South Carolina educator Wil Lou Gray (also a member of the Hall of Honor), Chester Travelstead (former dean of the College of Education), John Dewey, and Maxine Greene. The museum saw no need to bring our walled educational dignitaries to life through traditional living history productions, common within museum education programs. In fact, we currently administer a living history program of South Carolina teachers, Biographical Imaginations, oriented for elementary and middle school children (Kridel, 2004). Sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, this
outreach project has received great acclaim and, we felt, need not be extended at the post-secondary level with our Hall of Honor recipients. Yet, we also realized that informal sites of learning quickly become overlooked spaces. Our surveys of patrons noted their recognition and appreciation of the wall installation, and many students expressed their interest to read more about those gazing down upon them. But any sense of dynamic engagement was clearly informal and, alas, static.

Arising from one student’s request to learn more about Septima Clark, the museum saw an opportunity to engage our preservice teachers and to embrace the power of biography “to inspire comparison. Have I lived that way? Do I want to live that way? Could I make myself live that way if I wanted to?” (Rose, 1984, p. 5). We also saw the occasion to foster a sense of professional pride for the emerging sensibilities of preservice students, many of whom were fearful if not overwhelmed by the thought of “becoming a teacher.” The first year teacher education literature underscores the importance of students imagining themselves as teachers (Bullough, 2008). With a rich legacy of civil rights struggles in South Carolina and the unrequited efforts for school desegregation and integration never as fully explored in our education courses as one would hope, we initiated the program So Their Voices Will Never be Forgotten to serve as a form of memorialization and to foster a shared experience among students of hope, curiosity, and imagination (see Figure 31.1).

On the first Wednesday of each month, volunteers—faculty and students—read aloud passages from Septima Clark’s 1962 autobiography, Echo in My Soul (see Figure 31.2). The museum has adopted the following motto which is announced before each event:

We seek not to honor, nor do we wish merely to remember. The museum wants never to forget the struggles fought by a group of courageous South Carolina teachers, individuals who have helped in preserving, transmitting, rectifying, and expanding our most fundamental educational beliefs.

We sought to alter the solitary emotional experience of our students who are becoming teachers while supplementing their formal education with a shared, group experience of personal meaning. All were touched by the sentimental and profound nature of reading the words of Septima Clark, a civil rights legend who also taught a mere three blocks away at Columbia’s Booker T. Washington High School.²

Moreover, participants recognized the significance of speaking aloud the words of another and, in doing so, bringing forth her
voice and beliefs in real time to contemporary audiences. Our intent was not to then stage a subsequent discussion or analysis of race and social context. Not all activities among those construed as public pedagogy need to result in intellectual analysis moving away from the cognitive rigor commonly associated with educational experience (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, this volume). We created, instead, a personally reflective moment for each participant, standing alongside Septima Clark as colleague for an instant and imagining the life of a distinguished teacher of courage and strength. So Their Voices Will Never be Forgotten has established a personal bond between author, reader, and listener: a shared, group experience of emotion crossing racial and gender boundaries. The poignancy of speaking aloud the words of another—a commemorative gesture that occurs in as many different ways as there are participants—fosters the continuous bond among teachers and brings forth a dignity and seriousness that many of the undergraduate “teachers in the making” are only beginning to understand.

To further strengthen the historic sense of the program, the museum invited Fannie Phelps Adams, a colleague of Septima Clark, to speak at the October 2008 So Their Voices Will Never be Forgotten session as a way of concluding its 30th anniversary year. While students and faculty had been reading the words of Clark during the past year, they could now hear the voice of a 92-year-old African American talk of life as an educator in a segregated setting where, while teaching only blocks away, she would not have been allowed to enter the museum’s space and outdoor pavilion. Unknown to Phelps Adams, the event concluded with the unveiling of a commemorative bench (see Figure 31.3) on the museum’s pavilion area with the inscription, “in honor of Fannie Phelps Adams and the courageous teachers of Booker T. Washington High School who fought for civil rights so that all individuals could sit on this bench.” The museum now begins each So Their Voices Will Never be Forgotten event with an audio recording by Phelps Adams—so that her voice will never be forgotten, and every program concludes with a reading at the Phelps Adams bench.

**Personal Testimonies as Shared Joy: Carolina Shout**

Few occasions can bring as much gratification to a public school educator as receiving a teaching award. These types of presentations and banquets display the respect and gratitude of administrators, colleagues, students, and parents and typically are staged with a sense of dignity and great affection. In what has become a variation on the celebratory aspects of an awards banquet, the Museum of Education organized perhaps its most unique form of memorialization with an ongoing program known as Carolina Shout: A Celebration of Teachers (see Figure 31.4). Rather than selecting one or two specific teachers to be honored, museum staff invited a carefully chosen array of students of various ages who would talk about beloved teachers who changed their lives. Celebratory in nature and attended by speakers’ friends and family, honored teachers’ colleagues, current students, and friends, our intent was to construct an evening event that constituted a pedagogical collage for our preservice teachers and faculty where they could not only

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**Figure 31.3** Fannie Phelps Adams (R) and Nicole Schnibben, coordinator of So Their Voices Will Never be Forgotten. Used with permission of the Museum of Education.
hear a multitude of accounts of outstanding teaching but would also learn of our community’s African American teachers, those courageous individuals who were professionally engaged during an era of segregation and actively involved in assisting school integration. In what has become a prosopography of outstanding teachers, each account acknowledged and commem- rated in different ways outstanding teaching and, more importantly, displayed the profound impact of the teacher on “students,” those currently in third grade, 11th grade, and those in their 40s, 60s, and 70s. Speakers, typically eight in number throughout the evening event, delivered succinct and poignant, heartfelt tributes and some recalled a particular moment—a gesture by a teacher—that remained with them throughout the decades.

Further, we wished not to merely commemorate the profession of teaching; our memorial- ization would truly celebrate the profound and sentimental bond between teacher and student which, we believed, would be best depicted by a student publicly expressing—testifying—thanks and gratitude. In southeastern African American culture, such occasions are called “shouts,” a time to testify with joy, and the term provided a conceptual rationale for such shared, group experiences of true celebration. Staged in 2001, 2004, and 2006 with a fourth in development, Carolina Shout: A Celebration of Teachers has become a one-of-a-kind event, partly due to the participation of Kenny Carr and the Tigers from Charlotte, the leading shout band in the United States, who performed this rarely heard instrumental brass music. Throughout the event Carr and the ‘Tigers’ performance punctuated and intensified the moments of unbridled celebration (Kridel, 2002).

Our perennial Carolina Shout “witness,” Bill Ayers, has attended each event and subsequently written descriptions; these appear on the museum’s website with photographs and the text of individual tributes. Yet, there is no way to convey the feeling of sitting among 400–500 individuals—preservice teachers, faculty and teachers, community members, families—witnessing, for example, one of South Carolina’s leading civil rights leaders extending his love and thanks to his beloved teacher and, as they embrace, Carr and the Tigers break into “a joyous noise.” Implicit in

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Figure 31.4 Carolina Shout 01, 04, and 06. Used with permission of the Museum of Education.
the presentation are the remarkable contributions of Black teachers in segregated and integrated schools of our community. In what has become a signature event of the Museum of Education—what I would consider its most distinctive and most profound contribution to education—Carolina Shout brings a degree of celebration that is truly unsurpassed while subtly portraying problems of segregation and the progress and hopes of integration for today’s educators.

The Profundity of Place: The Travelstead Room

Proponents of memorials contend that dealing with conflictive pasts is an essential component of the construction of national identity based on human rights and human dignity, and such initiatives can make a significant contribution to the rebuilding of a devastated society. Whether in an emerging or a long-established democracy, ignoring the past and avoiding policies of truth-telling and justice for victims in general can only hamper the search for stability and peaceful interaction in the present and future (Brett et. al., 2008, p. 2).

The franchising and commercialization of higher education is now a common phenomenon as naming rights are sold to sports arenas, buildings, and rooms. Alumni are courted by development officers and, if the named building or coliseum is not the result of one’s accolades, the successful accumulation of wealth says enough. Checks are taken, inscriptions are mounted, and donations are applauded. The Museum of Education saw an opportunity to disrupt this process and to merge memorialization, public pedagogy, and “sites of conscience” in a meaningful way for the current and future teachers of our state as well as for the soul of University of South Carolina (Sevcenko, 2004).

Chester Travelstead, Dean of the College of Education from 1952–1955, stood on the conference stage at Wardlaw Hall, the USC education building, and stated:

Here and now, in the summer of 1955, we find ourselves faced with the necessity of making many momentous decisions with respect to the schools in this country. Perhaps at no other time in the history of education has so great a sense of gravity and urgency characterized the action concerning schools which is being taken and which must be taken in the near future. (Travelstead, 1983, p. 21)

Urging South Carolina educators to embrace the Brown Decision and begin the process of integrating the public schools, he went on to say,

Education takes place in many ways. Our children can be educated to deceit and chicanery, as well as they can be educated to integrity and loyalty. This education, of course, is not confined to the schools or homes. These children learn from everything they see and hear. In this crucial matter which faces us all in 1955, our children will learn much by observation of our words and deeds. (Travelstead, 1983, p. 24)

Three weeks later, Travelstead received a letter from the USC Board of Trustees and President (soon to become the next governor of the state) dismissing him from the university, although they extended an offer that if he recanted his statement then he could keep his position. Travelstead refused. He was later hired as Dean of the College of Education at University of New Mexico where the president stated, “Travelstead’s troubles in South Carolina were more of a recommendation than an indictment.” Travelstead would ultimately become provost of University of New Mexico and would never set foot in South Carolina again.4

The Travelstead incident, while acknowledged at the university, was not well known. When the museum shifted its orientation from being an archives, its researcher’s room was made available
to the College of Education, and a decision was made to name what has now become a regularly used seminar-meeting space “the Chester Travelstead Room.” The place has come to represent a form of truth and reconciliation as each scheduled group is introduced to the circumstances of his dismissal. The exhibition serves as an ongoing forum-memorial for teachers’ acts of courage and, with a public pedagogy orientation, focuses on the individual human experience, helping teachers “to connect the story to their own personal experience and imagine what they would have done in each situation. This kind of imagining is the first step in inspiring people to take action” (Sevcenko, 2004, p. 14).

We followed traditional rites of room dedication which, as we had anticipated, Travelstead was unable to attend since at the age of 95 he no longer could undertake such challenging travels. Our event was video-taped, and he had prepared a statement to be read for the occasion. The audience gave him a standing ovation, and the room memorialization proved to be a great success and renewed the importance of Travelstead’s actions. During the event, Travelstead’s 1983 reflections on the incident were read:

What happened to me personally in South Carolina in 1955 is not highly important—except to me; but it was both illustrative and symbolic of the turmoil in the Deep South at mid-century. And this event, if put in proper perspective, could serve as a warning about what can and does happen to people when the rights, hopes, and opportunities for any group—or for even one person—are thwarted or violated.

These comments inspired one patron to underwrite the Travelstead Award for Courage in Education, now presented biennially. What we had not anticipated, however, were the events occurring after the room dedication ceremony.

Chester Travelstead’s son contacted me shortly after the event and mentioned that he wished to see the space, knowing that his father would be unable to visit the facility. Coleman Travelstead arrived in December 2006, and we spent a lovely afternoon in the room, taking photographs and talking about the details of his and his father’s experiences at University of South Carolina, plans for the tone and demeanor of the room, and thoughts of graphics of “the Travelstead Incident” exhibition. After returning to Albuquerque, he emailed to tell me that he had just spent a wonderful day with his father, looking at the Travelstead Room photographs and laughing and crying about the events of South Carolina. The next day I received an email from Coleman Travelstead informing me that his father had died in the night, and he thanked me “for putting him to rest.” Our memorialization continues, and we are currently producing a documentary video about the Travelstead Room, the power of place, and the story of creating a space that embodies a dynamic aspect of history and the contested nature of race in the 1950s, 1980s, and today.

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Had I to do it all over, I would not change what I did. At the time I thought my remarks would be helpful to South Carolina. I believed then as I believe now that educators must
take the lead in what is right and not be afraid to stand up for principles that they hold.

(Chester Travelstead, personal communication, July 31, 2006)

“The Travelstead Incident” is filled with racial complexities, courage, kindness, dishonor, and shame: all the components that combine to cause race to become so problematic in South Carolina classrooms and for memorializations to become so important and profound. Our efforts to explore this incident as an active conception of public pedagogy could not have occurred during the museum’s first decade; nor could we have staged Carolina Shout or So Their Voices Will Never be Forgotten. The passing of time, great patience, and the building of trust ultimately led to these programs that are truly experimental—we are at times uncertain where the experiences will take us but maintain a faith that good outcomes will occur. And they do. Faculty, students, teachers, and community members recognize the dynamic elements of memorializing, and conversations while filled with celebration and joy also reclaim serious, contested and at times painful memories. Our museum experiences—slightly atypical by our emphasis upon shared group events staged in real time—bring forth a variety of emotions and call for—demand—truth and understanding (Barsalou & Baxter, 2007). Yet, we do not permit commemoration to be constituted merely as accolades. Instead, we have begun introducing “transitional justice,” a concept typically applied to those sites where unfathomable atrocities of genocide and human rights abuse have occurred. While we wish not to dishonor the gravitas of this form of justice, we ask whether similar methods of action can be taken to establish societal stability and educational trust, resonating with our most fundamental beliefs in 1930s progressive education, “democracy as a way of life,” and schools as transitional societies. In essence, we are exploring the use of transitional justice to recognize schools and the classroom as site of conscience, places where human rights are violated, and spaces to promote democracy, peace, and reconciliation.

Our foray into public pedagogy has not been simple. We have found ourselves in the midst of controversy, with members of our state legislature publicly speaking against the Museum of Education and individuals circulating petitions against our speakers and boycotting our programs. Yet, these are “the essential tensions” of the public square, a more complicated space as we now enter our fourth decade and move toward truth and reconciliation hearings to examine 20th century efforts to integrate schools as well as to discuss those institutional methods that served (and continue to maintain) segregation. In our own way, we are introducing transitional justice into the dialogue of educational discourse in South Carolina to actively develop further, through memorialization, a vibrant and exploratory conception of public pedagogy.

Notes
2. Booker T. Washington High School of Columbia South Carolina participated in the General Education Board’s Secondary School Study, a 1940s cooperative project among leading progressive Black high schools in the Southeast. See the museum’s webexhibition: http://www.ed.sc.edu/museum/secondary_study
4. In 1955, USC administrators hired a new dean of education who was committed to a segregationist stance for any forthcoming debates on school integration. This individual would ultimately become founder of the Museum of Education and, shortly after his death, faculty lobbied for the facility to be named in his honor. We note the irony of naming a room to honor Travelstead in the facility that was begun by the individual hired to replace him. Also, we were touched when our university development officer, upon learning the circumstances of the Travelstead’s dismissal and our intent to name the room in his honor, sent a note of congratulations.
5. The biennial Chester C. Travelstead Award for Courage in Education recognizes an individual from the state of South Carolina who displays courage and who exemplifies those basic dispositions from the College of Education’s conceptual framework [the core values of justice, stewardship, intellectual spirit, and integrity]. The 2007 Travelstead Award was presented to Matthew J. Perry, Jr., the leading civil rights attorney in South Carolina dur-
During the decades of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s who was involved in seemingly every case serving to integrate South Carolina’s public schools, hospitals, restaurants, parks, playgrounds, and beaches. In 1975, Perry became the first Black lawyer from the Deep South to be appointed to the federal bench and, in 1979, he was appointed to the United States District Court in South Carolina. The second Travelstead Award will be presented in 2010 to Dr. Cleveland Sellers, former member of The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, former USC faculty, and current President of Voorhees College.

References