

The background of the top half of the cover is a warm orange color with a sunburst pattern of rays emanating from the top center. In the center, there is a dark blue semi-circular arch. Inside the arch is a silhouette of a tree. Below the arch, a white map of the United States is visible, partially obscured by the arch and the text.

LEARNiNg Landscapes

*Informal Learning:
Flexible Contexts and
Diverse Dimensions*

Spring 2012 Vol. 5 No. 2

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Statement of Purpose



LEARNing Landscapes™ is an open access, peer-reviewed, online education journal supported by LEARN (Leading English Education and Resource Network). Published in the autumn and spring of each year, it attempts to make links between theory and practice and is built upon the principles of partnership, collaboration, inclusion, and attention to multiple perspectives and voices. The material in each publication attempts to share and showcase leading educational ideas, research, and practices in Quebec, and beyond, by welcoming articles, interviews, visual representations, arts-informed work, and multimedia texts to inspire teachers, administrators, and other educators to reflect upon and develop innovative possibilities within their own practices.

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Editorial



When we decided on informal learning as the topic for this issue of LEARN-ing Landscapes, we wanted to attract a wide range of contributions and purposefully left the theme loosely defined. Our hopes were realized. The contributors to this issue have chosen to discuss informal learning in many different ways and places. Some authors talk about individual or group learning outside of formal schooling and in a range of contexts, others talk about alternative types of activities that take place in addition to, or alongside, formal schooling, while still others discuss some of the intersections of formal and informal learning and the advantages and tensions that can occur on these borders. For the purposes of discussion, I have clustered the articles around themes, but it should be noted that the invited commentaries and the peer-reviewed articles are arranged in alphabetical order.

What I have found to be an interesting metaphor to juxtapose with each of the articles is the process of the early language learning of children. This type of learning takes place informally. Naturally curious, the child, with her need to make meaning of the world around her, listens, observes, engages, emulates, collaborates, practices, pursues, takes risks, modifies, and finds reward in a determined pursuit of speech and understanding. While this acquisition process may differ in various contexts and cultures, unless deterred physiologically, young children across the world become extremely competent and successful language users in a very short period of time given the complexity of the task. In Western cultures, the “teachers” or “family” members who participate and help in this acquisition process take the lead from the child, model and scaffold the language, correct for meaning and not otherwise, praise, engage relationally with the child, and do this “teaching” in the natural and every day activities of the child’s world. While in other parts of the world this “teaching” may vary, the learning is in the “doing” (Dewey, 1938). Language learning is one of the great success stories of informal learning. And it was with this metaphor in mind that I began to see some very interesting similarities across the range of submissions. The excellent commentaries highlight these underlying themes and set the stage very well for the articles that follow.

Jerome Bruner, known world-wide for his contribution to education, is a prominent psychologist. He is currently a Research Professor of Psychology and Senior Research Fellow in Law at New York University. In an engaging interview, he discusses how he became interested in education and questions the distinction between formal and informal learning. He emphasizes here, as he has elsewhere (Bruner, 1986, 2002), the natural propensity that humans have for narrative and illustrates with a story of how a childhood friendship with “Gracie” opened up for him the important notion of possibility, and the need to find different ways of thinking and learning. Shirley Brice Heath, an anthropologist who is well known for her substantial and compelling contributions to education over several decades (Heath, 1983, 2012), is the Margery Bailey Professor of English and Dramatic Literature, Emerita, and Professor of Linguistics, Emerita, at Stanford University. In her commentary, she traces the current movements of the digital age that are producing a vast number of learners whom she calls “professional amateurs” who voluntarily pursue learning that is driven by creativity and a thirst for knowledge that is easily accessed in the open sourcing of information via technology. She underscores how slowly the educational systems are to recognize this trend and the possibilities that can be gleaned from this type of informal learning. Michael Cole, a well-known cross-cultural scholar, is Professor of Communication and Psychology at the University of California, San Diego where he is the Director of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition. Robert Lecusay is a doctoral candidate in communication and cognitive science at the University of California, San Diego. Ivan Rosero is a doctoral candidate in communication, cognitive science, and science studies at the University of California, San Diego. They describe partnerships between their university and other communities called U-C Links that provide inexpensive after-school “playworlds” comprised of interesting, engaging, and inquiry-oriented computer-mediated activities for children and youth, and invaluable sites for research on informal learning. They suggest that the challenge is how to expand and sustain these partnerships as an inherent part of social responsibility and practice. Barbara Rogoff, renowned for her work on communities of practice (1991), is University of California, Santa Cruz Foundation Distinguished Professor of Psychology. In an interview with her, she discusses how she learned about informal learning in a Mayan community in Guatemala. The youth in this context learn informally through intent community participation and “legitimate peripheral participation,” akin to apprenticeship learning, where learning occurs in the execution of “real” tasks, and is accomplished through observation, emulation, and gradually increasing participation. She describes how she has used the principles underlying this kind of informal learning with a Salt Lake City school in collaboration with its community. She, too, sees the digital age as opening up possibilities for learning in virtual communities.

An interesting historical depiction of informal learning in a Canadian context is provided by Jane Preston. Jane Preston is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education, University of Prince Edward Island. She recounts a personal narrative that she obtained from her mother in a research interview context. Her mother, reluctant to be interviewed orally, chose to receive questions from her daughter to which she responded in writing. The narrative that was produced depicts the life of her mother as an immigrant on the Prairies in the 1930s. Preston equates the important and dominant lessons that her mother learned as a young woman growing up in an agricultural setting with holism (Smuts, 1926/1987) and holistic education which is based on the connections among family and community with natural surroundings.

M. Shaun Murphy is an Associate Professor in Curriculum Studies at the University of Saskatchewan. Janice Huber is an Associate Professor in pre-service and graduate teacher education at the University of Regina. Jean Clandinin is a Professor of Education and Director of the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development at the University of Alberta. These authors provide a poignant, narrative study that gives an insider perspective of a mother and daughter's experience. They show how what these researchers call "familial curriculum making," or the values and identities that this student brought to school from the informal learning in her home life, contradicted the values that were inherent in the school curriculum making. As a result, the young girl was confused and felt demeaned because her parent was portrayed in a deficit manner. These narratives show how unspoken tensions can exist and persist in the lives of students and the importance of narrative inquiry for attending to them. Barrett Mincey is an educator and researcher dedicated to juvenile justice education. Nancy Maldonado is an adjunct faculty member at Walden University. Candace Lacey is a Program Professor at the Fischler School of Education at Nova Southeastern University. They, too, use narratives, in this instance of successful graduates of juvenile delinquent residential programs, to get at the insider perspectives of the participants, which suggest the importance of positive counselor and peer relationships in achieving graduation.

The theme of the following articles is about the spaces that can exist in and around formal learning and enhance it. Kathryn Hayes, a PhD student at UC Davis, Angela Booker, an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at UC Davis, Beth Rose Middleton, Assistant Professor of Native American Studies at UC Davis, and Jesika Maria Ross,* the founding director of the UC Davis Art of Regional Change program, write about a "hybrid space" where college students participated in a Community Media Seminar and then used their developing media skills to go into the community and gather community-based experiences. These were subsequently portrayed using

technology creatively and exhibited/presented to the community. The learning was engaging, meaningful, and enriching. CJ Dalton, a PhD student at the Faculty of Education, pursuing Cognitive Studies at Queen's University, shares the solace she found while writing her dissertation in her "woodworking space" in which her close emotional ties to her grandfather, also a woodworker, came to the surface and released her creativity which she then tried to transpose to her more formal thesis writing space. Heather DeLaurentis, a sixth-grade science teacher at ISAAC, an urban charter school located in New London, Connecticut, and David Howes, a school designer with Expeditionary Learning (EL), a non-profit organization and a national network of schools, share how in response to inattentive and physically disruptive students they created an "early bird running club" that eventually involved both students and community members before school each morning. As a result, they had a deeper understanding of their students, a stronger connection with community, and among the students there were fewer behavioral referrals, higher attendance, and higher grades.

Another cluster of articles revolves around the use of museums as sites of learning, or as models for more formal learning. Corrine Glesne is a qualitative researcher, educational anthropologist, author, and consultant. In a study of the use of art museums located on seven university campuses in the United States, she found that participants discovered in their museum experiences that the exposure to art was a stimulus for reflection and further exploration. She shows with examples how experiences in these art museums were designed as sites for confrontation and experimentation rather than the more typical distant experiences. The former engaged the participants, and enhanced their informal education. Glesne suggests that these kinds of experiences counterbalance the "technocratic impulse" of our society. Anila Asghar, whose work focuses on science learning, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University. Using social constructivist, sociocultural, and dynamic skill development theories as a frame for her article, she reviews pertinent literature and discusses how museums and other similar types of venues offer engaging and safe places for science exploration and inquiry. Susan Humphries, the founding head teacher of The Coombes School and currently a Trustee of the Learning Through Landscapes Trust, and Susan Rowe, head teacher of The Coombes School in England, describe an interesting museum approach they have used in the school to engage children in inquiry and fact finding with the help of the community. Their projects result in collections and creations of artefacts that are exhibited in and around the school. The students learn both formally and informally, develop new understandings, as well as environmental, artistic, and social and cultural awareness. Tyler Wood, an interpretive guide at the Centre d'histoire de Montréal, offers an interesting perspective on the potential use of museums for

classroom teachers. He emphasizes, and shows with examples, how the hands-on and interactive approach that he espouses for museum visits can help students make tangible connections with classroom learning, and suggests ways that teachers can make museum visits most beneficial. His article suggests that educators should be making more and stronger links with museums.

Another group of authors describe alternative modes of schooling that arose out of necessity, and/or philosophical beliefs. John Guiney Yallop, an Assistant Professor at Acadia University, shares candidly how he and his same-sex partner decided that their adopted daughter who was starting kindergarten at a neighborhood school should be homeschooled to counter the homophobic messages they were receiving at the outset from the principal. He highlights the experiential learning that was mixed with other more formal learning, and the important relational connections with his daughter and with other homeschooling families. In a contribution that complements nicely Guiney Yallop's article, Eli Gerber, currently a science student at Marianopolis College in Montreal, shares his story of being homeschooled until he entered college. He describes how his days unfolded in the country in meaningful exploration, rich discussion, and passionate pursuits. His learning was scaffolded by his parents, had no boundaries from everyday life, and built on his interests and propensities. He learned how to learn, and in his teens, gradually assumed full responsibility for his learning. He argues that the hierarchical and standardized model for institutionalized education is flawed. Ronald Hansen, Professor Emeritus at Western University, relates how a holistic and different way of learning has been instituted in the residential Fosen Folk School in Norway. He shares poignant stories of students he interviewed that revealed in learning that started with experience, and developed their connection to others, nature, and the environment—learning that was not in "preparation for life, but life itself."

Articles about volunteering and mentoring offer other ways of looking at informal learning. Jennifer Pearce, a Masters student, and Katina Pollock, an Assistant Professor, both in the Faculty of Education at Western University, describe how a newly certified teacher, who was unable to obtain a permanent teaching position, began volunteering in a school where he did his student teaching with some very interesting results. Some of these included his ability to relate theory to practice, which had previously eluded him, an increase in his understanding of pedagogy, classroom management, and non-instructional duties and responsibilities. They attribute his professional growth to the increased control of his own learning, the excellent feedback he received because of his relationship with the school, and the fact that his volunteering was at his initiative. They contrast this with the "punctuated experiences"

and compulsory learning that is part of student teaching. Irving Lee Rother, a Quebec educator whose experience includes teaching, volunteering, consulting, and advising in a variety of contexts, as well as designing curriculum at the school, university, provincial, and international levels, describes his experiences of volunteering in Palestine, Nigeria, and South Africa. He discovered how this informal learning provided him with deep and valuable insights about himself as a person, educator, and learner. Renée Spencer, an Associate Professor at the Boston University School of Social Work, provides a useful landscape for thinking about mentoring as a site for informal learning. She suggests that a mentor's overall approach to the mentoring relationship contributes to the quality of what transpires. Using psychotherapy and other related literatures, she posits that role modeling and advocacy, collaboration, and relational skills that include empathy, authenticity, and a positive regard toward the mentee can contribute to social and emotional well-being, and cognitive and identity development.

Last, but certainly not least, the final articles that I have grouped together for the purposes of this editorial are about non-formal educational programs. Ellyn Lyle's work and research focuses on adult and continuing education in workplaces and she has spent the past decade fostering spaces for adult and continuing education in centres for workplace learning and professional development. She describes how she uses the philosophical underpinnings of "Join-Up with horses," a program which espouses learner engagement, coupled with theories of adult education which are based on meaningful learning through authentic communication, trustful interaction, and choice in creating meaningful and sustainable learning to inform her professional development work. More specifically, she describes her interesting experience of conducting a professional development program in a processing plant. Lisa Trimble teaches in the Department of Integrated Studies in the Faculty of Education at McGill University. Christina Foisy is a PhD student in Humanities at York University. Nikki MacMillan is the Health Educator at Head and Hands, a Montreal community organization. Jos Porter is a front-line community worker, educator and activist based in Montreal. Channing Rodman is currently a social media strategist in Vancouver, B.C., and Marlo Turner Ritchie is a community development leader and was previously Executive Director at Head and Hands, Montreal. These community-based educators write about the Sense Project, a very successful, non-formal program in which they have all been involved. The Sense project partners with schools to provide sexualities education to complement the current Quebec curriculum. They draw on experiential learning, non-formal education, and harm reduction practices to create learning about sexualities that is preventative, inclusive, non-judgmental, and holistic. Finally, Sunita Sharma is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Teacher Education in the

College of Arts and Sciences at Saint Joseph's University. Kadriye El-Atwani, Jubin Ratzad, and Jason Ware are PhD students in Curriculum Studies, while JoAnn Phillion is a Professor and Erik Malewski is an Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction, and all five in the College of Education at Purdue University. They describe, using vignettes, how disorienting experiences in a study abroad program helped US participants to question their assumptions about race, class, and gender and promoted cultural awareness among the group. Their work suggests that non-formal learning can complement, and enhance in important ways, the professional development of pre-service teachers.

*At the request of Jesikah Maria Ross, we have omitted capital letters in her name.

LBK

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Commentary

Enthusiasts for Learning: Leaders in Creativity

Shirley Brice Heath

ABSTRACT

This commentary points to several movements in modern economies that support informal or voluntary learning. A historical context establishes reasons for the rise of professional amateurs, such as citizen scientists, community youth arts organizations, and do-it-yourself individuals and groups. Creativity marks the nature of learning among voluntary learners, as does dedication to open sourcing. Shared knowledge at the citizen/consumer level benefits everyone. Within this atmosphere, young people are drawn to follow through on problems and issues by seeking information, guidance, and demonstration from sources of expertise on the Internet, in their communities and schools, and among others similarly enthused about learning on one's own in one's own way.

I am an anthropologist who has spent the past thirty years studying how children and young people spend their own time learning.¹ When people learn of my long-term pursuit, they ask questions: What do children and teenagers do that is *real* learning? How do they do it? How have societies changed in their ways of supporting, fearing, and ignoring learners who want to learn on their own time and in their own way toward creative projects, processes, and performances?

Here I answer some of these questions. I place them in a brief historical context that helps explain the fact that in 2011, 85% of US employers searching for creative talents reported that they could not find individuals with these skill sets. In the same year, employers in the computer science field identified creativity as the top leadership competency. In 2010, the United Nations suggested that the most creative nations would be the most resilient. In these same years, the public media frequently

speculated on the dire consequences that could result from entertainment's takeover of children's free play and flexible opportunities to explore nature and to create imaginative projects. If the "future favors the flexible," then what? (Richardson, 2011).

National Awakenings

In 2004, the Demos Foundation in London published a small volume entitled *The Pro-am Revolution: How Enthusiasts Are Changing Our Economy and Society* (Leadbeater & Miller, 2004). The authors, both economists and political theorists, had long been public intellectuals thinking about ways to engage the British populace in local development of creative industries. Within a year after the slim volume on "the pro-am revolution" appeared, the British anthropologist Ruth Finnegan edited a collection of papers entitled "Participating in the Knowledge Society" (Finnegan, 2005). The papers detailed more than a dozen types of pursuits ranging from archaeology to software design to ornithology through which the special interests of voluntary learners enabled them to accumulate information, invent new free services and products, and band together to solve local problems.

These publications awakened widespread interest in how individuals living in modern economies learn on their own time and in their own way and come together to create the multiplier effect of their collective learning. Since 2005, productions and publications of all types and in a variety of modes have hosted a steady flow of films, plays, articles, opinion pieces, and calls to action. Individuals in small groups now network across national and linguistic boundaries to advance scientific understanding of bird migration patterns, ocean pollution, and disaster control and to extend the boundaries of art forms from different cultures. These groups increasingly include young people who are drawn to the flexibility and diversity of contexts in which they and others work and learn creatively. As the Arab Spring of 2011 showed the world, such groups can bring about political revolutions.

A New Century, New Ways of Learning

The final decades of the 20th century saw a dramatic increase in the percentage of young people living in modern economies who headed into formal higher education. Public policy and education leaders pushed hard the idea that all students should set as their goal completion of a college or university degree. Passing tests and being certified and legitimated by a higher education institution brought the promise of a lucrative job. Becoming a professional seemed the *only* way for young people to prepare for careers. Public media repeatedly pointed to the global economy's

need for professionals in medicine, engineering, finance, economics, climate change, biotechnology, computer science, and law. Trained and legitimated through years of specialized schooling meant that these professionals reflected standards and could be expected to advance the bottom line for corporations now marketing around the world. Licensing, certification, and gradations of expertise were an accepted addendum to achievement of a degree in higher education. Whether a new employee of a corporation or an enterprising entrepreneur, individuals were expected to prove themselves as professionals through satisfactory performance in apprenticeships, internships, clerkships, or state professional examinations.

Within the first few years of the opening of the 21st century, however, degrees and certification no longer guaranteed the lucrative positions that young educated men and women had held during the 1990s. Just as young people could no longer take six-figure salaries plus bonuses for granted, a silent movement gained speed and force in local communities. Without fanfare, individuals across the age span were turning to voluntary expertise development during their leisure time. They were doing so by going over and around the walls of institutions. Their enthusiasms, whether citizen science, visual arts, open-source software development, water-saving inventions, or alternative health practices, took them into social networks far away from their usual professional circles. On their own time, citizens, young and old, identified needs, followed their interests, and determined ways to know and do in their spare time what neither commercial nor civic institutions and organizations were undertaking. Those who stayed with their voluntary learning pursuits easily logged the proverbial 10,000 hours that author Malcolm Gladwell had posited as the tipping point into success (Gladwell, 2008). Success for diy-ers (do-it-yourself-ers) meant learning to do something on one's own by practicing, studying, talking, and traveling to meet and join with other enthusiasts with similar goals. Ways to learn meant enrolling in formal classes, arranging get-togethers at one another's homes, searching the Internet, risking trial-and-error sessions with a local friend, initiating spontaneous conversations in coffee shops and bookstores, and attending special interest shows and conventions. Those who became "pro-ams" or professional amateurs used both conventional and unconventional ways to find resources, models, experts, and histories of the work of experts from past eras.

International changes in Internet access multiplied the numbers and types of knowledgeable individuals to which learners had access. Many made no secret of their goal of subverting certain corporate and institutional ways of creating products and services, carrying out research, exerting control over creativity, and compiling and storing information. For example, the independent music industry, starting

with rap and expanding to other genres, prefaced the move to diy ways of getting music to consumers by making their work freely available on the Internet. Independent filmmakers followed a similar course. Novelists, such as Stephen King, led the way for authors when he experimented with making portions of his work openly and freely available on the Internet. Software developers, who had been among the first to advocate open sourcing, relished the public fanfare that accompanied the growth of the “indie” movement in film, music, and other arenas of commerce previously controlled by large corporations.

Meanwhile, pro-ams across the lifespan of learning took note of widely publicized efforts to subvert powerful commercial entities that played largely to shareholder dictates and higher profits. Adult pro-ams urged young people to be pro-ams and to work to professional standards while simultaneously innovating, challenging, and taking risks to test their ideas with others. The free and open distribution of expertise marked small groupings of learners, young and old, dedicated to similar interests and willing to commit to unending practice and experimentation. These learners saw themselves as making play work for themselves and for society as a whole (Brown, 2009).

As the first decade of the 21st century came to an end, employers and economists pointed to the desperate need in modern economies for workers who knew how to collaborate, develop and think through creative ideas, and work “outside the box.” To be sure, the fundamental criteria for becoming an effective employee remained just as they had been outlined in national reports from economic bureaus more than a decade earlier (e.g., Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 2004). But these reports emphasized what employers wanted from schools and not what young people could and did set out to learn on their own and with other learning enthusiasts. The quiet revolutionary shifts to what many termed “informal learning” had not yet entered mainstream thinking.

On their own time and in their own way, enthusiast learners explored information sources and tested creative ideas that extended far beyond the time and curricular restraints of formal education settings. Voluntary learners built their expertise and developed their creative ideas by observing closely what others were doing and had done. They worked with new combinations of processes and raw materials in their work. They expanded much of what they had learned in their formal schooling even as they drew from non-schooled experts who had learned early in their lives to work outside the “normal” way of doing things.

Young People in the Play and Work of Creativity

Children and adolescents express their creativity in ways that differ from and complement the means and modes of creative groups of adults. The individual creative young person is inclined to move toward some product or process of innovation through long periods of silent thinking, reflecting, and sketching out ideas. These individuals learn as *visualizers*. In addition, they are gleaners, for they have wide-ranging interests that lead them to collect and sort bits and pieces of information. They vacillate between wanting to make the simple complex and to ensure that the complex is very simple. They are both *builders* and *destroyers* in their play and work. They have an inclination to seek out and define problems and a resistance to solving problems that other people set before them. Learners drawn to testing their ideas out often spend long periods of time alone, doing activities not seen as particularly worthwhile by others. They are fundamental *questioners* and *resisters*. These learners tend toward taking risks, trying out the untried, going the uncharted or dissonant route, and choosing to practice almost endlessly specific skills related to one or another core interest at any point in time. They are *risk-takers* who have a self-starting mechanism that others find hard to turn on or off. Therefore, others often characterize them as “unpredictable” or “hard to control.”

When these young individual learners come together into groups to play and work collaboratively toward a creative product or performance, individuals watch as their ideas are confirmed, contradicted, and amplified by others. Creative groups tend to be marked by a tendency to work best under very tight and high-risk deadlines. These youthful groups believe that whatever they do, meaningful consequences and outcomes will result for the group.

The need for external critique of both process and product or performance is acknowledged, though sometimes resisted. Group members challenge their advisors; in doing so, they advance their learning and find new ways to test their ideas. Creative groups demonstrate willingness to value contributions of disparate types of information and out-of-the-ordinary ways of doing things.

Increasingly, young people find on the Internet new models for how they want to learn. Adolescents, often those who do not find themselves engaged and enthused about classroom life, begin to seek new ways to expand their interests. In doing so, they naturally find themselves drawn to horizontal ways of learning that rely on a widening and increasingly diverse range of types of authority, modes of representation, time frames, and norms of achievement. Their learning involves tinkering, puttering, trying, talking, testing, and redoing. Many young people begin with one

interest or passion and then switch to another that may draw only indirectly from the original impetus for their learning. Moving in a new direction and switching back and forth across interests marks the learning of young learning enthusiasts as they work their way into the arenas of expertise they most want to develop. For example, young people who begin their interests in computer programming by immersing themselves in video games often tire of this mode and turn to one or another particular aspect of graphic design. A young would-be scientist who starts her rebellious interest in motorcycles may lose this passion and turn instead to intensive participation with a neighborhood dad who is a physicist, robotics enthusiast, and uncle of two “cool” teenage boys.

As the second decade of the 21st century opens, foundations, corporations, community organizations, libraries, and summer programs sponsored by universities show some few signs of recognizing the value of informal learning to the development and promotion of creativity in modern economies. As this recognition grows, resources may become more and more available, but they are sure to come slowly and quietly. However, as opportunities and resources spread, young people will want to maintain control over their own learning. They will only cautiously look to others to help provide them what they most need to advance their creative play and work. Their needs include the following:

- 1) material items to support creative work (e.g., for robotics)
- 2) linkage with previously inaccessible sources of information and ideas
- 3) opportunities to observe and participate with experts in their spaces (e.g., laboratories, studios, rehearsal zones)
- 4) openings to allow young people to align with expert adults interested in the same project over several years (e.g., profit-making use of recycled materials)
- 5) intensified access to software enabling highly specialized modeling and testing of mathematical and artistic ideas (e.g., in astronomy)
- 6) widened involvement in debates surrounding patent applications and the entrepreneurial potential of innovations

Knowledge Societies

The label “knowledge society” is rapidly being applied to more nations around the world. Canada, the United States, Australia, and European nations now find themselves being outpaced in out-of-the-box practices in which individuals of nations such as China, India, and Brazil excel. Some of these practices, such as hacking, amount to theft and destruction. Others, such as extraction and cultivation of

medicinal herbs, challenge the positioning of pharmaceutical corporations. Young pro-ams relish keeping track of these practices, and often play with ways to identify hackers, design anti-hacking programs, and combine security measures in new ways. Intel Science winners in the US study animal behaviors and plant components in other parts of the world in order to propose their uses to replace expensive means or products used in modern economies (see, for example, the case studies in Dutton, 2010). Young social entrepreneurs find ways to identify their counterparts in nations around the world, sharing ideas and plugging practices through Internet communication.

Leaders of democratic nations that experienced the economic recession of the first decade of the 21st century were hit with the harsh lesson that governments and their institutions previously expected to “serve” the people could no longer do so. Economic returns through taxes did not match needs. Citizens would not only have to be more productive in their work settings but also would need to be responsible for themselves in more ways. Citizens would need to dedicate their attention and activism to highly specific problems, such as water quality, loss of local wildlife resources, and invasion of new species of insects attacking local crops.

Previously, research behind such issues fell to governmental agencies and university research teams, often funded by governmental grants. As the 21st century moves forward, citizen pro-ams will be doing more and more monitoring of local needs and devising ways to meet these in relation to the availability of local experts—many of whom will have voluntarily chosen to learn the knowledge and skills called for to meet local needs.

General use of the term “informal learning” rarely captures the varieties of ways that knowledge and skill acquisition go on with pro-ams. The majority of discussions of “informal learning” describe it as learning that is undertaken by individuals and groups who study and experiment outside formal settings of instruction. However, pro-ams and experiential learners across the lifespan see formal contexts as merely one possible way of learning that will increasingly be needed to complement previously common ways of pursuing inventions, innovative strategies, niches of interest, and specialized ways of combining modes of representation (Heath, 2012).

Pro-ams, though driven in the main by interest in stepping outside the usual ways of doing and knowing, also find their motivation in what they see as a need. Sometimes they may begin their work to meet their own individual need or to follow up on a matter of mere curiosity. However, as they advance their learning, they

accumulate contacts with others who may be in the midst of similar pursuits. In the first decade of the 21st century, pro-ams came increasingly to be motivated by the needs of impoverished and needy groups whose interests were not being served by either institutions such as schools and governments, or corporations such as pharmaceuticals and medical device distributors.

Young people continue to see parallel needs in the lack of resources and spaces for learning that children and adolescents experience when they live in under-resourced neighborhoods both local and distant. Simultaneous with the rise of pro-am enthusiasts for learning was acceleration in social entrepreneurial and blended-value projects that allowed for-profit accumulation of assets along with non-profit pursuits. Widely proclaimed in the public press and elaborated in youth-based urban projects, such entities often found ways to partner with civic, medical, and educational institutions. For example, Artists for Humanity, a youth initiative in Boston, Massachusetts begun in 1991, emerged by 2005 as a regular client of the city, as well as commercial businesses in the area. The young artists (between 14-18 years of age) were commissioned to design benches, bicycle racks, and other objects the city needed, while commercial businesses enlisted Artists for Humanity to design websites, create advertising materials, or develop a portfolio of photographs for use in waiting rooms and lobbies. A medical clinic besieged with young patients with early-onset diabetes enlisted the young artists to create educational materials on the disease that would be “cool,” explanatory, and persuasive (<http://www.afhboston.com>).

Across modern economies, young people have either started their own learning environments to accommodate their interests and needs or they have sought out leaders of museums, parks, and other community groups and persuaded them to ramp up their emphasis on voluntary learning by the young (see, for example, Elizabeth & Young, 2006). In order to support themselves, young-initiated organizations have relied on adults with expertise in specialized niches of interest the young were keen to learn. Dominant among the primary activities of these organizations were art forms, such as graphic arts, sculpture, furniture and fashion design, musical genres. Not far behind have been strong environmental interests, such as organic community garden development, recycling programs, and preservation of indigenous ways of using herbs and other plants (e.g., Gaylie, 2011). Leaders of museums, parks, and botanical gardens have been among the first community organizations to see themselves partnering with young people in these pursuits.

Why work and learn voluntarily? Any enthusiast will have some unique answers to this question. Most will agree, however, that having a sense of place in

a world of fluid identities and memberships comes for them in the work and play they undertake. Voluntary learners, perhaps ironically, feel they belong to something greater than themselves and better than what the institutions around them provide. Voluntary learners value the resiliency that using their own time in their own way gives them. They know that what they do banks social and cultural capital for them as individuals and as groups, even when what they do faces resistance.

Finally, and perhaps most important, these enthusiast learners position themselves as critics, observers, and protectors of democracy. They take freedom seriously and wish that more people around them would do so as well. In short, they are dedicated to the idea that as the numbers of individual and groups who assert themselves as pro-ams go up, so does the measure of the freedom of the society (Dyson, 2002).

Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted, generalizations stated in this article are based on findings from Heath 2012 and publications cited in Heath's CV which can be found at www.shirleybriceheath.net.

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Commentary

Cultivating the Possible

Jerome Bruner

ABSTRACT

In this interview, eminent psychologist Jerome Bruner takes us back to the 1960s to trace the beginning of his interest in educational theory. He describes the circumstances that led to writing his seminal book, “The Process of Education,” and his surprise at how well the book was received worldwide, both from the public and academics. Dr. Bruner believes that “the easiest and most natural way we organize things is in a story-telling mode.” This interview is a good example of his belief as he relates stories of the launching of Sputnik, the famous meeting at Woods Hall, his childhood friends, and his academic career. Finally, he invites us to “go beyond” as he explains his view of the future of education.

The Landmark Woods Hall Meeting and “The Process of Education”

I’ve always been interested in classic subjects in psychology, as you know, but what got me interested specifically in learning in its relationship to education—you won’t believe this—came when the Russians sent Sputnik into the air. And at that particular point the National Academy of Sciences became terribly concerned: “How was it that the Russians got ahead of us in terms of space exploration and space travel?” They decided, particularly the people in the field of physics and biology, that they would bring together curriculum, committees to explore the issue of why the Russian educational system had produced a faster progress than ours and in the process they came to the conclusion that our schools were doing very badly. They decided to set up a meeting to bring together the leading figures in the nature fields

of science along with psychologists for a meeting at Woods Hall on Cape Cod. They asked me if I would be the chairman of the meeting. I had been interested in cognition and we were in the process of setting off this so-called “cognitive revolution”...so I took on the task. We had two weeks of very, very intense discussion at Woods Hall, in which it was decided that we should look at what in God’s name education was supposed to be and why the schools weren’t doing the proper job. The question that interested me, given my own predispositions, was not how kids just learned stuff but how they structured it, how they brought it together so that you could go beyond to make your leap into the unknown, into the realm of possibility. We had an intense two weeks of debate and then at the end of it the National Academy said to me, “Would you please write a report on this”—at which particular point I got everything else out, sat down in my study, and for three weeks wrote intensively a book called “The Process of Education.” It was very interesting because also at that particular point, various members of the committee from the Woods Hall group had been involved and I sent drafts around to all of them... The person who comes to mind as one of the major ones, was the leading physicist in our group, who was a man named Jerrold Zacharias who was a professor of physics at MIT. We got very much interested talking about what the nature and structure of how you put something together in a way that made it possible to go beyond the information you had, that the object of learning was to open up realms of possibility beyond just the sheer business of what you learned. In order to extrapolate from what you knew required somehow that you put it into a structure that had this extrapolated quality to it that you could go beyond. That required looking not only at what it was that you were learning but how you were learning, and a discussion of what you understood, what your hypotheses were, that is to say the process of learning became just as important as the results of education as measured by the difficult kind of examination and that kind of thing. After a bit the book came out and to my absolute surprise (I wrote the book along with the chief editor at the Harvard University Press who was a lovely guy) it got the front page review in the book review section of the New York Times with very high praise. I had never really written for a general public and this was for a general public. I was kind of astonished and in the long run it’s always amazed me, that book “The Process of Education” has been translated into fourteen different languages, has won all sorts of prizes, and even got me invited to Russia, which was a very amusing kind of thing. It was the Russian work on Sputnik that had got this whole business started over here. Then all of a sudden I started thinking about the educational establishment in schools and what schools were doing...and that started the famous curriculum reform movement. Instead of just third-down teachers putting together the curriculum, why don’t you get the leading experts in the world to put together the curriculum for the schools—the physicists, the mathematicians, the psychologists...

Informal Learning: Generating and Testing Possibility

For some reason you use the term “informal.” I don’t know what the difference is between “formal” and “informal” in education except that formal usually means the strictly controlled teacher without exploring what the alternative ways of understanding things are. After all, the mind is designed to explore possibility, and being aware of that possibility and being able to share among kids and teachers alike the way in which you’re going about it opens up to others the process of learning, the process of being educated as well as the results that you would test on some standardized test and so on. The standardized tests being mostly geared to how much content the kid had... I think what you call informal learning I think I would call, with emphasis on the possible, thinking about possible ways in which one can go beyond what you’ve learned...learning something and saying “Where does this take me? Where can I travel beyond this?” How did I come to this? There’s some interesting kind of way in which it became clear to me that there was something that existed within the culture that encouraged people to go beyond it. That is to say, I remember well my theoretical physics friends and my bright psychology friends. The object was not just to master content but to think in a way about generating possibility and testing possibility. I think that’s what you mean when you use the word “informal.” I would say by “informal” keeping open the possible meaning of how you come to think of it, what the structure is, what it relates to, what it could mean metaphorically, how you would go beyond the metaphor, how you deal with prediction and that kind of thing. I thought at first that this was the kind of thing that we gifted intellectuals going forth, would this be the kind of thing that educators would love and I was absolutely astonished and loved it. Even the Russians loved it!

The first translation of the “Process of Education” you’ll be interested to know was a translation into Russian [laughter]. The Russians translated it and I gather from my good friend Alexander Romanovich Luria that it was a very good translation too. The book had a very wide sale in Russia, not just among the people who were planning Sputnik, but also among Russian educators. I was absolutely entranced and the extent to which the underlying notion of learning, using your mind to think of possibilities of different ways of structuring what you know made a difference to them. They even gave me some kind of a reward...made me an honorary member of the Russian Academy of Science.

Narrative and Paradigmatic Modes of Knowing and Communicating

The easiest and natural way we organize things is in a story-telling mode. How is it that the Earth goes around the sun and we tell a story about something

called gravitational forces? Then we converted into something paradigmatic, something that can be translated into a more formal scientific mode, but there is some interesting kind of relationship between the narrative mode of telling the story part and the paradigmatic modes. There's much more emphasis as a result of all of this discussion, which was taking place in all of the sciences, much more discussion and more attention paid to how kids come to their notions about things and the cultural patterns that exist within society that dispose kids that way. It's interesting to me that kids from educated families very early—not all of them, to be sure—develop this more searching mode of looking at how things can be put together, how they can be structured. It was interesting because when you actually reach the general public with this they were interested too. There's something terribly boring about rote learning, where you just learn stuff measured by your ability to tell it back, reproductive learning—learning should also be productive as well as reproductive.

The American Educational Research Association had a meeting here in New York, and we met in Madison Square Garden. They invited me to give a talk and I was scared to death. I had never had a very successful relationship with my teachers when I was a kid; I never could quite tell what the devil they wanted of me. I gave my talk about the importance of opening mind to possibilities, the importance of structure as a means of providing one as a motive...how to see leaping into the possible, what's made possible by your notions, what does it imply. And also the importance of dialogue in this, people exchanging their notions about things, about how they go about understanding them, and so on. It was an eye-opener to me. I was delighted. I had lived a rather quiet life up to then, and all of a sudden I was a big shot [laughter]. And I didn't altogether like being a big shot because when you're a big shot, and particularly educators want you to tell them how to do it. The proper answer is part of the process of education is your trying to figure out with your students how to do it, how to understand better, and so forth. That's a kind of rough account of how it took place. It was a very interesting kind of thing because all of this was taking place while I was at Harvard, and I had really not had much to do, hardly anything to do with the graduate school of education there...I knew it had a high reputation. My only contact was that the guy who was the dean had just been appointed a new dean, was a sports partner of mine, Frank Keppel [laughter]. We used to play squash together every couple of weeks.

“Example” Is “Storytelling”

I think there's no question that narrative comes to us naturally in some kind of an innate tendency. We never have to explain to kids what a story is...you start

one...and they understand it. There's some interesting kind of way in which narrative performance and instance, a more general type of thing, this is all about...trying to understand something in a more general way. You tell a story of how it goes and then you try to state the more general type of thing, but separating the two is a dreadful mistake. It's characteristic, for example, when you watch good physicists or good mathematicians, whenever they come forth with a generalization, the first thing after the generalization is they say, "let me give you an example of what I mean." "Example" is "story-telling" in an interesting kind of way, and whether it's built into our genes or whether it's in the nature of language—I don't know the answer although I've written a great deal on the subject. It was also interesting to me the way in which people of the humanities became very much interested in this way of teaching as well. Rather than talking about a revolutionary theory, they talk about the specifics of revolutions. The way in which, for example (to take a far-out example), Sigmund Freud comes along and tells us completely different stories about our desires and stuff like that—and we say, "Wow, that's an interesting kind of tale that you're telling from the patient. How does that fit as generalization about mankind and his striving?" So we're constantly trying to go back and forth. Exemplification and generalization are essentially "lovers" if I can put it that way—the exemplification loves the generalization and the generalization loves to take the exemplification as its lover [laughter].

Funny Things That Come to Mind

The fact of the matter is that "inquiry" as we know it has to do with knowing their own lives a little bit better. We also know that it is the exchange, the dialogue that makes such a difference. When I was a kid, for example, my two best friends on our block (we lived on Long Island) were Bobby Hecker and Jerry Riesfeld. Bobby Hecker's sister, Gracie, who later was an editorial writer on the New York Times...we were kids, 10 and 11, something like that. She was a terrific storyteller and she would sometimes hang around when Jerry and Bobby and I were having one of our "bull" sessions. And she would come forth with: "You guys are so funny. You're always X, Y, Z"—looking for some kind of generality. I didn't realize until maybe a quarter of a century later that Gracie Hecker was my first love [laughter], in so far as you could have love at the age of 10 or 11. It's so funny these things that come to mind. I remember one funny episode. Right on the corner of the street where our house was there was a mailbox and you know those engraved letters on the States' mailboxes that say "US MAIL." I was once going by, we were joking and saying how do we really know that stands for "US MAIL"—"maybe," said I, "it stands for Uncle Sam Married An Irish Lady" [laughter]... Gracie Hecker, who turned out to be a very "hot" editorial writer at the Times, said, "Why not? It's not only interesting because it's on the mailbox but it's

interesting Jerry that you thought about that. Why did you think of that?" Which sent me off for days thinking about why in God's name did that come to mind. But it was again always...keeping them open...putting structure, yes, but structure in a way that allows you to go beyond what you've structured to go, to go beyond the information, given what the information imposed. And I think you can do that with young kids. I'm seeing young kids differently now that I have grandchildren of this age. My favorite little niece is going off next week—she's just won a scholarship to spend the term at the University of Prague in Czechoslovakia. I said to her, "What are you going to do in Czechoslovakia?" and she said to me, "You know, Jerry, the one thing I think is wonderful is I'm not going to know what I'm going to do in Czechoslovakia—I love that!" [laughter] And I thought, she is doing OK.

A Call for More Dialogue

One of the places we should be going is to cut down this "teacher to the whole classroom." There should be more discussion between the kids. A lot of schools are now introducing that, justifying why you think what you do, saying what you did, what the alternatives are...make it a more general discussion. And stop fixing it at such sharp curriculum objectives—leave it a little bit more open...they have to learn certain kinds of things but what are the other possibilities? I want to reopen the possible...so how do you do that? We should be taking a look at what our schools do, and our schools were taking a look at it. My grandchildren are at The Dalton School here in New York, which is a very famous, old progressive school. I'm just delighted at the way in which the correct answer is not the only thing that they're after—they're also after interesting answers: how you make the journey beyond (just as we're doing on the phone now). I don't know enough about the organization of schools except I know for want of many relationships between teacher and all the students, it's not enough: there's got to be more dialogue with the students talking about possible ways of understanding things. I keep coming back to that word, "possibility." That's what knowing things are. It opens up the realm for the possible, and I don't mean just when you get to be a graduate student at Harvard or McGill—I mean right throughout the entire education process. Teachers enjoy it more; students enjoy it more. Maybe it requires that we somehow get rid of the nailed-down desks and rows...for more of a circle of discussion. I never had the daunting task of administering a school or a school district but I would certainly want to stay away from rigid techniques carrying out the lesson, and that means at every level. I want the Board of Regents here in New York to think about ways of posing questions on a regents examination but check also the extent to which kids have mastered the exploration of the possible on the basis of what it is you already know...so that kids are able to go from what they learned to what else might be possible...extrapolation...going beyond.

Keeping the Discussion Alive

I want to talk a little bit too about the business of “going beyond,” that if you know something, where does this lead? It isn’t just that you’ve mastered something, but where does it take you, the extrapolated nature of learning? I say to myself, “it’s great for example that there’s a journal—like your journal for example—that’s opening up this general realm of things.” There should be also an opportunity for it to go back to teachers so that they can discuss what we’re discussing.



Jerome Bruner is a prominent psychologist, scholar, and educator. He was educated at Duke University and Harvard University, has received numerous honorary doctorates from around the world, and is currently a Research Professor of Psychology and Senior Research Fellow in Law at New York University. He is the author of several landmark texts including *The Process of Education* (1960/1977) and *The Culture of Education* (1996). From the “cognitive revolution” to his current conceptions of the significance of culture, context, and narrative, Dr. Bruner’s work and ideas continue to inform our understanding of cognition, learning, and education.



Commentary

Creating Hybrid After-School Enrichment Activities

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ABSTRACT

In this commentary we propose a collaborative strategy for the creation of informal learning activities in after-school settings that are also shared sites of learning, research, and development. We briefly trace the history of a research program—"UC-Links"—whose defining feature is a form of collaboration between institutions of higher learning and local community institutions responsible for youth in the after-school hours. These collaborations thrive only to the degree that "mutual appropriation" can be negotiated between partners, and it is within mutual appropriation that new possibilities for creative cross-generational and cross-cultural informal learning activities are materialized.

The Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition's interest in "learning that occurs beyond the classroom" grows out of our long-term interest in the role of schooling in human development. As part of this work, many decades ago we pursued a project in which, in a university setting, we created after-school clubs for children whose behavior was also being observed in their classrooms. We picked the subject matters for our clubs to be attractive to the children and at the same time, allow the adults to try to figure out whether the children learned in a different manner when reading was a means to doing something fun (e.g., being a member of a cooking club where you actually got to bake your favorite cake, or of a science learning activity in which you got to hook up electric circuits). One firm result of that research was that children who were seen as difficult in the classroom were just fine in the after-school club. And vice versa: some children with advanced

academic skills proved to be so busy stirring up the social pot that the cakes did not get baked (Hood, McDermott, & Cole, 1980).

Not long after, in the midst of research on ways in which displays of learning abilities are manifested across a range of social contexts, we found ourselves running another after-school club. Its participants were children singled out by their teachers as needing extra help to learn the basics of reading. The overall curriculum we designed consisted of a variety of game-like activities to enable us to assess reading ability while promoting the ability to read. In the course of that program, we began to use then-just emerging computer games to accomplish this purpose. Eventually, computer-mediated activities became central as part of a mixed activity system play-world we called "The Fifth Dimension" (LCHC, 1982).

In designing these after-school activities, we deliberately sought to create alternatives to dominant pedagogical practices that confront children who fail to learn through the standard routines of the classroom. At the time, a great deal of attention was being paid to "quality time on task" and the search for ways to expand "time for learning" during the school day. The favored solution among educationalists was adoption of classroom management techniques narrowly focused on how to get kids spending more time sitting at their desks doing the intellectual exercises that had been organized for them. The archetype social structure of the children's regular classrooms was the "recitation script" in which children are constantly answering known-answer questions posed by the teacher. Our classroom and classroom-based research had revealed a little-noticed consequence of this regime, amplified by a focus on creating more time on task. Children in such classrooms are rarely given the opportunity to form learning goals of their own; these goals are prescribed by the teachers and the school district. This same research had also shown that forming goals is central to the process of arranging for learning-with-understanding (Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989).

Consequently, we viewed the opportunity to engage with children in after-school settings as a research opportunity. In most after-school care organizations, children and youth are freer to choose the activities they engage in and social relations are conducted on a more informal basis. Under such conditions, we could try out really different ways of organizing the teaching/learning process of children who are struggling within the regime of formal schooling.

This was our entering point. If we were self-conscious about the process of inter-institutional collaboration over time, perhaps we could become more intelligent

about how scarce resources can be deployed more effectively in the name of the next generation's development.

A U-C Link

We conceive of our model as a U-C Link. It's partly a play on words; we are at the University of California, and we operate by linking ourselves across institutional boundaries to create a common program: A university group and a community group agree to jointly conduct an activity after school. We think of the ideal basic unit of a U-C Link to be:

1. A university course in which students' education is centered around texts and academic discourse.
2. A community setting where a community staff person cooperates with the teacher of the class and together they come up with a plan to supervise the undergraduates and children in educationally productive activities.
3. A system of activities that "fits" with the needs of the University and the Community institution.

In our local University's terms, our after-school involvement fulfilled all three of its touted missions: Teaching, Research, and Service.

1. Undergraduate students obtain the experience of having to confront their classroom-derived book learning with the lives of children on their own local turf, an excellent medium for genuine theory-practice education for the undergraduates.
2. Our specially organized activities in settings such as youth clubs, libraries, churches, and extended day programs have provided us with an excellent research setting for testing out innovative educational ideas.
3. The active participation of supervised and enthusiastic undergraduates, experts in learning, provides a clear service to local community after-school centers, hard pressed for funds for qualified assistance with programming in the after-school hours.

"On-the-ground" initiation of a U-C Link requires that a college or university offer a course, an after-school care provider (a school, a library, a youth club, etcetera) offers space, and staff participate on behalf of the host institution. Together the two parties cooperate to develop the activity they have jointly undertaken. A U-C Link is not designed to be a free lunch—but rather a delicious and nutritious, and very

inexpensive lunch. If the experiment seems to be working, the partners are likely to need to find resources for a person who worries about the collaboration itself. Continued collaboration becomes an additional common goal among the U-C linked.

The Necessary Hybridity of UC Links Activities

From our experience, one of the challenges facing the study of learning outside of school is that, unlike schooling with its traditional rules and structures, one faces a wide diversity of institutional settings with an even broader range of goals, rules, regulations, and “ways things should be done.” The opposite of “formal” is not “chaos,” but a different social order with its own forms, values, and conventions.

In organizing partnerships between colleges and communities, there is a kind of “default localism” in which the norms of each organization are assumed to be more or less “pre-synchronized.” (“Sure, it will take some adjusting, but we all want the same thing, so it will work out.”) But it is precisely in coordinating disparate aims in a community setting that difficulties arise over time. In our experience, when insufficient attention is devoted to the relationship between organizations, especially how they work out the division of responsibility that accompanies their division of labor, such difficulties can grow to threaten the partnership itself.

The difficulty can be as “trivial” as the fact that the local community organization begins its fall activities when the elementary school opens while the college partner opens a month later. What do you do in the meantime? Or perhaps the university is on a quarter system, or can only run a program four days a week? To community partners, the jolt to programming from the untimely appearance or disappearance of a dozen college students can be severe if it does not become a part of the routine programming.

A similarly “trivial” difficulty can arise if a faculty member who teaches the partnering course takes a sabbatical leave or if there are insufficient funds to conduct the practicum class in a given academic period. How can one’s local Boys and Girls Club be expected to organize its programming on the whims of the course schedules of their partnering college?

A quite different, and from our perspective, non-trivial difficulty arises from the enormous power of the public school system to require that students, starting from grade one, do significant amounts of homework each evening. Local community organizations, pressured by the school on one side and worried parents on the

other, feel bound to provide students with extra time and support for doing their homework. Schools now routinely co-opt students' out-of-school time with kill-and-drill worksheets where after-school activities once could offer a safe harbor from such prescribed tasks.

As a consequence of such pressures, those like ourselves who seek to leverage the potential of informal learning environments to create valuable learning opportunities have had to learn to work with our community partners to find times for genuinely development-enhancing activities to take place.

A Sensibility for Informal Possibilities Within Cross-Institutional Collaboration

Effective partnerships imply accommodations in both directions. For lack of space, we provide here one recent example that highlights both the *mutual appropriation* (Downing-Wilson, Locusay, & Cole, 2011) between partners, and a specific case of how the resulting new possibilities for informal learning can be brought together in the creation of a novel activity.

In our most recent U-C collaboration at a local community center in southeastern San Diego, undergraduates join in to help children with their homework, and also collaborate with graduate students to ensure interesting enrichment activities are available outside of homework time. In parallel, the community site coordinator helps to create space for special projects and assists with local diplomacy. Once the two organizations get accustomed to each other's rhythms of operation and overriding local necessities, new opportunities for organizing model learning activities are to be found in the odd gaps in schedules, where genuinely new forms of learning experience can be designed.

One such recent experience, dubbed the "Ocean World Activity," took place over two weeks during April 2009, while kids who attended the center were on vacation from school. The activity, which included five local elementary school-aged girls, centered on learning about the ocean, and made available to the kids multiple modalities of engagement: reading from a children's science book, looking up images and facts on the Internet, populating a virtual world with digital content resulting from Internet searches, drawing on poster-boards affixed to the walls, and the use of puppets for make-believe. All of this took place within a specially designated and resource-enriched space known locally as the "tech room."

There is no space here to do justice to the interactional dynamics and learning strategies that this activity made possible, but it is of central importance to this commentary to foreground the “location” of this informal activity *within* a set of possibilities that can emerge when institutions collaborate during after-school hours. Many elements were involved here, ranging from the engaged participation of local kids, to the mix of “high” and “low” tech tools used, to the theme of the activity itself (it was a jointly organized visit to the aquarium that put the ocean “in the air”), to the relative expertise of graduate and undergraduate students, and extending even to the fact that this activity took place during vacation time for the kids. The high degree of contingency that can nevertheless be funneled in productive directions, through a kind of *sensibility for informal possibilities* that develops in time, is one hallmark of this partnership.

Of course, vacation time is not the only time when the informal can be leveraged. Using the power of informality, successful blending activities are a great resource. On a day-to-day basis, arithmetic lessons are folded into cooking lessons, where a notion of fractions takes on multiple meanings, as children need to double the size of recipes, or share 25 cookies among 10 children. This all naturally merges with regular snack time and new experiences of eating vegetables grown in the Center’s garden. In turn, the garden provides its own plethora of opportunities to bring the content of the school into the activity as a means to a goal the children are seeking to fulfill. Likewise, outside sports activities are turned relatively easily into elementary mathematics exercises as groups of kids compete to reach the finish line by solving subtraction problems.

Sustaining Quality

Since we began our research three decades ago, many talented, creative, and persistent people have, for one reason or another, hit upon the U-C Links approach to leveraging collaborations with community-based youth-serving organizations. It is exciting to see programs develop with (relatively) high levels of fiscal support, using digital technologies that attract youth and arguably build just the kind of productive synergy with higher education that we ourselves hope to promote.

However, even as we write, some of the most successful such programs are only now seeking to replicate themselves, responding to the demand to “take it to scale.” They have no clear-cut plan of how they will continue to exist once the funding that made their birth possible is gone and they are kicked out of the nest to make their way in the economic landscape of the informal after-school world.

We offer the UC-links model as one way of accomplishing several goals at the same time.

1. To create social ecologies where kids and college students learn from one another, and where university and community partners meet on relatively “levelled” ground as they learn to look at the world through one another’s eyes.
2. To enhance quality of undergraduate education through provision of environments where they can learn about the linkages of their university-based knowledge with the life conditions of the generation coming up behind them.
3. To make it possible for institutions of higher learning to be more effective citizens in their local communities.

In sum, it was known to our grandmothers no less than to John Dewey that, properly organized and supported, learning in informal settings designed to be accommodating to young people can be enormously productive intellectually and socially. But sustaining the infrastructures which make such high quality activities routinely available is a far more difficult task. The basic challenge is a social-organizational matter, not a matter of figuring out how to make stimulating learning environments for children.

As currently constituted, most after-school programs can realistically aspire to providing children with a physically and socially safe environment during the after-school hours. Without the resources to hire and retain a sufficient number of professional staff, it is unrealistic to expect them to organize activities other than homework help that are designed to significantly supplement the school. A UC-Links program is one way to provide the necessary additional resource enrichment.

Existing proof of successful programs, initiated by a variety of talented scholars, now abounds. Finding ways to make such activities by after-school experience providers a routine social practice is *the* challenge of the present.

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Michael Cole is Professor of Communication and Psychology at the University of California, San Diego where he is the Director of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition. He has conducted cross-cultural research on cognitive development, especially as it relates to the role of literacy and schooling. His recent research has been devoted to a longitudinal study of individual and organizational change within educational activities specially designed for after-school hours. These systems link universities and local communities and allow a study of the dynamics of appropriation and use of new technologies and cultural-historical approaches to human development.



Robert Lecusay is a doctoral candidate in communication and cognitive science at the University of California, San Diego. He is a member of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition where he collaborates with lab colleagues, undergraduates, and members of the local community to create and study after-school learning environments. In these environments he designs and implements innovative science education activities. Adopting a cognitive ethnographic approach, he investigates how the activities and their participants learn and develop over time.



Ivan Rosero is a doctoral candidate in communication, cognitive science, and science studies at the University of California, San Diego. His research focuses on informal learning activities made possible through collaborative partnerships between community and non-community institutions. Expansive collaborations that lead and call for reciprocity, dialogue, and mutual investment simultaneously create their own forms of life and vital needs. Expressed within joint activity, these forms of life link imagination, affect, play, and learning on the one hand, and ongoing negotiation across institutional boundaries on the other. The complex entanglement across time between these linkages is the central focus of the research.

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Commentary

Fostering a New Approach to Understanding: Learning Through Intent Community Participation

Barbara Rogoff

ABSTRACT

In this interview, author Barbara Rogoff describes an informal learning practice called “intent community participation.” This type of learning occurs when children are included in a wide range of community activities and observe, contribute, and receive support and feedback from others. She describes the advantages and challenges of intent community participation and examples of how it might be integrated in schools. Finally, Dr. Rogoff gives us her thoughts on how to foster this kind of orientation to learning in teacher preparation.

I believe there are some interesting links between your extensive work in apprenticeship thinking and informal learning. Can you talk a little bit about this?

became very interested in informal learning quite early when I was a grad student and especially when I went to work on gathering data in a Mayan community in the highlands of Guatemala. I noticed how skilled the children were in a number of different things and I asked their mothers, “How do you teach them?” And the mothers said generally, “We don’t teach them, they learn.” I thought “I have no way of understanding that” because I was thinking that people learn by being taught, so how do people learn in situations when nobody’s teaching them?

That led me into trying to understand what people are doing to help children learn in situations where it’s not teaching, and by “teaching” I think that the Mayan mothers meant the kind of teaching that goes on in school, and I think that’s

what I meant at the time too. There's lots of ways of assisting learners that are not what we were calling "teaching" and learners bring to bear themselves quite a bit of expertise in going about learning in situations where it's not structured like teacher-learner.

That's very closely related to informal learning which has a history in anthropology looking at small communities like the Mayan community I was working in; children learning by observing and pitching in to what's going on in the community, documented in many ethnographies. It has been called "informal learning."

More recently informal learning has become of interest, especially in the museum world, trying to understand how people in museums can be learning when it's not a didactic setting. I've been trying to open the idea of informal learning into something that's not just a dichotomous opposition to what goes on in school—so it's not formal learning versus informal learning. There are many different kinds of informal learning. I think we should be trying to understand the different kinds that are available as alternatives to some forms of learning that happen in school that we know are not very effective, and even connecting up some kinds of learning that happen in school that are effective that may connect up with informal ways of learning.

Can you tell us a few examples of the different kinds of informal learning?

One that's often used in the museum world is "inquiry learning," which is quite interesting. But the one I have most focused on in my research has been what I call "learning through intent community participation," which is for children to be involved in activities in their community and helping out and doing so under their own initiative but also with the support of other community members. They are observing keenly what's going on and contributing from a very early age already as participants in the community rather than being seen as people who are not yet ready to be a part of the community. They're part of the community from the beginning. How do they learn: by observing, by contributing. What are the aspects that are important to being able to learn in that form of informal learning—that's been the central question of my research.

Do you have some specific examples that stand out for you?

It's widespread in the Mayan community where I've been working for the

children to be a part of what's going on and for them to be keenly aware of what's going on around them. They might be playing with a particular toy and at the same time they're listening in on conversations around them, they're alert to something interesting happening across the way. They are alert to learn from a number of surrounding events that they may be directly participating in or in the presence of. They can learn by being alert and by being ready to help out without being asked, which seems to be a part of this way of learning. That alertness, the initiative that's involved in helping out, the skill in collaboration which is involved if you're pitching into community or family activities and the consideration that's needed to be able to take the perspective of other people and coordinate with them. Those are all aspects of what we see in my research group as learning through intent community participation.

Learning through intent community participation has been widespread in the Mayan community where I've worked—I talk about that in my new book, "Developing Destinies: A Mayan Midwife and Town," which just came out. It focuses on changes and continuities in practices like learning through intent community participation.

I should clarify one thing: it has been traditional for the children to be learning through intent community participation; they still do but there are enough changes in children's lives in the Mayan community and actually worldwide that there are now fewer opportunities for them to be present and involved with the wide range of activities in their communities. There's a lot of ethnographies in other Indigenous communities of North and Central America where the same way of learning is very common, and there's probably ways of learning that are similar in other parts of the world. But we are hesitant to generalize without knowing more about how they really function. We don't want to jump into over-generalizing...more research needs to be done in different parts of the world before we can say whether it's similar on other continents or different.

What are the advantages of learning through intent community participation?

Learning through intent community participation has a number of advantages compared with the kind of "assembly-line instruction" that is common in schools. (But of course assembly-line instruction is not necessarily how schools run.) Compared with assembly-line instruction, learning through intent community participation encourages children's initiative; it encourages children to be attentive to what's going on around them, to make sense of things on their own and with the help

of others, to be planning, because they are able to contribute. If something arises that might be an obstacle...they have to figure out how to go around it. There's many opportunities to be building one's understanding plus if children are in the presence of other people working on similar aspects of the same activities, they have a chance to observe how other people handle similar issues. So they don't have to discover it all on their own, but they are very active in watching what others do, trying things themselves, using initiative to be a part of the larger endeavour.

Are there any challenges to this kind of learning?

If children are not allowed to be present it's more difficult for them to be learning in that way. Children in countries that require them to be segregated from the wide range of activities of the community for many hours of the day—such as in formal schooling—they have fewer opportunities to be helping out, pitching in, learning by observing people in the productive and social activities of their communities.

A challenge would be if we were trying to implement learning through intent community participation more broadly in children's lives in the United States, we would have the impediment that they are often excluded from situations where they can use that kind of learning. However, I should point out that even in highly schooled communities in the United States, children learn a lot through intent community participation, including how everybody learns their first language: by listening in and watching how other people use it, having something to say, trying it out, contributing to conversation or other ongoing events.

Another example would be even in schools that might be run through assembly-line instruction, children are seldom instructed in how to do their part in assembly-line instruction. They learn that in the process of being embedded and contributing to the ongoing activity of assembly-line instruction, through observing and contributing. Even in schools that are run in the assembly-line instruction way, they would be using intent community participation to figure out what are the rules, how to get a turn, who gets favoured...all the kinds of hidden curriculum of the school.

Of course, many schools are doing things differently than assembly-line instruction. For about ten years I studied a school in Salt Lake City, which I refer to as the "OC." I've written a book together with parents, teachers, the principal, and children of that school called, "Learning Together: Children and Adults in a School

Community.” In that book we built on what we learned from being a part of a school that’s run more collaboratively, much like learning through intent community participation, to talk about what’s involved for adults and children to collaborate in classroom situations. That was a difficult thing for many adults who were volunteers in the school to learn how to do; difficult for some new teachers; not difficult for the children. I wanted to underline that there are schools that are doing things that are fairly much aligned with learning through intent community participation, and if people are interested in learning more about the principles involved in that, that would be by looking at the book, “Learning Together: Children and Adults in a School Community,” which is Oxford 2001.

Can you tell us a little bit about how that school functioned?

It’s a public school, kindergarten through sixth grade (now through eighth). Parents need to volunteer for their children to be in the school; they volunteer three hours a week in the classroom. It’s a public school, sort of a magnet school, and doesn’t cost the school district any more than the regular neighbourhood school. The parents generally want something different for their children than what their neighbourhood school offers. Some of them are eager to be volunteering in the classroom. Others, like me, I was a parent-volunteer there because I wanted my children to have the opportunity to be part of it.

I didn’t understand the philosophy of the school when my children began there. Over time, after some struggles on my part, in fact, I came to see that the central part of the philosophy was that the children and the adults were collaborating on creating learning situations for the children, and that also involved learning situations for the adults. That was a necessary part of creating a community of learners that worked for the children and for the adults. Curriculum was developed by children and adults together, and children had an understanding of why they were learning what they were learning.

Often the learning involved developing a project that was of interest to everybody, the children and the adults alike, that would carry with it learning of some of the curriculum topics that were part of the state-wide core curriculum. For example, there was a fourth- and fifth-grade classroom that was studying probability and they decided to make a “Las Vegas” day where they were going to play games of chance. The adults wore those kinds of visors that the casino people in Las Vegas wear and they played at “Las Vegas”... While they were playing these games of chance, the

principal came along and said, “What’s going on here?” And the children said: “Oh, we’re studying probability; it’s part of the state core curriculum.” They were having fun playing these games of chance and at the same time they knew that they were learning probability and they were thinking of it reflectively and with interest. The curriculum was carried by the collaborative interest of the adults and the children.

There is always interest in how to deal better in teacher preparation and professional development as well. What would you suggest to foster this kind of orientation to learning?

One of the things that’s most important for adult learning is the same as for children’s learning: for people to be involved and participating, having a chance to observe others, having a chance to contribute. I try to organize my undergraduate and graduate classes in ways that are somewhat aligned with intent community participation, though it’s a challenge sometimes to do so.

I think one of the hardest things for new teachers is that most of their instruction has occurred in ways that are not what we want them to do themselves. New teachers, like anybody else, have learned a lot by the situations in which they have been participants. Their chemistry class or their high school English class—however they have been embedded in learning for their whole lives—those are part of what they come into teacher preparation programs understanding. And like the struggle that I had as a new parent in the school in Salt Lake City, you have to kind of be able to open up your eyes to a different way of doing things, and sometimes that means letting go of what you’re familiar with—which is a challenge.

Kris Gutiérrez, who is past president of the American Educational Research Association, has done a number of projects in which she has teachers watch children in more than one setting. For example, they might follow a particular child in the classroom and then in an after-school setting. Kris has organized some after-school settings that are very effective situations for the children’s learning. The teachers have a chance to see that the same child may act quite differently when they have a chance to be contributing with interest than they do in a classroom where they’re simply told what to do and have to sit still all day. The teachers get to see a contrast that opens their eyes. For that question, I think maybe some of the best answers are found in the work of Kris Gutiérrez.

Do you have any particular story that you would like to share with us about this approach to learning?

One example of this approach to learning that I think is very compelling is one of my kids is now a software engineer in a prominent company. She learned how to program computers through intent community participation. As an undergraduate she didn't study anything resembling computer programming. She studied biology, anthropology, Latin American studies, and then after she graduated she met some friends who were involved in technology and she helped them out. And they created a start-up together, and in the process she learned how to program.

She was learning by pitching in—she had the guidance of her friends who were already skilled in that area. It was interesting to her partly because of the social relations with the friends, and partly because it was just interesting. So now she is a very skilled employee of a prominent company, and her learning is quite different than a student who goes through a computer science program for the most part, at least that's what I hear. She says that when she's interviewing for a job she needs to study some of the things that are perhaps emphasized in a university computer science program because she'll be tested on those in an interview, but they're not needed for being a programmer. What's needed to pass a test, an academic test, even in industry, is different than what's needed for her to be a very skilled programmer, a leading programmer in her work. The basis of her understanding came from learning through intent community participation.

That's a wonderful story and I think it really brings to the forefront how our digital age is maybe forcing some of that to happen. In virtual communities there seems to be much more of that kind of approach to acquiring new understandings and new skills. Would you like to add anything else?

The idea that there may be some changes afoot with digital technologies that may open up learning through intent community participation is a really important one. Video and interactive animation simulations of various sorts now allow people to be sort of present for the activities that are ongoing. For instance, if I were to try to explain to you in a class "How do you weave?" or "How do you program?" I would have to give lots of definitions, long explanations... You'd have to be trying to visualize it yourself; you wouldn't be able to see the process. But with the aid of video clips or other ways of giving people more of a presence in the activity, we don't need lengthy explanations out of the context of the activity. People can sort of just see it.

In my talks that I give at national conferences and so on, I use a lot of video clips now and people understand the research phenomenon at a much deeper level than when I used to just try to talk them through it and tell them both principles and examples. The principles can be shown and illustrated with the examples in a way that begins to resemble learning through intent community participation with the aid of representations that are sometimes interactive, and used more as a means of communication than simply explanations out of context, which schools were dependent on for many years. I think that there is a real chance for change in our ways of supporting people's learning, with the changes of our technologies. But they will require also having a deeper understanding of ways of supporting learning, such as intent community participation, and other alternatives to assembly-line instruction.

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Informal Science Contexts: Implications for Formal Science Learning

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ABSTRACT

This article illuminates the affordances of informal science learning to promote scientific literacy. It also discusses the ways in which informal learning environments can be creatively employed to enhance science instruction in K-12 as well as university settings. Also offered are various theoretical perspectives that serve as useful analytical tools to understand science learning in formal as well as informal settings.

"Children throughout the world, if we are to survive as a planet, will need to have a deep level of scientific literacy." (Chiu & Duit, 2011, p. 553)

Promoting a wider public understanding and appreciation of science is an overarching goal of science literacy as underscored in science education policy and curriculum benchmarks (CMEC, 1997; AAAS, 1989; NRC, 1996). Key goals of scientific literacy encompass: (a) developing a deeper understanding of science concepts; (b) developing scientific reasoning to understand the natural and designed phenomena; (c) understanding scientific research and findings, (d) recognizing scientific ideas and issues underlying socio-scientific issues; (e) formulating scientifically informed views and stances on issues of local and global importance; (e) critically evaluating scientific information from various sources; (f) participating in debates and actions around critical social, economic, scientific, and environmental issues; and (g) pursuing careers in science, engineering, and technology (AAAS, 1993; CMEC, 1997). Contemporary science education reform efforts thus aim to develop scientifically literate citizens who can meaningfully contribute to socio-scientific discourses and engage in social and political action around them. A deeper and critical

understanding of scientific developments and the ways in which they impact modern societies is essential to furthering the development of sustainable approaches and systems (Bybee, 1997; Chiu & Duit; 2011; OECD, 2009).

Much of the science education reform has focused on enhancing science curricula and professional development of teachers in formal science learning contexts to meet the policy aims for science literacy. While these efforts may be very important, we are not taking into account a good deal of emerging body of research that stresses the influential role of informal science learning occurring through interactions with one's natural, technological, and cultural environments.

Science learning occurs in formal as well as informal contexts and it is extremely important for science educators to understand the ways in which it influences one's learning and views about the natural world. Although informal science environments and experiences have been significantly shaping public attitudes toward and understanding of science, the science education community has recently begun to recognize its contribution to promoting scientific literacy. Informal science learning involves social interactions and learning environments across a wide range of contexts outside of the traditional science curriculum in school, college, and university settings. Informal learning contexts include, but are not limited to, museums, science exploration centers, nature centers, zoos, aquariums, and community-based organizations. Equally important are personal experiences with machines and various technological appliances; exposure to digital and print media; online interactions; science and religion; and conversations with peers and family members around socio-scientific and ethical issues surrounding climate change, medical practices, stem cell research, biotechnology, and genetically modified organisms (Phillips, 2010; Reich, 2002; Kelly, 2000; Martin & Reynolds, 1996; NRC, 1996).

What gives informal learning its distinctive flavor is its purely interest-driven, voluntary, self-directed, hands-on, and authentic nature (Pedretti, 2006; Dierking et al., 2003; Falk & Dierking, 1998). The potential of informal lived experiences in terms of fostering positive attitudes and intrinsic interest in science make them a powerful source of science learning. This informal science learning occurs in multiple contexts where people can pursue their curiosity without having to worry about any formal assessment against externally stipulated performance standards (Rennie, 2007; Jung & Tonso, 2006; Schauble et al., 1996). Informal science learning is authentic because learners develop their understandings in purposive and, therefore, authentic interactions with their social and physical environments. The results of learning are more judged against the purpose of engagement with learners' contexts and not through formal assessments against externally stipulated standards.

Ideas gained from formal and informal contexts dynamically interact with each other in unique ways to shape an individual's scientific knowledge, opinions, and behavior. Acknowledging that formal science curriculum is not the only source of scientific ideas and understanding the nature of learning that occurs across diverse contexts in an individual's life, both within and outside of schooling environments, would help in developing a comprehensive and holistic understanding of science learning across formal and informal contexts including how informal and formal may complement and counteract each other (Kelly, 2000; Falk, 1997; Falk & Dierking, 1992). This article argues that the contribution of informal science learning should be recognized and viewed in conjunction with formal science education in advancing scientific literacy.

This article discusses important theoretical frameworks that illuminate our understanding of the construction of knowledge in formal as well as informal contexts. Next, it presents creative models of integrated science curricula drawing on informal and formal learning approaches and findings from empirical research about the impact of such models on cognitive, affective, and social development of students and teachers.

Theoretical Perspectives on Science Learning

Despite its powerful impact on stimulating curiosity about the natural world and positive emotions toward science, informal science learning remains under-theorized in science education. Further, the cumulative and ongoing nature of science learning across myriad sites requires a comprehensive approach to understanding how scientific understanding is developed in informal as well as formal learning environments. This article draws on three theoretical frameworks that provide inclusive approaches to examine and enhance science learning in diverse learning contexts: (a) social constructivism, (b) socioculturalism, and (c) dynamic skills theory. These frameworks provide a comprehensive approach needed to understand an individual's conceptual, emotional, and historical-cultural development while engaging in authentic as well as carefully crafted science learning experiences. These theories of development also inform science educators about the pedagogical supports that can be provided to deepen students' understanding of science; develop their curiosity and interest in science; and foster problem-solving and critical thinking skills. These frameworks also serve as useful lenses to analyze how people acquire, retain, and apply scientific knowledge and the contextual factors that may enhance or inhibit their learning.

Social Constructivist Perspective

The view that meaning is actively constructed by the learner through purposive interaction with his or her environment challenges the perspective that regards students as passive recipients of scientific knowledge (Piaget, 1972, 1985; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). The constructivist framework posits that knowledge is developed incrementally by expanding one's existing mental representations or schemas—*assimilation*—and by modifying their schemas to resolve any discrepancies between the external reality and their internal representations of that reality—*accommodation*—to achieve equilibration. From this perspective, learning is conceived as a dialectical interplay between the processes of assimilation and accommodation. An individual constructs new knowledge by integrating new ideas into his/her existing schemas or by restructuring the schemas to interpret new information (Piaget, 1973). Given its emphasis on construction of knowledge through interaction with environments, this perspective encourages inquiry-based science pedagogy that embraces cognitive conflict experienced by the learners as a useful resource. Cognitive dissonance can be employed in inquiry-based science learning to help in restructuring one's intuitive ideas in accordance with accepted scientific models—*conceptual change*. Encouraging children to raise questions about physical phenomena, proposing predictions based on their explanations, testing their predictions, and comparing data with their initial expectations facilitate the process of conceptual change. From this perspective learners are construed as necessarily engaged in construction and application of their scientific knowledge. Scholars argue that application of knowledge strengthens and expands scientific understanding (Phillips, 2010; Phillips & Norris, 2000; Falk, 1997; Carey, 1987).

The social constructivist perspective is typically seen as a challenge to a perspective that construes learning as acquisition and memorization of scientific facts and principles. Research shows that traditional approaches to formal science instruction generally promote rote memorization and often fail to address students' alternative conceptions (Asghar & Libarkin, 2010; Asghar, 2004, 2011; Shapiro, 1994; Stead & Osborne, 1980; Driver, 1985). Accordingly, the reform discourses construe science understanding as the ability to comprehend and solve novel problems using appropriate scientific models.

Application of theoretical knowledge to real situations requires hard thinking aimed at making connections between theory and empirical reality. While the first step in learning science involves developing theoretical ideas, the necessary next step is to make predictions about the reality using those ideas. A student may know Newton's laws and equations of motion by heart and even learn to apply them

to routine problems generally requiring computation. Nonetheless, a deeper knowledge of physics would mean that the students could apply the laws of Newtonian physics to situations involving forces on the Earth and in space.

The social aspect of constructivist learning emphasizes that interactions with one's social environment are critical to constructing and applying new scientific knowledge. Consequently, peer interactions, discussions, collaborative reflection, and cooperative problem-solving are central to the social constructivist perspective (Martin, 2004; Crowley et al., 2001). The social constructivist framework provides a useful tool to support and examine meaningful conceptual change in a variety of formal and informal settings.

Sociocultural Perspectives

Sociocultural frameworks view learning as mediated by one's language, cultural tools, historical conditions, and active participation in community practices. Scholars argue that sociocultural theory offers a robust framework to understand and compare how students' learning is influenced by cognitive, cultural, and social practices in diverse formal and informal contexts (Geist & Lompscher, 2003; Martin, 2004). Further, sociocultural perspectives acknowledge and attempt to understand the ways in which the power relations may influence learners' inclusion, participation, and response to learning situations. According to this view, understanding of science and socio-scientific issues grows out of one's engagement with their unique socio-political conditions, cultural values, and distinctive literacy practices. The sociocultural framework serves to enable interpretation and comparison of learning across different settings. For example, one can look at students' life culture and compare ways in which their familial and community discourses are compatible or at odds with school science and the culture of science (Donnelly, Kazempour, & Amirshokohi, 2009; Roth & Lee, 2004; Geist & Lompscher, 2003).

The sociocultural perspective is also useful as an analytical tool as it assumes learning and construction of knowledge as connected with and growing out of learners' personal, social, and political problems (Coburn, 1998; Bodker, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). The pedagogical approaches flowing from this perspective encourage linkage of science concepts to the issues students confront in their everyday lives. Furthermore, these approaches encourage participation in social and political action around particular scientific, technological, and environmental issues in their communities. It also attempts to blend school and community-based learning and action through activities that have the potential to raise consciousness through

the application of scientific knowledge to social issues. Students' involvement in issues relevant to their lives leads to intrinsic motivation and interest in learning science that could be capitalized and harnessed in building their content understanding and inquiry skills in formal as well as informal settings. Sociocultural perspectives serve to broaden and contextualize structured science curricula by including cultural venues and social issues that make science accessible and meaningful to learners (Verma, 2009). Moreover, these perspectives help to examine, compare, and integrate formal and informal learning opportunities to foster holistic development of learners.

Dynamic Development Perspective

The dynamic skill theory provides a conceptual framework to explain knowledge construction through the interaction of the individual with his or her environment (Fischer, 1980; Fischer & Bidell, 1998). The skill is the capacity to organize mental representations, emotions, and actions within a given context in relation to a specific learning task (Mascolo & Margolis, 2004). Fischer (1980) defines skills mutually by the "organism and environment." The construction of skills is dependent on and embedded in the person's specific social context (Fischer & Bidell, 1998; Fischer & Yan, 2002). The development of skills takes place when an individual undertakes a learning task in the context of his or her broader environment. Moreover, an individual's emotional response to both the task and the environment in which it unfolds is immensely important in shaping his or her learning and development.

Dynamic skill model offers a useful lens to examine learning comprehensively in terms of learners' emotional and conceptual development. The development of progressively more complex skills—thoughts, feelings, and actions—is an outcome of an individual's specific learning tasks and the conditions in which those tasks occur (Ayoub & Fischer, 2006; Ayoub, Fischer, & O'Connor, 2003; Fischer & Ayoub, 1996; Fischer & Granott, 1995). The dynamic skills perspective is more comprehensive than constructivist perspectives inasmuch as it views the development of human reasoning as a function of its social and historical contexts, and not just purposive interaction with the physical environments independent of such contexts.

Dynamic skill theory defines a developmental scale and a series of rules and methods for analyzing an individual's thoughts and actions in the process of his or her development. Skills develop as children coordinate lower-level actions into higher-order wholes within particular tasks, conceptual domains, and sociocultural learning situations. Human development is conceptualized in terms of progressing

through four stages of development. In each stage the individual exhibits a new ability that builds upon the structures of earlier stages. The development of skills proceeds through four major tiers of developmental changes between birth and thirty years of age: (a) reflexes, (b) sensorimotor actions, (c) representations, and (d) abstractions (Fischer & Farrar, 1987). The skills become increasingly complex and qualitatively different at each level through a process of “coordination” by integrating lower-level skills into more complex and sophisticated skills (Bidell & Fischer, 1992; Fischer & Rose, 1994). The transformation of skills as they become more complex and higher order produces gradual and continuous changes in behaviour. For example, all skills in the sensorimotor tier consist of sensorimotor sets—actions, objects, events, or people. Infants can control only sensorimotor action. They act on objects in their environment, but they have not achieved the ability to think that objects, events, people have attributes independent of the infant’s actions. At this stage an infant can control activities like looking at a doll for long periods of time; keeping the moving gadgets in the field of vision; and grasping the objects when they touch the child’s hands. The representational tier is characterized by a relationship between two or more sensorimotor systems. The child at this level develops the potential to combine disparate sensorimotor systems to generate single or complex representational sets. For example, children can coordinate different variables to develop the ideas of conservation of mass, length, and volume. At this level intentions guide actions. In social relations the child constructs an understanding of the relationship between his or her own intention vis-à-vis another person’s intentions (Fischer & Bidell, 1998).

According to dynamic skill theory, learning and development involve integration and differentiation of skills—thoughts, actions, and feelings. Importantly, it recognizes the role of affect in organizing and shaping cognitive skills (Asghar, 2004; Ayoub & Fischer, 2006). Research shows that students with high anxiety either quit science because they find it hard or take fewer science classes in college (Tobias, 1990, 1992, 1993). The dynamic skills model predicts a correlation between cognitive and emotional dimensions at every general level of development. In the early stages of development children see things in terms of positive and negative split; they consider negative and positive characteristics and behaviours as mutually exclusive. People, actions, and experiences are either good or bad. A child, for instance, may think that science is boring because it is difficult to understand. The skills are focused only on the negative aspects of science. However, as the control systems become more complex, children become aware that good and bad could exist in the same situation and people. For example, a child understands that some aspects of science could be fun, such as doing interesting experiments, while others could be boring, such as repeating the same experiments many times.

The pedagogical implications of the dynamic skills model involve its use as an effective tool to develop appropriate contextual supports that teachers, parents, and online communities can provide to promote students' interest in and understanding of science. This model posits that individuals are able to function at higher levels in contexts that provide high rather than low levels of social support (Asghar, 2004; Rogoff, 2003; Parziale, 1997). For example, adolescents can be supported to develop complex abstract relations in high support contexts depending on their level of engagement and the amount of support they are receiving from their environment (teacher, parent, or older siblings).

Taken together, these theoretical frameworks help in conceptualizing and analyzing science learning in various traditional and non-traditional contexts. They can enhance science education researchers' and practitioners' understanding of how learners approach their learning tasks; what they actually learn; how they relate to their learning activities at an emotive level; and how they understand and apply their science knowledge to solve myriad scientific issues in their broader social, political, and cultural environments.

Infusing Informal Science Opportunities Into Formal Science Education

"...[M]useum field trips - regardless of type, subject matter, or nature of the lessons presented - result in highly salient and indelible memories. These memories represented evidence of learning across a wide array of diverse topics." (Falk & Dierking, 1997, p. 216)

Informal experiences with science through interaction with myriad resources outside of the school have become a vital source of curriculum enrichment. Partnerships between schools, scientists, and museums may offer rich and meaningful science learning opportunities for students and their teachers (Katz et al., 2011; Kisiel, 2005, 2006). Innovative models of school-museum partnerships have been developed to enhance student learning in science. This section presents examples of such ongoing collaborations among schools, science museums, nature centers, and community-based science projects.

Museums and other similar venues offer stimulating environments for engagement in explorations. As the theoretical perspectives discussed earlier

suggest, science learning is a social, collaborative, and cumulative process occurring over an individual's life in myriad settings. Research suggests that museum and other such free-choice settings cultivate an intrinsic desire and curiosity to learn science (Kelly, 2000; Russell, 1996). Museum exhibits and investigations can be carefully integrated into science curriculum to: (a) spark students' imagination and sense of wonder about the natural world; (b) stimulate their interest in particular science topics; (c) develop their questions to plan and pursue scientific investigations; (d) promote conceptual change through discussion, reflection, and cognitive conflict; (e), organize cooperative inquiry projects, (f) extend students' emerging understandings of particular scientific models; (e) provide authentic problem-solving tasks; and (f) facilitate social interactions and cultural development.

Research suggests that teachers can design effective and interesting plans for inquiry-based science instruction by connecting curriculum to museum exhibits (Anderson, Lucas, & Ginns, 2003; Kisiel, 2006; Falk & Dierking, 1992). Nonetheless, some scholars argue that although museum fieldtrips enhance "visitor engagement, understanding, and recall" (Allen, 2004, p. 30), it is not clear how these "fragmented" experiences impact children's ability to extract abstract scientific principles (Cox-Petersen et al., 2003; Abraham-Silver, 2006; Allen, 2004; Anderson, 1994). Hence, as educators it is our "responsibility" to "push these discrepant event experiences, these moments of heightened curiosity, to the next level," argues Abraham-Silver (2006, p. 12). She further adds, "Critical to meaningful science education is continued attention to bringing authenticity into the learning experience. This is where classroom teachers and informal science educators can meet and make a difference" (p. 12).

Presented below are some examples of the collaborative approaches to construct interactive and reflective learning spaces for students by creatively infusing informal activities into the science curriculum. The studies discussed in this section demonstrate how less formal activities could be used to enhance science instruction and offer evidence-based practices to augment student interest and participation in science. Notably, these concrete activities exemplify the theoretical perspectives set forth in the preceding section. Specifically, they illuminate how the principles and practices of the learning theories discussed above could be employed to promote students' affective development and cognitive growth through creation, coordination, and integration of new representations; conceptual understanding through discussions and interactions with their social environment; and active engagement with their communities to address socio-scientific issues through problem-solving and collaborative action.

Anticipating and Scaffolding to Sustain Conceptual Change

Using the constructivist framework, Anderson and colleagues (2003) examined students' emerging understanding of science concepts through a series of activities before, during, and after a museum visit. This study highlighted the importance of using post-visit activities to reinforce students' science ideas gained through their interaction with the museum exhibits on electricity and magnetism. Students' construction of scientific knowledge was investigated through post-visit concept maps and interviews. This study provides evidence that an integrated series of pre- and post-visit activities may result in conceptual change consistent with the accepted scientific models. These findings also underscore the importance of planning pre- and post-visit activities explicitly linked to the museum explorations to scaffold and strengthen students' emergent understandings. Besides supporting the development of scientific conceptions, such activities also help in identifying and preempting the development of potential alternative conceptions in these informal science learning venues.

Making Science Learning Meaningful Through Situational Resources

Employing the situational approach, Dohn (2011) examined how high school biology students' interest in learning emerged during a field visit to an aquarium. This case study particularly illuminated the situational factors that stimulated students' motivation to engage in science learning regardless of prior interest. The aquarium visit was a part of a 10-week unit on ecology and population biology. The students prepared for the aquarium visit by first reading a scientific text about ecology. The reading helped them to select particular organisms to observe during the aquarium visit. Post-visit activities in the classroom included evaluation and follow-up learning experiences related to the aquarium trip. The researchers used participant observations, video recording, and interviews to examine student learning. The following situational factors significantly contributed to student learning: (a) knowledge-based interest; (b) social interactions and cooperative learning while performing the tasks; (c) hands-on sensory experiences with different kinds of organisms; (d) surprising or unexpected discoveries related to biodiversity during field explorations; and (e) novel or unusual phenomena observed during the field trip.

Synergy Between Science, Technology, and Society as an Aid to Learning

Dori and Tal (2000) shared a unique collaborative model of an integrated science, technology, and society (STS) curriculum involving 6th graders, teachers,

parents, and local community members. This curriculum drew on synergistic school-community partnerships around environmental issues. These collaborative projects creatively combined formal and informal learning and assessment approaches, such as problem-based learning activities, case studies, field trips, and formal class sessions. Parents, teachers, and local community experts worked with students in groups to help them select project themes concerning industrial and environmental awareness (e.g., road improvement, waste industry, etc.). These groups also decided upon the criteria for designing products related to their chosen project themes through mutual consultation. Care was taken to develop projects that could potentially contribute to the township community. The groups also carefully considered the environmental impact of their products and developed appropriate solutions to address any unfavorable effects on the environment. Some examples of the collectively designed products were: a wastebasket with various recycling bins, and a lighted map to help locate each home in the community. A combination of informal and formal assessment strategies was employed to gauge learning outcomes, such as evaluation of collaborative products by local experts and assessment of students' conceptions and attitudes through pre- and post-course instruments. These evaluation measures revealed significant improvements in students' knowledge, attitudes, and problem-solving skills. Further, students developed a more comprehensive understanding of real-world environmental problems and their social, economic, and political consequences.

Learning to Teach Science: Affordances of the Informal

Teaching science is far more complex and involved than merely classroom lectures and textbook reinforcement; it requires hands-on activity, but it also calls for minds-on explorations that engage learners in thoughtful, reflective investigations that promote hypothesizing and questioning and foster a genuine interest and curiosity in the subject. (Kelly, 2000, p. 758)

Continued professional development of teachers is key to effective integration and implementation of informal learning approaches in science instruction. Practitioners and scholars have identified particular principles of effective professional development for science teachers in accordance with the goals of science education reform. These principles focus on (a) building teachers' knowledge of the nature of science and its epistemological foundations; (b) deepening teachers' understanding

of science concepts; (c) developing their pedagogical content knowledge; and (d) immersing teachers in real-world science problems and processes (Loucks-Horsley et al., 2003; NRC, 1999). Nonetheless, many science teachers experience a disconnect between the traditional instructional approaches used in their methods courses and those that they are expected to use in their classroom practice (Katz et al., 2011; Topcu, Yilmaz-Tuzuun, & Sadler, 2011; Riedinger et al., 2011).

Research suggests that teachers' positive feelings and attitude toward science impact their teaching and curricular decisions (Kelly, 2000). Informal science experiences have been shown to increase teachers' interest in and appreciation of science. Studies with teachers in museum settings indicate that interactions with exhibits and subsequent reflections on their learning and struggles help teachers integrate, understand, and apply their pedagogical content knowledge to develop inquiry-based lesson plans for their own students (Riedinger et al., 2011; Jung & Tonso, 2006).

Different models of teacher education have been developed to make professional preparation meaningful and culturally relevant for teachers by infusing informal learning opportunities into science education curricula. Presented here are a few examples of elementary science methods courses that illustrate the ways in which science preparation programs can benefit from informal learning spaces.

Integrating Outreach Activities and Virtual Tours Into Science Methods Courses

Riedinger and colleagues (2011) conducted an experimental study with prospective elementary teachers in an undergraduate science methods course. The treatment course included various components of informal science education including live animal demonstrations, guest lectures by informal science educators, and "virtual fieldtrips" to museums. Different sources of data included field notes, researchers' reflections, student evaluations, and pre/post-surveys to investigate pre-service teachers' beliefs about the nature of science.

The course instructors invited science educators to share informal outreach initiatives with the teacher candidates. The prospective teachers experimented with informal activities with their peers or their families and reported their findings to the whole class. They also adapted some outreach activities for their future classrooms. Another interesting feature of this curriculum was the use of guided virtual fieldtrips to museums and exploration of online exhibits on climate change. Discussions on

such experiences sought ways of incorporating the informal online activities into formal science lesson plans. The study found that the prospective teachers in the treatment group experienced significant transformations in their attitudes toward and appreciation of science. The authors attribute this change in attitudes to the affective components of informal science learning.

Student Teaching at a Science Museum

Kelly (2000) describes the impact of informal learning experiences on prospective teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. Besides observing actual elementary classrooms and practice teaching with small groups of elementary students, the teacher candidates developed teaching units and implemented them at a local science museum with small groups of students. The rich environment of the museum sparked students' interest and engagement with science explorations. Data were gathered through a variety of tools to assess the effectiveness of the course. These data included interviews with the course participants and graduates and observations of the science units implemented at the museum. Pre- and post-course questionnaires were also administered to gauge students' attitudes toward science, confidence in their teaching ability, and knowledge of content, pedagogy, and learning environments.

The informal learning environment served to promote a deeper understanding of scientific concepts, fostered teachers' problem-solving capacities, and reflective practice. Specifically, the informal experiences focused on the acquisition and applications of science content and relevant pedagogical knowledge to their teaching practice through hands-on inquiry, group work, dialogue, and reflective journals. Teacher candidates reported an increased confidence in their ability to creatively employ museum resources to promote children's inquiry skills and understanding of science. In this process they also developed a sophisticated understanding of the content related to the museum explorations that they used in their teaching units (e.g., microbiology, light, color). Doing science in a "non-structured" resource-rich environment was rewarding and so was the process of learning different concepts *with* children during the hands-on activities. Not only did they learn about science, but they also learned about how scientific knowledge was created through a purposive engagement with their environment. These interactive experiences also changed their initial views of science as boring, uninteresting, and based only on hard facts. Interviews with some graduates of this program who were teaching in schools suggested that they were using elements of their museum learning units in their classroom teaching.

The author notes that “even a single science methods course based on a holistic, constructivist approach can reform and enhance teacher knowledge, confidence, and attitudes and may lead to the utilization of constructivist strategies in teaching science in the elementary science classroom” (Kelly, 2000, p. 772).

Enacting Safe Spaces to Support Teachers’ Learning

Jung and Tonso (2006) conducted a similar study with pre-service elementary teachers to look at ways to support them in developing effective content pedagogical knowledge. They also explored the potential of out-of-school settings, such as museums and nature centers to create safe, supportive, and nurturing spaces for student teaching. The rich and robust informal learning environments provided sites of meaningful application of the knowledge and skills gained in the science methods course. Student teachers prepared and taught thematic units to small groups of children at a museum or nature centers. Data were collected through participant observations of teachers’ lessons, surveys, and interviews with student teachers. Teacher candidates received training from scientists and museum or nature center educators about the learning resources and science concepts involved in the exhibits and activities. The factors that were immensely appreciated by the teachers constituted team-teaching; a flexible environment where they could figure out their own pedagogical styles; and no fear of evaluation as they received a grade for completing their teaching assignments. The authors suggest that the use of safe spaces in informal settings can potentially contribute to reform efforts in science education. Further, interactions with scientists and science education experts enhanced teachers’ scientific knowledge and also helped in diagnosing and addressing their alternative conceptions.

The principles and theories of learning discussed in this article and the studies with children and teacher support the assertion that science learning cannot be confined to lectures, rote memorization, and an isolated set of laboratory experiments disconnected from learners’ everyday lives. Science learning is a lifelong process that occurs in multiple contexts through varied personal, social, and political experiences. Thus science learning should be understood, analyzed, and imparted holistically across formal and informal contexts. The challenge for science educators, practitioners, and researchers is how to harness these learning affordances effectively. Further research is needed to examine the factors that can contribute to sustained learning, motivation, and self-regulation in science education.

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A Space to Learn

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ABSTRACT

Weighted with the demands of graduate studies and frustrated by a writing deadline, a doctoral student is transformed by unexpected and vivid memories of a most beloved place of learning: a space containing the critical elements of energized creativity, well-worn tools, and the warmth of devoted guidance. Through interwoven reflection and the tools of meaning making, this student achieves a deep understanding of what a space to learn requires for educational inspiration.

Doctoral study has been described as a process of fundamental ontological and epistemological change reflective of the intellectual, personal, social, and cultural transformation experienced by the candidate (Mezirow, 1991; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Management of academic expectations and the accompanying life transformation draws heavily on one's resources of capacity, skills, and perseverance (Tennant, 2000). While there are undeniable moments of satisfaction during pursuit of higher education, the culminating sensation can be one of being formed, re-shaped, and re-finished yet again.

Currently I am learning to teach others, about teaching and learning. Discouragingly, there have been moments of isolation during this practice of spending so much time sitting still, listening, reflecting, learning, and writing. There are times when I want to throw off the weight of what feels like an ill-fitted cloak and leap out of my chair and away from this desk, where creating and learning so often feels hard. It seems that the work itself is less an effort than is the endeavor of locating a *space* to learn. Finding a space where I feel what I once felt; content in my place of learning has been both tumultuous and enlightening.

Recently, while in the physical and head space of the learner facing the demands and time constraints of yet another doctoral writing task, I found myself restless and agitated. Hours of precious time had been frittered away on seemingly pointless school commitments and stacks of papers due very soon were conspiring against me. Suddenly a wave of smothering fatigue brought on by an endured confinement of writing and a sense of lost autonomy crashed over me. Facing the blank screen with a rage intensifying, I startled at hearing my own voice cry out, "I want my workshop."

I miss how tranquility settled on me there; that place with its hard and soft surfaces, tools of every shape, and its creative possibilities. In that space I was many things at once: calm and energized, easy and intense. In that space I had solitude and the company of countless remembered conversations heard clearly over the whir of my saws and sanders, and the radio. In that space time slipped away and I was free.

Right now I want to be away from this desk, in this room, a place of learning where I feel pressure and alone. I want to be back in that place where learning was wrapped in warmth, care, and creativity; where demands and insecurities could be shaved off in curls of contentment. Gazing at the mostly empty page, my hands touched keyboard and an account of the physical and the sensory experience of the space I craved came without effort.

I have cut a length of mahogany on my table saw and I now feel its smooth and warm texture, and a smile runs through me. Next, I cut a piece of cherry wood and with the slice comes the smell of bubblegum fresh as the first chew, lingering only a moment. With a slow look around my space, I see that it is all here. Over in the corner is my sawdust encrusted ghetto blaster from high school. I hum along to big bold ballads and sugary pop songs while I saw, sand, scrape, and fuss. These favorite tunes heard between whirring blades carry me along and occasionally I throw back my head and join in as loud as I want: "I can see clearly now the rain is gone and I can see all obstacles in my way" (Nash, 1972). I am not alone here. Underneath my bench, lying in a growing pile of sawdust and junks of pine and oak from projects past is Noah. His mass of hairy gold and four perfect paws suggests not one but two piles of wood ends, shavings, and sawdust at my feet.

Today's project is a wooden book with covers made of alternating bands of cherry and mahogany. I decide that it will be a Christmas gift because it is turning out so beautifully. Later on, I will make giant wooden pencils, for my young nieces and nephew. Seven-foot replicas painted with bright colours with their names running down the side. My heart chuckles because I can already see them so clearly and I know I will make them.

This knowing fills me up and again I smile. I wonder at this feeling. Is it joy? Yes, I know pure joy here. Looking around my space with bursting satisfaction, I also see tools of every shape, function, and age around me. I have quite a collection now. My gaze settles on the tools and I stop because some of them are Grampa's. Well, I suppose that almost everything I need is here.

The words now fly onto the page with abandon, without awareness, and I slip away from an account of the physical space of my workshop to another sensory experience; an account of a working space now beyond reach but *oh* so filled with presence.

Somehow he is here, here with me and I miss him. I so want to show him the desk I have fixed and refinished like the many pieces we worked on together. I want to know what stain will highlight that perfect grain. I also wish I could ask him again how to adjust the new blade on my band saw. Too much time has gone by now and I seem to forget how he showed me. I cannot bring it to mind. I just didn't pay enough close attention the last time he was here; the last time.

You see, at that time, when my grandfather visited my new workshop he thought it was terrific. He even hinted that he was a bit envious of me because where he lived then was no longer his own place: our space, warm with projects and time to spend. I suspect that those times years ago in his basement are somehow with me when I am here in mine. I remember his work benches worn by hammer heads and scrapers, with marks penciled with ticked off inches, 8ths, and 16ths, and his wall of tidy soldier tools, lined up on pegs of readiness. I see that I have arranged my tools like he did his. Deep down I sense that he was proud that I was just like him, that I love the things that he loved, and that I understood what comes from creating in that special place. It was in his workshop using his band saw when I was five, maybe six, that I recall working carefully and intensely to make my name in scrap wood.

Glancing to my left, I stop my task and watch him bend over his table saw, a saw "much too dangerous for me," a saw he says, "is the most dangerous of all." In knowing these words, I am unable to take my eyes off him as he flips the switch of the saw creating that awesome cry of machine, swirling wildly around us. He leans into the wood and my breath stops while I watch his face so intense, concentrating and then relaxing with satisfaction as the wailing sound slowly whimpers to silence. Two perfect slices are held to the soft bulb overhead and I see his finger tips slide down a smooth wooden edge. Exhaling in silence, my heart cries out "YAY! Grandpa!! You did it!" and with renewed purpose, I return to cutting that tricky "J" in my work, listening to my little saw blade pulsing. And I concentrate too, just like him.

While still standing at the bench in my workshop, I recalled yet another experience of us, there in his workshop. I am older now and engrossed in my project with just a wee bit of skill and a whole lot of gumption:

I work away with hammer and chisel pounding against the wood that “just-wants-to-stay-stuck!” when a calm breath from behind intercedes. Sensing him leaning over me, I hear, “With the grain, with the grain. Do you see?” And his massive hand, roughly calloused yet so smooth with care, envelops mine to gently guide his own sharp chisel that I grip, over my project. And with this care and my now tempered taps, the wood magically shaves away easily. Like a spatula through icing the wood slices away and the action feels so smooth now that I am lost again in my work; which is our work. And everything just works, for a time.

Suddenly there is the flurry of a chattering voice and the caress of light footsteps cascading from above. Grandma flutters down the stairs and singsongs something ridiculous into our space: “Oh Don! I need a little shelf this long to go over my sink. Make me a little shelf, just so.” Our blue eyes twinkle at one another before we look back to her. Slowly his head swings back and forth as he points to his task on the bench but, as I watch him closely, I can see his thoughts. Yes, I understand now and I know that Grandpa will make it for her, and he will do it with a full heart and that smile of his.

I am returned again to the memory of standing in my own workshop feeling this joy of him in my core even with the ache of loss. I am there again but it is a time and place where I have recently lost so much. I am alone.

My losses are piled up like the stacks of dog-eared woodworking magazines in the corner; the loss of my marriage, of strength, and of trust and faith in me. But there is something down here, a contentment that comes when I am in this space. It is mine alone—not for others; others who take from me in different ways. In this place, I do not create for purpose and assessment and there is no value in this work for anyone but me. Yes, when I “create and fix” things elsewhere, there is satisfaction, but when I am here in this space, energy comes, there is renewal.

Make no mistake, this space is not perfect nor has it been a place without pain. In this space, a range of emotions, fluttering, raging, and even crushing have been spent. I have been injured in this space and I have felt real heartache. There are tools here that can exaggerate passion. I have smashed and lashed out here. I also remember the sudden flood that spring, when my tears joined the wet wood as tools rusted and my creations warped before my eyes. I have hidden down here when I

could not cope with those who betrayed or confused me. I have worked hard in this space on planned projects and have worked easily all day on absolutely nothing in particular. Somehow, I was always able to move against the weight of a heavy heart and stinging eyes, to focus, to concentrate, to create here. This space seemed safe enough for my angst and I suppose, safe enough to be content. I have sung out loud here. Again, I remember the feeling of being there and being pulled to create:

I will carve his name; something in pine or perhaps in birch. He liked the clean look of white birch. I will hang it over there, under the window next to my band saw. Deep down I smile with satisfaction because I know I will do it. Soon I am very still with my thoughts. Perhaps, the circle has come around for me, here in this space. I sense Noah getting up and after stretching long and lazily he moves near. He noses around the pile of scrap wood at my feet and then brings me a piece of oak, all tooth-marked and damp with drool. He smiles at me too, with soft brown eyes, and I feel his warm breath as I take from his mouth this offering. I turn the wood over in my hand and know its strength. "Oak? Yeah, pup, that'll do" and instinctively I reach for my stubby pencil and carefully begin to sketch his name over the grain: "A. D. Keirstead." I understand now that in here, in my space of creating, there is almost everything I need and there is time. I am energized, filled up, content and calm.

It is clear, as I write these memories, that in that space of learning, I have learned much about me and the world I inhabit. I shared some of these memories a few years ago when I was asked to put pen to paper to describe my "favorite place." Immediately my mind shot to this space and indeed, I was actually there somehow. Now, in this frustrating moment of doctoral endeavor, I am trying, very hard, to learn about the tools I need in what for me is a new craft of creative work. I struggle with the pace and demand of my academic responsibilities and so often it seems that I am pounding away at work that "just-wants-to-stay-stuck!"

I listen in my mind for the deep guiding voice I used to hear so clearly over my shoulder. It is barely audible in this learning space, at my desk, where project papers pile around me like flattened scrap and sawdust, where the tunes from my iPod are catchy but somehow constrained. Thankfully, Noah is still here, very near, but his golden is showing strands of grey and the space under my desk, where he wants to be, is too cramped for his length. There is also little, if anything, falling from this work surface for him to chew. I want desperately to be back in that place, where my work put me at ease. It seems that current academic endeavors have left me without time or space to create and again, I feel loss.

However, through the oft-used tool of the teacher and learner reflection I realize that in response to this resisted task of academic writing about learning the words spilling from my hands have taught me an unintended lesson. A lesson perhaps, that will guide me further in my efforts to learn about teaching other learners, about teaching and learning. I suppose I must pay closer attention to not only the lessons that I must prepare, but also to my core, where lessons are learned; give attention to what fills me up enough to be both energized and calm.

For a few years now, following a time of great upheaval of a life once lived, I have been on an entirely new venture of becoming me again, here in academia; unfortunately without a workshop. It takes just about all my energy to focus on the daily intellectual work, the product of which, in the moment, can feel like it is for others, not for me. What I have known for some time, during these passing years, but to which I suppose I have not paid close enough attention, is that I must have a space where creativity and joy can wash over me and right the daily drum of wrongs and worries. You see, I have years ahead of me still, to toil at this venture, and I understand that this doctoring process will command me, shape me, and quite possibly at times, overtake me. Without a safe creative space for making meaning and art, a place noisy enough from whirring blades, scraping metal and pop music, to hear that calm voice inside, I know I will not make it. To where I believe I must go, to make a difference in this new venture of learning, I need a space like this to learn. With this knowing, I turn that tool of reflection over in my mind and while considering its worn and dulled edges, another image slowly appears.

He is in his big chair reading one of his many books and the radio hums along in the background. Stacks of books are piled around him, casting towers of shadows under his lamp and his old pup lies heavily across his slippers feet. I am reading too but I can feel him deep deep in thought; enough to draw my gaze to him. He reads on but his stillness disquiets me. Laying aside my book, I end up perched on his footstool and softly ask, "Whatcha reading Grampa?" Over his glasses, blue eyes catch mine and slowly he shows me the cover. His book is about war, a war that was and was not his war, and ever so hesitantly he begins to speak a little of tanks, of mud, and horror in North Africa and Italy. He is soon telling stories of missing grandma and the baby girl he will not hold for four more years; the same baby girl who will one day be my mom. With an ever-brightening smile and chuckle in his voice he tells about the wayward fruitcake encased in butter cream icing, made and mailed overseas by Grandma; a fruitcake that took two years to find him, over there. His eyes twinkle as he describes how he and his buddies "sure did enjoy" that unbelievably still moist cake, once they "hacked off all that rock hard icing" with his bayonet! I hear Grandma's voice from the kitchen joining in the telling: "You know, I saved my

food rations for ages to buy all that butter!” and he grins at me slowly nodding in agreement. The voice from the kitchen adds that she still has all the letters he sent her, “and you know, they always came in bunches, even though he wrote one to me every day for four whole years.” Again he nods, with that smile.

What I know from the many stories told, just like these, is that Grandpa was one of the first in his village to go to college, just before being shipped overseas, when many folks barely finished high school. I know that he loved his wife madly and that he was lucky or smart enough to survive crazy times of insane turmoil over there, to come back here. He was also smart enough to give an intense story a happy ending when his granddaughter was listening. I know too, that he loved to learn, that he loved to be challenged, and that just like me, he often got lost in his books, about war, adventure, and ideas, and about many other serious matters needing consideration. I know these things.

Years later, struggling with my own version of insane turmoil and newly alone, he was able to visit with me at my home. To relieve the pain I saw reflected in his eyes, I enthusiastically showed him the work I had been doing, to keep the place I lived, and myself, from falling apart. On the tour of my projects we visited the repaired water tank, the new porch steps I had made from reclaimed planks, and the refinished cabinets nearly complete. As we finally stood in my workshop contemplating all the other tasks to tackle, he stopped me mid-sentence to ask, “But how did you learn to do these things, all by yourself?” At first I wasn’t able to reply. After some thought I told him, “Well, I just got some books, tried to figure it out, then, I guess, I just did it.” I remember his head gently swinging back and forth, and our blue eyes met and held for awhile longer than ever before. I then saw his lips say, “You know granddaughter, you’ll be alright.” And with him with me, I was.

When I reflect on that time, which was our last time, and consider the life I now lead as a learner and teacher, I expect that he would hint again that he is a bit envious of me, envious of the incredible opportunity I have to learn about teaching and learning, and about writing. He would probably also smile at me knowingly about how it can get hard sometimes. I think he would be proud knowing that I still love what he loved, that I am a storyteller too, who tries to share both the heartache and a bit of joy, before the last line.

Sitting amongst this stack of papers, deciphering details of daily emails, and the bewildering pressure and demands to write, write, write, when I would rather just cut, sand, and shape, I drift back again into memories that help me understand. After a

time Noah moves from his cinnamon bun curl at my feet and raises on slow legs to press against my side. I am brought back to the present when I see his raggy old ball roll to a stop against my computer. I look down at him as he rests his great warm muzzle on my desk and raises big brown eyes. He sighs heavily and suddenly noses my arm from the keyboard. It is time to play, to walk, to nuzzle, to share a treat, and to remember that grandpa deeply loved his dogs too. In fact, he was never without one, you know, just like me.

I am stunned at knowing that I have just created this recollection of that space, our place, while hours and hours have slipped away unnoticed. My blue eyes glisten and my face is damp yet I feel calm. Perhaps, during my academic endeavors, I can find a space to learn through creative work of a different sort. If not in a workshop, then maybe in the places of my work, like the place I am now, using these very different tools. Perhaps while writing without constraint, about non-academic things, or even “about nothing at all in particular,” I can begin to engage in higher learning and thoughtful teaching with a lighter heart, and even with a feeling of joy. Yes, perhaps my space for creating is through writing; where really, there is almost everything I need at, or under this desk, refinished so long ago, when I was there.

In this workspace, over the whirr of hectic academic demands, I have listened to that guiding voice while time slipped away and I have seen those blue eyes twinkling through my own, leaving me feeling easy. Deep down I smile with satisfaction because I have written him on paper instead of wood and I can continue to do this whenever I need him. I know I will do it. I understand now that in my space of creating, there is almost everything I need and there is time. I am energized, filled up, content, and calm.

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The Early Bird Gets the Worm: How Early Morning Exercise Creates Inspired Learners and Educators

Heather DeLaurentis & David Howes

ABSTRACT

As the nation grapples with how to shrink the achievement gap and raise the level of achievement for all students, educators need to rethink how they deliver instruction and how students learn. Sitting in chairs all day long is not the most conducive way to learn. It is critical that schools look towards morning movement and exercise programs to stimulate increased brain activity and energize children to be ready and able to focus on their academics throughout the day.

The last bus pulled out at 3:17 p.m. It had been a hectic day and as we sat in the classroom waiting to begin a professional development session, we began to trade stories about the various behavior referrals and even a threat of a fistfight. A few colleagues and I were chatting, as we typically do at the end of a long day, about ways to keep students engaged. We teach in a small urban school where we have a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students and a dedicated staff that is working hard to improve the learning of students who are often distracted and who lack motivation with regard to their studies. We could only laugh in exasperation as we shared our favorite “sit-com” moments from the day about students who randomly pop out of their seats or chat with friends in the middle of what we consider to be interesting lessons. We all agreed that this reality and scenario is probably found in every school, in every school day, and in every kind of student. But as we got to thinking about it, we asked ourselves, “Who would want to sit all day long, between four walls, and not be encouraged or allowed to be active and move around?” It was at that moment another fitness-minded teacher and I realized rather than *philosophizing* about how a school day should be, we should *effect*

the change we wanted to see. We decided to start an early morning fitness program called “Early Birds” that would be open to all students, free of charge, and operate three days a week. Our mission was to determine if purposeful, vigorous exercise before school might have an impact on the focus and achievement of our students during the school day.

On that first morning, we really had no idea what to expect. I had butterflies all night thinking about everything that could go wrong. What if someone gets hurt? Given that we were taking students on a 1.4-mile run through the streets of downtown New London, the possibilities of problems cropping up were numerous. Waiting for the first child to arrive, I worried that we had made a terrible mistake.

On that first morning, nine students participated. We hit the pavement with one teacher in front and one teacher in back. The students were safe but not entirely motivated. Some students were walking and taking breaks while others complained of how tired they were. We found the challenge of trying to balance the different levels of motivation and ability in students as we ran outside similar to dealing with this same problem in the classroom. We asked students to run in place until their classmates caught up, and completed the mile as a group. Beyond running the 1.4 miles we wanted students to increase their heart rates to above 140 beats per minute to make sure their workout was rigorous. To accomplish this we added in sprints, relay races, and calisthenics in intervals where we measured and recorded each child’s heart rate. This allowed us to track the fitness level of every child and make sure each one was an active participant.

We had our doubts during this first day, but when I stood outside the changing rooms I knew that something positive was happening. The students were all laughing and teasing each other in an honest, accepting way, clearly enjoying the experience.

The program continued for 12 weeks until the end of the school year. The students showed considerable progress in their fitness levels. Our observations and other records indicated that these same students were also demonstrating improved motivation and focus in the classroom.

We believed that for the program to be successful it was critical that parents understood its purpose and supported it. We were pleased when a number of them began running with us in the first year to join in on the fun and to help with safety concerns. We attribute the success that time as much to the parent involvement as to the nine students who participated.

During this first year, we noticed that many students were wearing the same clothes every run, and then proceeding to wear these same clothes again to school. The students wore basketball high-tops, football cleats with holes, or whatever they could find. As 72% of our students are on free and reduced lunch, we knew that, as a group, their financial resources were limited. Yet, lacking the latest in high-tech running gear did not keep these students from showing up every morning ready to go. Clearly, we were onto something.

As we entered the second year of the Early Bird program, we wanted to reward the dedication and desire the students were exhibiting. Their team spirit and pride in their hard work and accomplishments was palpable. Yet, they still did not quite look like the team they were clearly becoming. It was at this point that we decided to make T-shirts for Early Bird members. A parent who is a tattoo artist volunteered his artistic ability and designed a logo. The school paid for the T-shirts and in 3 weeks each child was given a new Early Bird jersey! We were humbled by the reaction of the students who wore them regularly. They seemed so proud to be a part of a team, and to have earned these shirts. What began as an effort to improve student focus and achievement through exercise clearly had become much more than that. Early Birds has inspired us as teachers by providing us with a much deeper understanding of our students and a stronger connection to the community around our school.

The program is now in its third year: 42 students, 2 parents, and 6 staff members are now involved. In reflecting on our original purpose, we are left with several key questions: How does exercise impact learning? Is it just the exercise that is impacting student learning or is it something deeper and more complex? Are the relationships students are building with adults outside of the classroom in the early morning hours impacting their motivation in the classroom? Is the self-esteem that results from the students' knowledge of the physical results of hard work having an impact on their perseverance in the classroom?

We believe our Early Birds program is having an impact on student achievement for two reasons: 1. Research has shown that physical exercise and elevated heart rate do have a positive physiological impact on brain functioning and brain development (Hillman, Erickson, & Kramer, 2008). 2. Relationships built between students and adults outside of the classroom can positively impact students' perceptions of school. Our conclusion is that schools in the 21st century cannot continue to operate on the old paradigm of learning between the hours of 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. Schools today have to offer more to students including programming before and after school. By offering more meaningful activities like a fitness club before school and helping students to

see the relationship between their physical fitness and their academic success, we are noticing a significant reduction in the achievement gap. Students who are members of the Early Bird Program are demonstrating fewer behavior referrals, higher attendance rates, and higher grades. We think Early Birds is about the value of educating the whole child: their physical fitness, their self-esteem, and their academic focus. Research on the effects of exercise on adolescent brain development suggests that we are onto something important (Ratey, 2008).

In their book, *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*, Harvard psychiatrist Dr. John Ratey and Eric Hagerman (2008) document what many people have long felt, that exercise helps increase one's ability to think and perform. An increase in blood flow to the brain allows for more cellular growth of the brain cells, called neurogenesis. It is this phenomenon that is known to help the process of learning, decision-making, and other regulatory processes. The movement also helps release various chemical and hormones in the body that are linked to increased pathways in the brain (Casarez, 2010). Many people who run or exercise regularly have experienced this "feeling" of clarity and enhanced alertness. Ratey and Hagerman's book further suggests to us that the Early Bird program might provide more to our students than just enhanced focus—early bird exercise might also lead to brain cell growth.

As year three of Early Birds unfolds, we have designed the program to offer greater variety and levels of activities. In addition to distance running and calisthenics, we now also offer dance classes, floor hockey, and zumba as alternatives when some kids do not want to participate in the daily run. Offering more workout options has generated more interest in the program while allowing us to keep the group of students in each activity at a safe and manageable number. We have expanded to become year round and while our runs have grown colder, our numbers are holding steady. The students are now participating in record numbers, the smiles are always there, and recently members of the United States Coast Guard Academy have even began joining us on our morning runs! This program that started with a couple of fitness-minded teachers who wanted to see how exercise might help their overactive and antsy students has now blossomed into a school-community partnership. Students, staff, parents, and community partners are all getting into the Early Bird fitness kick. We are seeing significant results in the achievement of our Early Bird students. As previously mentioned, students who regularly attend Early Birds have stronger attendance, are earning higher grades, and have fewer behavior referrals. We are even starting to see improvement on school-wide benchmark tests and the state standardized tests for students who have participated in Early Birds for 2-3 years in a row.

What is the relationship between student achievement and socio-economic background? Research has shown that dropout rates tend to be higher for children who live in poverty (Education Week, 2012). According to the U.S. Department of Education's 2011 *Condition of Education* report, about 68 percent of 12th-graders in high-poverty schools graduated with a diploma in 2008, compared with 91 percent of 12th-graders in low-poverty schools (NCES, 2011).

Given these facts, we believe we need to look more deeply at the research on exercise and its relationship to engagement and success for students who live in poverty. In the meantime, it is our hope that our school will adopt this now informal program as part of the required school day. We are determined to help lower the achievement gap at our school, provide better options for our students, and we strive to grow students' self-esteem and self-worth. A program such as Early Birds, where students begin the day with vigorous exercise, would be a key first step. More than just feeling good, it is about building on the science of how regular and rigorous exercise impacts body chemistry, brain development, and learning (Hillman et al., 2008). We believe exercise is as vital to learning as proper nutrition. Students must be given all the tools to be successful and our public schools can do more to invest in these tools. Extending the school day will allow for such programs to enhance the day and provide needed energy outlets for students.



Fig. 1: Early bird members in full flight

According to recent data, the diagnosis of students with ADHD has increased more than 2% in the past 10 years. In an article posted by msn.com, “Nearly 1 in 10 children in the United States is being diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, according to a new government study” (Carroll, 2011). In this same article, Dr. Bradley Peterson, an ADHD expert, explained,

We are increasingly more academically, cerebrally, and intellectually focused than we were two, three, five decades ago. And our requirements for kids to do well in school – having to sit still, stay focused, and attuned – have changed over time. I think the tolerance and threshold for saying a particular child is too fidgety, too distracted, has likely changed over time, too. (Carroll, 2011)

We need to reconsider how we educate and what our school day is providing for our children. We can significantly help our kids’ health, self-esteem, and academic achievement by providing regular, rigorous exercise programs that are mandated as part of every school day. It is our hope that Early Birds will serve as a manageable model for schools to implement quickly, effectively, and continuously as part of the learning day. Our aim is to grow healthy and happy young adults who will have the tools necessary to be successful in an increasingly demanding, stressful, and fast-paced world.

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Passion by Design: Meditations on an Innovative Model

Eli Gerber

ABSTRACT

In this article the author discusses two intrinsically interrelated items: first, the past, present, and future of the educational infrastructure as well as its purpose, potential, and shortcomings; and second, the unique nature of his home school education. He further examines related elements that are conducive to the enrichment of the current educational model and also that of social development in general. His underlying goal is to inspire reflection on the importance of fully promoting passion, diversity, creativity, introspection, and innovation.

It is, in fact, nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry; for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom; without this it goes to wreck and ruin without fail. It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty. To the contrary, I believe it would be possible to rob even a healthy beast of prey of its voraciousness, if it were possible, with the aid of a whip, to force the beast to devour continuously, even when not hungry, especially if the food, handed out under such coercion, were to be selected accordingly. (Einstein, 1949, p. 17)

Overview of the Educational Infrastructure

*E*ducation has evolved into a richly dimensional and intricate topic of political, social, economic, and scientific discussion. Over the course of my fledgling academic career, I have been fortunate enough to collaborate with

many intellectually engaged people. I have observed that each one of these individuals—irrespective of their cultural, professional, and personal backgrounds—possesses a meticulously honed and definitively tenacious opinion about education. It is a topic that is often intrinsically linked with our sense of self, thus its sensitivity runs deeply in so many of us. One explanation of this phenomenon is that education is a fundamental foundation of society and civilization. In a universe where infinitesimally distinct moments form an elaborate continuum that carries us into an unknown and ever-changing future, we rely upon education to equip us with the practical and theoretical vocabularies necessary to survive and prosper, as well as to prepare the next generation for a potentially unknown future. This is no elementary task, and its daunting complexity and numerous symbioses are only magnified when one considers how the wondrous volatilities of the universe render us incapable of formulating any reasonable sort of portrait of our future world.

Despite the overwhelming nature of the role which education seems destined to play in our society, I believe that a large portion of the potential for its harmonious presence and prosperous evolution resides in the form of educational institutions and structured knowledge acquisition, though not in their current operational form. With regard to the history of human civilization, the presence of public education systems is a relatively modern phenomenon. Their existence was scarce prior to the early 19th century, when their popularity grew dramatically to meet the needs brought about by industrialization. Naturally, the primary objective of these institutions was to produce acceptable industrial workers, and the production of such was approached in a relatively industrial manner. Curricula underwent standardization and a kind of hierarchy was established among the disciplines in which one was instructed at school, with those disciplines most conducive to efficient performance in the industrial sector and on the professional scene (mathematics and language studies, for example) residing at the top. This format was quite suitable for the needs and conditions of times past, and the fundamental elements of such have remained embedded in the educational infrastructure up to the present time: the hierarchy of scholastic disciplines endures as “alternative” disciplines such as art, music, dance, drama, philosophy, and even physical education continue to grow scarcer as they are perpetually phased out of the conventional elementary/high-school curriculum model. I argue that this hierarchy is (as well as are other elements of the standard model for institutionalized education) unacceptable. It is potentially to the detriment of self-knowledge, emotional intelligence, and intellectual diversity, and results in personal alienation and underdevelopment, ultimately culminating as a manifestation of apathy, un-fulfillment, inefficiency, and cultural monotony. Clearly, the conditions and needs of the present differ greatly from those of the past. Education is ready

to evolve. The previously valid assertion that academic credentials lead directly to professional success is waning drastically. One need look no further than our planet's rapidly expanding population, coupled with statistically evident increases in matriculation from multiple levels of education at an exponential rate around the world (UNESCO, 2011). Diplomas and standardized, certified knowledge acquisition are still vital to success in many domains, but are no longer sufficient alone.

So what is true success, and what is the secret to obtaining it? Simply put, success can be defined in the utilitarian terms of pain and pleasure (not unlike those commonly employed by 18th-century philosopher Jeremy Bentham), namely, that a successful person maximizes the latter and minimizes the former in all aspects of his or her existence. This is quite straightforward. A functional and progressive society, therefore, is one in which all members must work in order to contribute to their own pleasure, hence the pleasure and conducive progress or "success" of the whole. The more time we spend working in this manner, the more prosperity we can expect to experience as individuals and as a society. I would further argue that we experience pleasure when we are nurturing our passions.

In an organic world of relativity and perceptual bias both outwardly and inwardly directed, this notion of self-derived pleasure and fulfillment provides a very satisfactory (although abstract) definition of "success." Consider the relevance of this passage from "The Wealth of Nations" by 18th-century philosopher and economist Adam Smith (1776): "By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it" (pp. 488–489). Does there exist a worthy description of a utopian society that is not established upon the profound transcendental satisfaction and productivity of its members?

Although this definition may resonate deeply with the minority whose passions are already flourishing, others may merely view it as a romanticized dramatization of a delusive, ecstatic paradise. The occidental world has always supported the feeding of an obsession with a breed of radical individualism or "cult of the individual or celebrity," which displays a rather absurd and dissuasive tendency to favor destiny, fate, and uncanny natural ability over self-knowledge and discipline as the most prominent sources of the aforementioned definition of success.

An ideal educational system is therefore one whose design is most conducive to establishing an environment in which individuals are provided with the resources necessary to locate their passions, learn to nurture and hone them, and apply/pursue them as a means to the evolving and progressing pleasure and prosperity of their

individual selves and society on the whole. It should embody self-discovery and knowledge-of-self, community and communication, discipline, diversity, creativity, and a dynamic ability to learn both independently and with others.

This seemingly utopian, yet simple formulation fails to take into account that passion, talent, and intelligences are diverse as well as local. Earth boasts an ever-expanding population of billions of human beings, each a potentially passionate, successful, and fulfilled individual. The range of these varied passions is simply huge, and the validity of each is justified by the definition of an individual, authentic self. The problem is that such a massively diverse spectrum of people, talents, intelligences, and passions calls for an educational system which consists of an equally diverse, personalized, and localized curriculum conducive to meeting the conditions under which society and its members may flourish. Such an approach must be organic rather than linear, in the sense that the comprehensive diversity of human passion and intelligence must be respected by initially facilitating introspection, self-knowledge, and academic independence at an early age, and by providing the resources necessary to refine and cultivate talents, intelligences, and passions. It entails the design of personalized curricula adapted to the respective strengths, weaknesses, and interests of its students, regardless of any impersonal predetermined prospects of success that may influence students' available educational resources or progressions.

This is far from the industrial, non-local, and impersonal "take it or leave it" system in which human diversity and potential is stifled by the aforementioned "disciplinary hierarchy." We cannot continue to sanction the conformity of authentic individuals to an outdated and unnecessary educational mould without actively endorsing alienation, indifference, and ignorance on a personal and societal scale.

My Unique Home School Experience

I was born in 1992 (in the Laurentian mountains some 100 kilometres north of Montreal). I am the first child of two professional artists: my father, an American composer, instrumentalist, and vocalist, and my mother, an Anglo-Canadian ceramic artist and educator. When I was young, my parents made the decision not to enroll me in a formal educational institution, after experiencing several encounters with children and adolescents who had been educated using alternative methods. This decision was further bolstered by the inadequate academic and social standards of the institutions available in the area. It is worth noting that both of my parents lead successful, active, passionate lives as well as highly fulfilling professional careers.

After I was born, my father continued to support the family financially by composing, performing, and recording music, while my mother largely assumed the role of educator until I began secondary-level study. Every day for several years I was given what seemed like an endless amount of time to explore nature and cultivate a harmonious relationship with flora and fauna (and eventually their nomenclature and mechanics). I was also immersed in many diverse environments and circumstances, which I was constantly encouraged to analyze and critique. I believe that a great deal of introspection, observation, and critical thinking occurred during numerous experiences over this period. Here is a typical memory from a day in my seven-year-old life: The forest. Barreling up a Laurentian mountainside with my mother, reciting lessons in arithmetic and grammar aloud, enveloped by the tranquility of a crisp, country morning. Upon reaching the summit, we consult a plant field guide and spend the next few hours recognizing, classifying, studying, and drawing an abundance of native botanic specimens. Returning home, I help my mother in the kitchen and summarize my discoveries and reflections of the morning's exploits (over a homemade lunch prepared using fresh vegetables from our backyard garden), perhaps recording them in a journal. The afternoon would be dedicated to practicing Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, and in the evening, we would select stories and poetry which we would read to one another before bedtime.

Our home had an enormous selection of literary material, which I was encouraged to study at an early age, and my parents frequently read to me from a vast collection of classic children's literature including the works of Aesop, Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll, and Mark Twain. My literary skills began to take shape at age three, and by age five I was reading Time Magazine (among many other publications) and had acquired a more dynamic initiative in the selection of the media that I was to consume (although television hours were a scarce occurrence, not to mention nonexistent during my early childhood). Given that my parents were accomplished, educated artists, exposure to a comprehensive spectrum of creative mediums was inevitable. I was introduced to drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramic, poetry, dance, theatre, and, most importantly, music. As both of my parents were pianists (my father a professional), I devoted many hours to playing and practicing classical and contemporary piano pieces guided by their teachings (when I became a teenager I transposed the practice of piano to the guitar). Many lessons were communicated via musical mediums both theoretical and intuitive, and music has remained a fundamental element of my cultural, professional, and expressive existence. I have been performing music alone and with my father since I was a young child, and still spend a great deal of time practicing and studying music each day. In addition to musical stimulation, I routinely accompanied my parents to the museum where we would study pieces and draw them for hours on end.

But my educational resources were not limited to my family's initiative and my own personal means: we became loosely affiliated with a local "resource group" of families who had chosen "alternative" approaches to their children's education, and many classes/activities in the realms of science, art, languages, and physical education were organized either by members of the community or by selected specialists. In addition, I took part in numerous pedagogical and social activities involving friends who attended traditional school. Although I have always been characteristically introverted, I still enjoyed an extensive social life. In general, my early childhood was a period of exploration, immersion, and stimulation with respect to culture, intellectual/literary skills, and the physical world. I did not begin to develop any type of structured, regimented academic schedule until age eight, when I displayed a particular interest in mathematics and the sciences. Even though I had to devote many more hours to my studies at this time, I was still given much freedom to indulge in other activities such as music and athletics.

As for my scholastic endeavors, the attention, effort, and instruction that I received from my parents (particularly my mother) and also from outside sources remained significant until I began secondary-level education and started to exercise more initiative in setting my own goals. My interests and passions were gradually refined to include mathematics, physics, music, and athletics (particularly the Korean martial art of Taekwondo), each of which I actively pursue to this day. From then on, I became primarily responsible for my education. Most of my time was devoted to the study, practice, and exploration of these interests and passions. I acquired numerous courses and textbooks to study, conducted and recorded experiments, practiced and performed music, trained competitively and recreationally in Taekwondo—even though the discipline required to do so stemmed not from expectation or imposition, but from within myself. My greatest asset was not natural talent, but the ability to establish and pursue goals (as well as acquire knowledge) independently, rigorously, and confidently. By age 16 I had enrolled in a correspondence program and eventually obtained official certification for many courses including those of the standard curriculum. I am currently studying science at Marianopolis College, and plan to study physics at university.

Conclusion

Education is intricately interconnected with virtually every aspect of society. Perhaps the concept of a utopian infrastructure is simply fictional, but there are always improvements to be made. I have been truly blessed by unusual and extraordinary circumstances with regard to my family and the people around me, opportunities available to me and the encouragement to pursue them. While my own unique experiences certainly do not in any way amount to an enlightening example of some objectively valid ideal, I believe that there are elements of such experiences which could be very conducive to the design of an organic, personalized, and dynamic educational model that promotes and celebrates self-knowledge, creativity, discipline, passion, and diversity among current and future citizens of the world.

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Eli Gerber was born in 1992 and educated independently of traditional schooling. He is a professional musician, a student, and Taekwondo practitioner who has held several regional, provincial, national and North American tournament titles. He is currently studying science at Marianopolis College with the ambition of becoming a physicist.



Museum Art in Everyday Life

Corrine E. Glesne

ABSTRACT

Art museums engage diverse audiences in multiple forms of learning. Based on qualitative research at seven academic institutions, this article focuses on the role academic art museums play in the everyday life of students and faculty, on how people become interested in art and art museums, and on possible contributions of campus art museums beyond use in classes and research.

With art museums or exhibition galleries included in at least 700 academic institutions in the United States (Russell & Spencer, 2000), the academic art museum contributes to the formal education of many. Art museum educators reach out to children in public schools and develop programs for the college or university. Increasingly, museums also hire an academic curator or educator to assist faculty across the disciplines in incorporating art into teaching, assignments, and research (Goethals & Fabing, 2007; Villeneuve, 2007). Less recognized is the role of campus art museums in informal education, in contributing to the *everyday* lives of people. This article focuses on such contributions.

Sponsored by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, this study involved interviews and observations at seven colleges or universities, identified as having exemplary art museums.¹ Each museum had received a Kress Study Collection² around fifty years ago, but the institutions varied widely on indicators such as private/public, large/small campus populations, and rural/urban locations. One hundred twenty-nine people were interviewed, including students, faculty, museum directors and staff, campus administrators, and others such as security staff and community volunteers.

When the opportunity to inquire into the ways in which exemplary art museums are integrated into campus life arose, I was intrigued. I am neither an artist nor an art historian. I have never worked in a museum nor taken classes in museum studies. Yet, I am a firm believer in the necessity for each of us to link with some form of creativity and as the study unfolded, I became a champion of multiple creative possibilities associated with academic art museums. As I listened to professors across the disciplines—language, history, literature, biology, math, business, and more—describe ways in which they used the art museum in their classes, I was chagrined that I had never considered such options during my seventeen years as a university professor, other than to take a class or two to a relevant exhibit. The ways in which the art museum is used in academic classes is a topic for another article. The focus here on informal learning matters as well because, as interviewees told me, what's important is "getting them through the door." Then the art and didactics become the educators and muses.

This article begins with descriptions of the roles art museums can fill, other than use in teaching and research. Nearly three-fourths of study participants were involved in the arts—teaching, studying, or working at art museums. Many of those remaining interacted in some way with art museums. The second section, therefore, focuses on how interviewees became engaged with art and art museums. The third section attends to *how* participants talked about what art and art museums mean for their lives. This article concludes with thoughts about what having a campus art museum may contribute to an institution and the people who study and work there.



Fig. 1: Ernesto

Engaging Beyond the Classroom

A thin, wiry man stood in front of a painting, clasping a clipboard with a clump of recycled paper in his left hand. He stood still in meditation and then began to sketch rapidly. He placed his sketch on the floor below the painting and moved

on to the next where he meditated and sketched again. I followed, looking first at the sketch on the floor and then up at the art work to find the details he had captured. Then, I found myself looking first at the painting and thinking what I would choose to document if I were the performance artist. Only then did I compare the image in my mind with that on the floor. I learned later that others did the same. For an entire day, from opening to closing, Ernesto Pujol documented the art on view within the Spencer Museum of Art. He did so silently, without a break, leaving a trail of drawings in a performance he called "Visitation." His work was a catalyst for others to dialogue, without words, with museum art and artist—visitors were welcomed to make their own sketches and leave them on the floor. Inspiring a fresh look at the art in the galleries, Pujol, at the end of the day, backed out of the museum and bowed in meditation as museum staff closed the doors. (Field notes, March 15, 2011)

Art museum staff trust the power of intrinsic motivation, of people's ability to learn through individual interests when *engaged*. One museum director said, "I'm a firm believer that the best education is actually self-education....*engage* students to be so compelled by something that they will follow up. So, the real issue is to get them in the door and get them in to look" (Personal communication, November 3, 2011). "It's about getting students into the museum," stated a student. "Once you see one thing in the museum, you want to see another thing. It's kind of like a contagious type thing" (Personal communication, November 5, 2010). Once people visit museums, they tend to return. They make use of the museums on their own, taking friends and guests, or seeking refuge when a quiet space is needed.

Finding Solace and Inspiration

Upon entering the University of Arizona Museum of Art, I walked up the stairs and saw to my right a wide doorway with gold lettering above it: "The Samuel H. Kress Collection The Altarpiece from Ciudad Rodrigo." The lighting and color of the steel blue room made the twenty-six large panels from the Fifteenth Century altarpiece of the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Ascension in Rodrigo, Spain virtually glow. In other galleries, visitors tend to enter and immediately go from one painting to the next, reading labels and studying the work. Here, they come in and stop, their eyes spanning the walls of the room, taking it all in, as one would do upon entering a basilica or great architectural space. Then, they go from one panel to the next, voices lowered to whispers. It's a place of reverence, reflection, and learning. As a student described:

When you walk into that space and you see the religious art and the figures, it's just, you feel like, oh, like wow, this is very beautiful.... My favorite thing...is Friday afternoons, they have guitar playing and that is amazing...They have chairs in the Kress Gallery and everyone sits in it, there are so many people sometimes that they're standing, and the guitarists play and it's really amazing. (Field notes, January 26, 2011)



Fig. 2: Retablo entrance

Some faculty and students liken particular works of art to “family” and say that whenever they have a few minutes, they visit. A professor in the sciences said, “I have a favorite gallery. There’s a painting up there that’s my favorite in this building and if I’ve got five minutes, I’ll go up and say ‘hello’” (Personal communication, March 15, 2011). When art history or studio art departments are located near the museums, students frequently visit over class breaks, as one undergraduate described: “I’ll come up for ten minutes and just go look at something I like.” This student talked about how seeing things in the museum led her to want to know more and so she would use particular pieces in assignments: “I’ve seen things that I like that because I like them, I’ve used them in papers, but I liked them like months before I’ve gotten an assignment and so when I’ve got the assignment, I’ve used them” (Personal communication, March 15, 2011). A graduate student spoke about how he visited the campus art museum as a way to unwind, but in the process, he would become inspired: “I feel

it is a release to come here and just relax and to look at other people's prints rather than work on my own. I feel it really helps me process how I want to further my own work, my own education by looking at these material objects that are collected here" (Personal communication, March 16, 2011).

The campus art museum is thereby used as a solo experience for those seeking quiet moments of reflection, introspection, inspiration, or pleasure. It is used also as a social space to share with others. Students, faculty, and community members saw the campus art museum as a place to take family or friends, as exemplified by this undergraduate's comment:

I feel like I evangelize when I'm in the museum. I tend to bring everyone here. If someone wants to meet up for coffee, I say, "Hey, we should just go to the art museum because it's free"...I've met blind dates here because it's a safe space and the guards know me...I bring my family every time they come to town. (Personal communication, March 16, 2011)

The museum is thus a venue that some people seek out and make frequent use of, taking others with them from time to time. Nonetheless, museum personnel and students on all the campuses talked about the challenge of getting students and faculty, particularly those in disciplines other than the arts, to come to the museum. Museum staff, student groups, and community associations all work to create and host social events to entice others "in the door," so that they may connect in some way with art.

Engaging Through Social Events

March. Not yet warm, but yellow-green leaves are beginning to outline bare branches of trees. At the University of Missouri's Museum of Art and Archaeology, people are setting up "Art in Bloom," an annual event where local florists and garden club members create flower arrangements inspired by a work of art in the museum. I was in the director's basement office when I looked out the high windows and saw, wheeling by, an arrangement so large that two carts had been tied together. On opening night, children to the elderly filled the museum and strolled from room to room to look at the flower arrangements paired with works of art. Along with a description of each floral entry and the accompanying art piece, visitors receive a ballot so they can vote on favorites in various categories that ingeniously guided viewers to think about the color, texture, and movement of the floral arrangements and the works of art. (Field notes, March 18, 2011)



Fig. 3: Art in bloom

Social events are organized with the hope of linking an event with a visit to the galleries. Some social events, such as exhibition openings, lectures, and artist demonstrations, are free. Others, such as art auctions or banquets, are fund-raisers. *Allen After Hours* is popular in Oberlin where once a month the museum opens its doors in the evening. Music (often played by Oberlin Conservatory students) and food accompany a planned event, such as an artist demonstration or talk. The Snite Museum of Art creates special programs on football Saturdays, making the museum part of the tailgate parties by welcoming students, parents, and alumni returning for games at Notre Dame. The College of Arts and Letters collaborates with the Snite and provides *Saturday Scholars* lectures at noon in the museum on football Saturdays. At the University of Chicago, *Sketching at the Smart* is an ongoing program coordinated by the David and Alfred Smart Museum in conjunction with the studio and visual arts departments. Once a quarter, the Smart hires a model to pose in the lobby of the museum and invites students, staff, and community members to come and sketch. The museum provides paper and other art-making supplies and graduate students in the Department of Visual Art provide instruction, if desired.

Social events directed towards students tend to have one thing in common: food. Some events are creative innovations of a particular place, but ideas that work spread quickly. For example, the Smart holds *Study at the Smart* right before finals, a suggestion by a faculty member, as described by Smart personnel:

We were trying to think of ways to engage UC students, their dorms are right here. You can throw a rock and break a window but students don't come to the museum for public programs.... They don't really come to hang out and just have fun or relax because the degree programs are very rigorous here. So he, half-jokingly, said, "You should just have a study program because all the students do is spend time at the library anyway." UC has this moniker "Where fun goes to die," so we decided to have a study program and keep the museum open until 1 AM at the start of reading period and just set up tables and power strips for computers and have free coffee and food and see what happens. (Personal communication, November 9, 2010)

On the evening of *Study at the Smart*, the museum opens to students at nine in the evening and the students are ready. One museum staff member stated, "They are waiting outside the door and then they camp out. They are sprawled on the floors of the galleries, they take off their shoes... It's a social thing and it's a motivating thing for them to get organized for reading period and it's a space that's different from the library" (Personal communication, November 9, 2010). At 11 p.m., trays of food are set out in the lobby for a study break. Students who might never come to the museum otherwise come to *Study at the Smart*. The Spencer Museum has also begun a study night event during finals. Their academic director "got the ball rolling" and she happens to have studied at the University of Chicago. Students and the museums work together to attract campus students to the museums, hoping they will feel comfortable there, see things of interest, and return on their own.

Possibly the most popular program that informally engages students across disciplines in art appreciation is the *Art Rental Program* at the Allen Memorial Art Museum (2011) at Oberlin College. An assistant curator stated, "I was over at a friend's house last night—she's a senior, has her own off-campus house, and she had a Picasso in the living room" (Personal communication, September 29, 2010). The student had the Picasso as part of the Art Rental Program. The tradition began over 70 years ago. Students rent at a nominal fee (\$5) a work of art for a semester from an art rental collection of nearly 400 objects (Allen Memorial Art Museum, 2011). Students begin camping out the night before rental begins, as museum staff described, "It's interesting to watch students...some of the people who camp out, they just like really get into the thrill of it and they aren't necessarily the people who know a lot about the art or get that excited about art otherwise, but they feel passionate about this" (Personal communication, September 29, 2010). An art history professor added,

The kids slept out on the sidewalk over night and they ran out of pieces. There is this intensity here which really makes it wonderful.... There's nothing that compares to the primacy of the actual object....It is magical...and the kids just thrive on that. (Personal communication, September 29, 2010)



Fig. 3: Art in bloom

An undergraduate stated that the ability to “have the art in your apartment takes away from that stigma of art being like something that can only be understood or enjoyed by the elite” (Personal communication, September 30, 2010). The art rental collection is not a compilation of the least valuable works in the museum, but rather a range of works by well-known to lesser-known artists. Each semester some lucky student gets to hang a Picasso or a Toulouse-Lautrec on her or his apartment wall, and in the process, informally learns about art and art appreciation.

Learning Through Work

Work experiences at the museum are helping students decide on majors or careers. Some work for wages; some obtain units of credit in return for labor; and some have fellowships and receive a stipend plus tuition and fee waivers. As a rule, all more than enjoy their work at the museum, they are enthusiastic. The following quotation is an example:

The reason I am here at the art museum is that my parents, when I was a freshman coming here to the University of Arizona, they said “you need to get a job before you get there.” So I...started looking online and they had a posting for the business office, sort of an assistant... and I got the job... A little bit into my job, I got asked to help with an exhibition and I said, “sure.” And now I’m kind of all over the place. I help with exhibitions and with the business office too, so my new title is *curatorial museum assistant*... It’s fun to know the process of how art goes up on the wall and to, you know, very carefully measure everything and you’ll be standing there and the curator will ask, even us, the students, “Does this look okay? What do you think about this? Will you look at this? When you walk in, how do you feel?” It’s really cool to be part of that. I’ve been a part of every tiny little thing in the museum... I’ve spent lots of time here and am very happy here. (Undergraduate student, personal communication, January 26, 2011)

Through hands-on learning, students become familiar with planning and preparing exhibition space, curating a show, writing labels, handling and storing art, record keeping, provenance research, leading tours and educating others about art, and security concerns; in other words, with the many tasks associated with running an art museum. The work often changes, giving students multiple museum experiences. An interesting paradox is that some of the museums with the fewest resources rely heavily on students’ input and work to remain active. As a result, those students appear to receive even more responsibility and experiences in museum work than in museums with more resources.

How People Become Interested in Art and Art Museums

Not everyone is attracted to the visual arts. Why do some become interested? What happens that they not only become enamored with visual art but also, perhaps, choose a career that allows them to be immersed in art or museum life? From this study, four factors seem to have the greatest influence: experiences with art growing up, experiences visiting art museums, a course or courses, and work in an art museum or gallery.

Often, a combination of these factors coalesced to encourage study participants to pursue studies, work, and/or frequent interactions with art and museums.

One led to another as when growing up in an art-centered environment set the stage for taking courses in studio art and/or art history which culminated in a degree in the arts and subsequent arts-based work. Growing up in an environment where people make art or appreciate various forms of art helps greatly to set the context for being associated with art throughout one's life. About a third of respondents reported this as their primary reason for involvement in the arts and art museums.

Visits to art museums tend to be part of growing up in an environment friendly to the arts, but sometimes museum interactions took place later on and were particularly meaningful for the individual. The art museum was especially important as a means for engaging faculty, administrators, and alumni who had not pursued studies or careers in visual arts. For many in this group, their prior interactions with art museums made them want to share the experience. They made use of the art museum in their classes and supported the campus art museum in various ways.

A course (generally an art history course) that a student just happened to take to fulfill liberal arts and humanities requirements or signed up for because it was receiving rave reviews from other students worked to interest others in art and art museums. This group had not necessarily received early socialization into the arts.

Yet others found their niche or at least expanded their interest in art and art museums through work or internships with museums. Some in this group knew nothing about art and art museums before getting a job with a museum; others were interested in art or art history but became more intrigued with museums through their work and decided to pursue museum careers. People, therefore, become interested in art and art museums through several different paths, often through experiential means, rather than formal education. How do they talk about what that interest means for their lives?

Art Talk: How People Speak of the Role of Art and Art Museums in Their Lives

I love it when I hear a college student say, "I had no idea art spoke like this." (Curator of Education, personal communication, November 3, 2010)

The words *captured*, *inspired*, *spoke*, *struck*, and *fell in love* often appear in interviewees' transcripts. They remember being struck by some work of art, stopped

in their tracks, virtually unable to move. They talk about ways in which museum objects inspire them in their own art endeavors or in life in general. They reflect upon art that helps them make connections, that allows ideas, thoughts, or plans to click into place. A few spoke of personal revelations. Respondents also found it difficult to fully express what art had meant for them, not because it was without meaning, but because art is a different language and that is, perhaps, the source of its strongest impact. As a different language, it allows other ways of viewing the world, other ways of being in the world.

Many respondents have vivid memories of being caught by a particular painting or museum exhibition, affected deeply, and sometimes set on a course for further explorations of and experiences with visual arts, as in the following account:

When I was twelve, my mother and father took us all to Europe and I remember the moment where everybody else was sort of going through, "Ok, we've seen this and we've seen this," and I'm dead stuck in front of a Degas drawing. I have this incredible awareness of the pastels...and the paper and that creative imagination, that creative expression, merging... And, I have to say, I was never the same. I knew... this was a place for me to find myself, this art world place, and worlds within worlds, and that has never left me. In hard times and good times, I can still find myself there. ...Visual Arts started there for me, twelve years old, in the Louvre. (Campus art museum director, personal communication, March 17, 2011)

Sometimes such moments were matched with serendipity. The emotions evoked by art brought clearly to the forefront something one wanted to pursue, as for this woman who became a docent for a campus art museum:

I was in the art institute in Chicago and said, "I could just stay here for the rest of my life." ...It was like a wish. And I said, "Oh, I just wish I could stay here." And when I got back to Bloomington, there was a thing in the paper about becoming a docent and doing a lot of stuff in the museum, and that was that. (Personal communication, November 5, 2010)

For others, their interest in art grew slowly until multiple experiences culminated in a realization of the role it could play in their lives. A student at Indiana University described how she came to her decision to major in art education.

I wouldn't say I grew up with the arts in my life. My parents—we definitely went to museums, but it was always something that was boring, you know, but I think still that instilled a creative side from those experiences.... it took me a while to realize what I wanted to do. I knew that I wanted to work with people.... I went to psychology for a little bit, I went to sociology and I took a few art history courses and I think my "ah ha" moment was realizing that art can affect people.... My interest is more in art education and using art to expand people's world, to have a more open mind through art... (Personal communication, November 4, 2010)

Respondents talked about the power of art to move them and to cause them to see differently. A student security guard described a Rothko, her favorite work in the campus art museum, as "a feeling that is painted rather than an image, a subconscious feeling" (Personal communication, January 26, 2011). A math senior who had helped create an exhibit on math and art, said:

I don't think I could ever look at some things the same way again. I'm taking an art history course now. Art is like math. It is all structure and patterns. Math and art describe the abstract. I couldn't have told you that a year ago. This work has really shaped my worldview. Things take on new forms. (Personal communication, January 26, 2011)

Art is a language that can be sensual, emotional, and analytical.

Influences and Impacts of Campus Art Museums

The student quoted at the end of the previous section was part of a team of three math students and curator who produced an exhibition at the University of Arizona Museum of Art, called *The Aesthetic Code: Unraveling the Secrets of Art*. It developed, as described by the curator:

I wanted to do an exhibition on math and art....I thought it would be really interesting and we could talk about the golden ratio and fractals and all this stuff that honestly I didn't personally understand when I first started... I called up the person who is in charge of the listserv in the math department and I said... "Put in there that I'm looking for math students who are interested in art to come and mathematically analyze works in our collection...."

And so I got these three students.... We were definitely the blind leading the blind at first. We didn't know what we would find and ...after a while we sort of trained our own eyes and got really good at seeing them right away, which pieces would have relationships that we could utilize and talk about. ...We started with the hardest parts, we started with golden ratio and color and optics and fractals. We started at the high level and one day I had this epiphany because I was having trouble pulling it all together, "oh, we have to start with line...." (Personal communication, January 25, 2011)

The exhibition explored mathematic and design principles that artists have used for centuries. Combing through works from the museum's collection, the students and curator chose art appropriate for demonstrating each concept from line to tessellations. The accompanying text was crafted to explain the concepts to someone not necessarily familiar with either art or math. Students who had never visited the museum before attended the talk by one of the math students and a math professor. Public school and university teachers used the exhibition in classes. The exhibition also provided a compelling forum for informal learning.

In addition to their significant contribution to courses and research, campus art museums affect people in their everyday lives and, consequently, their institutions. For some, the campus art museum was a deciding factor in their decision to attend a particular school or to accept a position. One student reflected on the role of the Snite in her attraction to Notre Dame:

Actually I had never visited the art department before I was accepted. I came here for conferences related to art... and I came to the Snite on both occasions because I usually gravitate towards museums wherever I go. I was incredibly impressed with the collection. I was expecting it to be very small and unimpressive—university museums don't have to be that large, so when I saw it, I was very impressed. So when I was accepted, that was definitely something that factored into my decision. (Personal communication, November 10, 2010)

A studio arts professor also was impressed by the Snite during her employment interview:

I was aware of the museum when I came here because of the pre-Columbian collection. That really interested me... I was actually kind of blown away when I...saw it. Part of the interview was to visit the museum—it was part of

everything the university could offer. (Personal communication, November 10, 2010)

Might this student and professor have gone to Notre Dame if the campus had no art museum? Professors at several institutions said that since faculty positions are difficult to find, they most likely would have gone somewhere without a museum, if that were the only choice available, but that they are happy to be at schools with museums with extensive collections. Students, however, have more choices about which institution to attend and those who already have an interest in art history, museum studies, or arts in general are likely to opt, if they can, for a school with a good art museum.

The influence of art museums on helping to determine students' careers is significant. "I probably wouldn't have realized I wanted to have a career in the arts if it hadn't been for the museum. It has helped me discover what I want to do," stated an Indiana University student (Personal communication, November 4, 2010). Others made similar comments. This impact most often comes through the opportunity for students to work at the museum. Some students who begin their studies planning to become art history professors or studio artists discover, through jobs at the museum, that they want a career with museums. Some students from non-visual arts disciplines learn through work at museums that they want to pursue museum studies. Some students from across the disciplines who have the opportunity to be docents for public school groups or to work with children through museum education programs, decide that they want to continue working in museum education.

Students who worked at the museums talked about how they felt "privileged" to have intimate contact with art and access to programs and speakers. That the museums' collections included works by famous artists and ranged over extensive periods of history and cultures gave students a sense of pride in the museums, as well as in the institutions they attended. "You really care about what's here," stated a University of Arizona student (Personal communication, January 26, 2011). Another student, talking about the Allen Memorial Art Museum, said, "It gives us a certain amount of pride and ownership. It's *our* Monet. It makes me proud to go to Oberlin" (Personal communication, September 30, 2010).

Interaction with art and art museums can influence future avocations of students. A 1958 science graduate became interested in art through a class. As a hobby, he became an art collector and later a donor to his campus art museum, created an endowed fund for collecting contemporary works, and was serving on the museum's advisory committee.

The campus art museum may also affect visitors' perspectives, identities, and emotions. Many talked about how being around art and creativity made them "happy" or how just being in the museum was peaceful, and even if working in the museum, they found the job relaxing. A recent survey of over 50,000 adults in Norway observed that people who engage in artistic activities or partake in "receptive" cultural activities such as visiting museums and the theater feel in better health and enjoy life more than people who do not (Cuypers et al., 2011). A museum director mentioned a visiting speaker who addressed museums' contributions to well-being:

One of the things she pointed out was that medical studies have been done where people inside museums exhibit lower blood pressure and the lessening of stress because they recognize museums as sort of sacred and safe places and respected places, good places to be. (Personal communication, November 3, 2010)

The impact of art museums that resonated most with me, however, was how standing in front of a Degas or Rothko or Giovanni Bernardi rendered the viewer "dead stuck" as the art lit a spark of creativity deep within, that spark of profound imagining that enlivens and changes lives. I have spent my life as an educator and am distressed by current emphases on test scores and technical skills that push the arts to the sidelines, or eliminate them altogether. The art museums I visited were working to counterbalance this technocratic impulse. I agree with an art history professor who stated, "Art is one of the fundamental things that defines the human experience and the human condition." He continued:

the urge to create, the urge to respond to the world around us through imagery, through colors, through space, and when it is done at a high level... it is profoundly moving and exulting and enriching. It enriches life. It can give us pleasure, it can also disturb us... it can cause us to see the world in different ways. It can bring us to experiences and emotions that we haven't had before... Anything you can think of in the world is transformed through art and given back to you in a way you never thought of before. And sort of turn this around. When you look at a Sudlow³ landscape...and then you go drive through the country, you see it a different way because Sudlow taught you to see it. (Personal communication, March 16, 2011)

Many sorts of interactions are taking place in campus art museums, resulting not only in sites of learning, but also in locations of connection, creativity, inspiration, and deep pleasure.

Duncan Cameron (1971/2004) in *The Museum: A Temple or a Forum*, states that many museums cannot decide whether they want to remain a temple or become a forum for “confrontation and experimentation.” *Temple* and *forum* were not metaphors generally used by study participants. They are useful, however, for describing how, increasingly, the perception and role of the campus art museum is changing. As a temple, the museum holds precious gems and people make pilgrimages to stand before great works of art. As a forum, the museum is a catalyst for various kinds of interactions that might be more like a laboratory for the mixing of people and ideas. The thriving campus art museum is one that embraces its role as facilitator for all kinds of dialogues, research, performances, exhibitions, and experiences. It welcomes diverse and interdisciplinary perspectives. It sees its role as serving a population much broader than the arts community and it seeks to make a difference not only in the academic lives of students and faculty but also in their day-to-day lives.

Notes

1. The seven art museums include: Indiana University Art Museum, Snite Museum of Art (University of Notre Dame), Allen Memorial Art Museum (Oberlin College), University of Arizona Museum of Art, David and Alfred Smart Museum (University of Chicago), Spencer Museum of Art (University of Kansas), and University of Missouri Museum of Art and Archaeology.
2. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Kress Foundation donated works of primarily Italian Renaissance art to 18 regional art galleries and 23 college and university art museums. The gifting to academic art museums was known as the Kress “Study Collection Program” and involved more than 200 paintings, many of them old masters, sculptures, and other objects (*History of the Kress Collection, n.d.*).
3. Robert Sudlow (1920-2010) was a landscape painter who taught in the College of Fine Arts at the University of Kansas.

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Of Necessity: Making Decisions About Our Daughter's Early Learning Years

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ABSTRACT

Parents play significant roles in their children's learning. Part of those roles include making decisions about when and where their children go to school, or, if those decisions are, or seem, impossible, parents make decisions about how they are going to navigate this apparently inevitable relationship—parents and schools. This article explores some decisions two parents made about their daughter's learning as she headed into school, and during her early school years. The author is aware that not all parents would, or even could, make some of the decisions he made with his partner about their child's learning. The stories contained in this article are offered not as examples of what constitutes good parenting, or good decision-making about relationships with schools, but as reflective pathways into understanding how difference locates us within expected relationships.

When our daughter came to us, she was four-and-a-half years old and we were both forty-five. When some of our friends, around the same age as us, were involved in helping their children make decisions about university or college, or were babysitting their grandchildren while the young(er) new parents were out job-hunting, my partner and I were looking at beginning school options for our daughter. We were aware of our difference, this was only one of them, and we loved our new life with our daughter.

One of the first decisions we had to make was when and where to start our daughter in junior kindergarten; we lived in Ontario at the time where junior

kindergarten was an option. The decision was simplified when one of the social workers we worked with through the adoption process said not to bother because it was more important that our daughter have bonding time with us than it was that she have experiences in school. Although the bond my partner and I formed with our daughter was as close to immediate as one could get (love at first sight), we understood what the social worker was saying; we had also read lots about attachment. So, at least that first decision was easy. Our daughter, who had already begun junior kindergarten in other school settings, skipped the rest of it when she came to us.

To be the stay-at-home parent, my partner had taken a long-term parental leave from his work as a gardener; I returned to teaching elementary school after my two new parent days off. Our daughter stayed home. We cocooned. We read. We played. We did art activities. We explored our backyard, our neighbourhood, and our community. When I was there, we did them all as a family. When I was not there, my partner and our daughter did them together, and then told me about them when I came home. Most of our family and friends understood our need to be alone those first weeks. Not all did, however. We soon learned that becoming parents changed more than what we did together on a day-to-day basis. It changed how people, even how family and friends, responded to us and to our decisions; it changed how they perceived us—how they judged us. This may have been a foreshadowing for some of what was going to happen in schools. Perhaps it was, but we were so in love with our daughter, and with this new role, parenting, we did not, or did not want to, notice.

When the summer of what would have been the end of our daughter's junior kindergarten year was approaching, my partner and I moved back into planning for her beginning school—for senior kindergarten. I was a public school educator who believed strongly in public education; I still do. It made sense, therefore, that we turned to our local public school as the first stop. My partner went in with our daughter to pick up the necessary forms. We wanted her to feel included in this process; going to visit the school was part of the process. My partner's initial impressions, which he chose not to immediately share with me, were not positive. He later told me that the principal looked at them, then looked away and walked back into his office. The secretary, however, was much more inviting and gave them the forms with instructions on how to complete them. We filled out the forms at home and returned them to the school. Our daughter was registered in kindergarten. Then, we started to worry. Would everything be okay? Would she be welcomed? Would her differences be celebrated or would she be made to feel that they were something to not be proud of? Would her teachers be sensitive? Would her principals be kind?

Were these questions that all parents asked themselves as their child approached school, or were these questions my partner and I were asking because our daughter is adopted and because we are same-sex parents? Were we more worried because our daughter would be entering school in the same school board I had worked in for many years? This was a board in which, and with which, I had engaged in struggles around homophobia and heterosexism, and where I had sometimes heard stereotypical language, and not only from students, about children's differences—including about children who were fostered or adopted. It was, eventually, a board I would resign from because I felt I no longer belonged there. When our daughter came to us, I made a promise to myself, and, in doing so, to our daughter, not to fight my equity battles over her body. I was also worried, even fearful, that "the sins of the father," in this particular board, might be visited on the daughter.

It was in the middle of those questions, those worries, those fears, that my partner told me that he had reservations about the neighbourhood school because of the unwelcoming actions of the principal. I decided to call the school and ask a few questions. I spoke with the principal and said that our daughter was registered in kindergarten, that we wanted him to know that she was adopted, and that she was coming from a home with same-sex parents—that she had two dads. The principal immediately told me that that would not be a problem unless our daughter said something about it in the school yard. (Not exactly, or even near, a response I was hoping for. Of course our daughter would be talking about her parents in the school yard; she was talking about us everywhere she went.) I said to the principal that I was hoping for something a little more proactive. I was aware of the equity documents developed by the school board, so I made a point of mentioning the documents, and I asked if our daughter's realities would be included in the curriculum in the school, specifically in her kindergarten classroom. I was assured that the documents were implemented throughout the school, that staff were aware of them and using them. I thanked the principal and said "Good-bye." When I hung up the phone, I told my partner that I did not want our daughter going to that school. He agreed.

My partner and I then made a decision that could be interpreted as protective; it was. It was also a decision that not all parents would, or even could, make; we could, and, because we were not ready or willing to wait and see if things would be okay, to take a risk with our daughter's emotional life, we did. We enrolled our daughter in two weeks of a two-month summer school program at a private school. After the first week, we asked our daughter if she would like to go to this school for kindergarten. She liked that idea. I am aware that I am showing how we manipulated the situation. That being said, had she not liked the private school, we would have

continued our search. While our daughter was going to be involved in the decision, we were not going to let a five-year-old make decisions that were not safe for her. We were not confident that going to our neighbourhood school would be safe for our daughter. While resilience can be developed from facing adversity, resilience also comes, in part, and, perhaps, of necessity, initially, from having positive experiences, from being valued and celebrated. We wanted our daughter to have lots of those experiences before she, perhaps inevitably, had (additional) less positive ones.

Kindergarten went wonderfully. A memorable moment for us was when the kindergarten teacher told us that our daughter had corrected her one afternoon; when the teacher was telling the students to remind their mommies and daddies to send them with their mitts and hats and winter boots and snowsuits because a big snowfall was expected the next day, our daughter put up her hand and told the teacher that papas had to be reminded too. (My partner is Papa; I am Daddy.) While the school program was somewhat traditional, with a sprinkling of Montessori, it fitted our daughter's needs. While the experience in kindergarten was, overall, a very positive one for our daughter, it should be noted that private schools are not without their problems. In some cases, unless there is strong leadership, problems are not fully acknowledged, or dealt with in transparent ways, perhaps because parents might decide to take their children, and their money, elsewhere. That attitude towards parents is, in my own view, a mistake. Most, although not all, parents who approach schools simply want to be treated respectfully for the very significant role they play in their child's life. These days, as a teacher educator, I tell student teachers to seriously question the negative stories they hear about parents. Parental interest in their child's education is not being bossy or picky, and assertively asking questions and making requests are not examples of aggression. While bossy, picky, and aggressive parents exist, they are not, in my experience and opinion, the majority. They are also not, as well in my experience and opinion, not entirely difficult to deal with when one has wise and supportive administrators.

From kindergarten in a private school, we jumped into French Immersion. This was a decision my partner and I made because we felt (and still feel) that learning a second language (or a third or a fourth) is an important part of an education; also, I taught French Immersion for nine years and I found it to be, for the most part, a very useful and positive experience for students. Our daughter, after the ground is broken, is comfortable in unusual situations. French Immersion is an unusual situation. Our daughter's experience in French Immersion, however, was not the useful and positive experience we had hoped for. Unlike in kindergarten, our daughter had few happy days in her first weeks of grade one. She found her classroom and the

school environment to be particularly unpleasant. I was working on my doctoral dissertation at the time and, noting my daughter's anxiety, I sometimes invited her to come to university with me—to have a Daddy and Daughter Day. She jumped at each chance. We were also beginning to receive some negative messages that the grade one teacher would write in our daughter's school agenda which came home with her each day; we arranged an interview with the teacher and the principal. The descriptions of the classroom activities, and of our daughter's behaviour, that we were given by the teacher were not close to the descriptions we were hearing from our daughter. While it is not entirely surprising that there would be differences there, it was concerning to us that the relationship appeared so negative. What was also particularly concerning was a question by the principal regarding how we were going to address the matter of our daughter having same-sex parents once that became known to her peers. It was presented as if this was a problem to be dealt with rather than a reality to be aware of.

To us, as parents, the teacher's approach seemed harsh and unresponsive to our daughter's needs. It appeared to my partner and to me that what the teacher was describing as our daughter's behaviour was based on stereotypes of adopted children and other children from "non-traditional" families. (I use quotation marks in the previous sentence because in many respects my partner and I are more traditional than many of our family members and friends, and more so than many of our daughter's friends' parents; I sometimes joke that my partner and I got married before we had our child.) At one point during the meeting, when I started to talk about our daughter's resilience, about some of the experiences she has had and how those experiences form part of what she brings with her to school, much to my surprise I began to cry. Although I had not anticipated this, as my eyes filled with tears and they rolled down over my cheeks, I thought that maybe this would soften the atmosphere—and the approach of the teacher.

When we received our daughter's first grade one report card, however, it was clear that the teacher's approach had not softened; we were shocked. I shared the report card with some colleagues who taught primary students, and even with an administrator of a school with primary grades. The response was unanimous: the report card was unusually negative and harsh for a grade one student, when it should really be focusing on the positive, and be celebratory. My partner and I felt that we could not afford a negative year so early in our child's school life. We might have felt differently had we been birth parents and had our daughter's life, to that date, been relatively uneventful. We talked to our daughter about changing schools. While she did not want to leave her before- and after-school program (which she loved, which

was not in the school, and which she was in because my partner had returned to work), when we mentioned the possibility of returning to the school where she did kindergarten, our daughter was thrilled.

The next two terms in grade one were enormously positive. The teacher was remarkable in her ability to recognize and celebrate the unique gifts of her students. When the year concluded, she gave each of the children a pendant with a word on it. Our daughter's pendant had the word "Pride." "My family celebrates Pride," our daughter excitedly said to the teacher. "I know," the teacher replied. "That's why I picked that one for you."

So, if things were working, why change? Despite the costs financially, we decided to continue with the private school for grade two because the benefits for our daughter emotionally were huge. Again, I am aware that this is a decision that not all parents could make, or would make even if they could. For us, however, it was a matter of necessity; we wanted our daughter to have a positive foundation in learning. To do that, we felt it necessary to, as much as possible, control the variables which had an impact on her learning.

Things did change, however, near the end of the first term of the following year, when our daughter's grade two teacher began sending home enormous amounts of homework—mostly rote math questions. We suspected that this relatively new teacher might be trying to prove herself in what some wanted to be known as an academically challenging school. We told our daughter's teacher that we understood that she may be getting some pressure from some parents to send home lots of homework, but that she would not get any such pressure, and no criticism, from us if a lot of homework did not come home; in fact, we informed the teacher that we would prefer to not have any homework at all for our daughter, or to have very little. We felt that after-school play time was an important part of learning, and we did not want our evenings crowded with activities that came from outside our family's initiatives.

The grade two teacher saw things differently. She said that she was worried that if our daughter did not do this homework, she would not be prepared for future grades in school, and would have problems later in her life. I was a bit taken aback, but I assured the teacher that our daughter's future success was our concern, as her parents, and, since we were not worried, that she, the teacher, should just focus on what our daughter could do in school in grade two and let us, the parents, handle life at home, including any work expected. Despite an agreement to ease off, the homework was soon coming again. Our daughter was beginning to show signs of stress—a

situation that we felt was not appropriate for a seven-year-old. We then took a step we had not originally planned on. After a conversation with our daughter, we withdrew her from school to begin homeschooling. This was possible because, although my partner had returned to full-time work at this time, I was, as noted above, completing my doctoral dissertation; I was also teaching one course at the university.

When we were homeschooling, I often took our daughter with me to my course. Our reading time together extended well beyond bedtime. Our daughter began to write stories about her experiences, including trips we took. We put a moratorium on math for a few months, because that seemed to be the major cause of the anxiety generated by the excessive rote activities—in school and for homework. We began to reintroduce math as part of regular life. My partner is the primary cook in our family, so our daughter began helping in the kitchen. She loved *measuring* ingredients and *dividing* portions. She *counted* out the various items my partner required for whatever meal they were preparing, or for whatever special creation they were baking. She *weighed* items when something more exact was necessary. My partner took our daughter grocery shopping. He talked with her about *prices* and why he was making some decisions based on those prices. Looking back at this practice, I would make one change. My partner and I tended to pay for purchases with debit or credit cards. When our daughter saw this, she did not make clear connections between the groceries in the basket and the money we were earning. This was evident one day when we were talking about making some big purchase and my partner said, “We don’t have enough money for that.” Our daughter replied, “But, you can buy it with your card.” We explained that before you can take money out of a bank account, you must put money into it. We also explained that even purchases made with a credit card had to be paid for later. It was at this time that we began to give our daughter a regular allowance. This, we feel, helped her develop a further appreciation of the role money plays in our lives.

One of the most remarkable experiences of homeschooling was connecting with other homeschooling families. In the city where we lived, there was an established network of homeschooling families. This was new to us. We got our name on the mailing list and listserv. We met for activity days, book exchanges, and excursions. The children played together and formed friendships. The parents, a diverse group whose reasons for making the decision to homeschool their children were equally diverse, including some reasons that I would have disagreed with, were very welcoming to my partner and to me, and to our daughter. The commitment of those parents to give their children the best possible learning opportunities, and to ensure that those opportunities would enable their children to learn in their own unique ways,

was impressive. Some of those parents were also making the decision to homeschool without the level of financial resources my partner and I were able to draw on. The relationships among the parents were collaborative, not competitive. The children saw those relationships and, as all children do, they learned values from them.

Our daughter enjoyed homeschooling. As well as interactions with other children in activities outside the home, and some individual outside activities also, she had activities at home. Some of those activities were increased play times—alone or with my partner and/or me. Other activities were more formal in our informal setting. We bought grade-level activity books and worked our way through them. When we travelled, even on very brief trips, we brought the activity books with us. When our daughter travelled with me to university, she brought those activity books and worked on them in the backseat of the car, and at a desk in the back of the classroom while I taught new teachers about teaching language arts. She also brought some of her story books and read them. The activity books included math activities; the moratorium was now over. We bought a family membership at the Royal Ontario Museum and went there frequently. We spent more time at the library, and we signed out books at each visit. We also watched television and movies, using “screen time” as educational time. Screen time included using the computer to search for educational activities. Our daughter concluded grade two as a homeschooler.

As what would likely be the final year of my doctoral program approached, with my dissertation nearing completion and knowing that I would be preparing for my dissertation defence, my partner and I began to look at employment opportunities for me—both positions and locations. I investigated the positions and the qualifications for the positions, while my partner studied the location—the university and the town or city where we would be moving our family. We talked with our daughter about the possible move. We assured her that she would be involved in all of the processes for the move. We had another decision to make. Would we continue with homeschooling or find another school for grade three? Our daughter wanted to continue homeschooling. I was reluctant. As I look back at it, and as I shared with my students at the time, I think I was concerned about being seen as the teacher educator with a child who was school-phobic. I believe that schools do (or can) make a (positive) difference in children’s lives. Why were we not sending our daughter to school to experience that difference? I was also, I think I convinced myself, worried that our lives would become busier as I approached the end of my dissertation. I had accepted teaching two more courses at my university, bringing the total to three. The commute was long. My partner was working full-time.

We decided to explore other options besides homeschooling, without ruling out homeschooling as an option for grade three. We did, however, rule out the possibility of public school in our community. Two failed attempts (failed because of what could be characterized as unwelcoming behaviour, at best, in the schools) were all that we were willing to accept from one school board, particularly when we already had our doubts—gut feelings that we should have been more trusting of to begin with. We also decided that returning to the private school where our daughter had already spent some of her schooling was not an option, because the school administration had not responded well to our decision to homeschool when our daughter was being given excessive homework despite our requests to have the homework ceased or reduced. We looked for another private school. We found one that seemed an interesting possibility and we asked if we could bring our daughter in for a visit. The small school was welcoming from the start. Without even asking, we were told that there would be no homework because the teacher believed home play time was part of learning. We started with two weeks of a summer program, which we increased to four weeks because our daughter liked it so much. We registered our daughter for the year. It was an enormously positive year. In many respects, we credit our daughter's grade three teacher, and the teacher's assistant, with playing a significant role in dismantling our daughter's phobias for school, and for math in particular. We credit the French teacher at that school with playing a significant role in restoring our daughter's delight in learning a second language. When I would ask my daughter if she wanted to take a Daddy and Daughter Day, and come with me to university, she would say that she did not want to miss school. I found myself bribing with a promise to stop in at the gas station where she could buy a stuffy for a "twooney."

Our daughter is currently in a public school in the community where we moved and where I now teach at a university. My partner and I frequently evaluate our decision about schooling, not out of any sense of regret for decisions made, but out of a need to keep asking ourselves if this is the best decision for our daughter at this time and place in her life. And we are, admittedly, protective, although we are also aware that our daughter is now often able, and even wanting, to fight her own battles. Because we involve her in these decisions about her life, we need to know our daughter's views as well.

As parents, we, not just my partner and I, but all parents, want to make only the best decisions for our children. Decisions about our children's education are not ones that are peripheral to parenting, but ones that go to the core of our hearts and lives as parents because we know, or at least we want to believe, that those decisions have such an enormous impact on our children. Because my own biological family,

the family I grew up in, was poor, the choices in regards to where and when I went to school would have been limited, or non-existent, even if we had had more than the one school in the community. Unlike my parents, I had other choices to make, with my partner and with our daughter, about the latter's schooling. The decisions my partner and I made in our daughter's early learning years were neither arbitrary nor final; they were responses to experiences, and rooted in love. Like my own parents, the fish plant worker and the housewife, neither of whom completed elementary school, the experienced elementary school teacher and doctoral student (me) and the college-educated-award-winning gardener (my partner) did the best we could. I hope.



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The Influence of Nature on Learning: The Case of Fosen Folk School in Norway¹

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ABSTRACT

This institutional ethnography provides an intensive, holistic description and compelling story of a different way of learning. It creates insight and understanding about learning that is not possible in the confines of school systems driven and governed by global economics. How do the instructors, headmaster, and students at Fosen Folk School in Norway teach/learn in a non-academic residential school? Their way of learning helps explain the complex territory between the instincts and tendencies that govern our learning when it is unfettered by institution/government standards, and the norms/values which characterize what is thought, within the formal learning system, to constitute effective teaching/learning. The relationship of self to people, nature, and the environment becomes discernible, understandable.

Folk Schools

Folk schools are one-year residential institutes offering a variety of exciting non-traditional and non-academic subjects, as well as academic subjects. The idea of folk schools is learning for life, an opportunity to grow both individually, socially, and academically in small learning communities. All students live on campus in close contact with staff and their fellow students. One important part of the folk school experience is to form a community, in and out of class.

The folk schools do not grant degrees or conduct exams. They are a supplement to the regular education system, with the aim of nurturing “the whole person.” You develop knowledge in a subject you will make use of every day for the rest of your

life. By taking away the pressure of grades and exams, you learn to motivate and be yourself. You choose the topics that interest you, for instance outdoor life activities, theatre, sports, music, creative arts, media, and communications. Students range in age from eighteen to mid-thirties—most are under twenty-five years of age; approximately one-third are male. School enrollments vary from 50 to 200 over ten months.

Introduction

There are two kinds of skills that are brought into play when human beings learn. One is perceptual and motor skill; the other is discursive skill. We use perceptual and motor skill to solve problems; we use signs and symbols to interact with others in the social world. The curriculum approach used in formal learning institutions extols the virtues of sign and symbol usage in the pursuit of knowledge. The importance of experience is overlooked and often detached from the learning process as if understanding could be achieved without it.

Research (Harre & Gillett, 1994) questions the logic behind this separation of learning through experience versus discursive learning. Harre and Gillett describe the natural instinct to learn as starting with the senses, especially the sense of touch. People need to have a “sense of physical location” when they learn. What much educational research fails to address is a fundamental issue in formal education institutions: How do people learn when experience [doing] intervenes, when it precedes or replaces knowledge acquisition?

This ethnography is unique in that it documents what happens to young adults when their learning is undertaken in a non-academic and non-competitive environment. Examples of human learning that are reported in the educational literature too often take place in formal learning institutions, e.g., schools, colleges, universities. The learning reported on here is that of people in a folk school in Norway, a one-year residential program where young adults pursue something other than an institutional milestone. They live and learn away from the comforts of home and the academic culture of a formal school or institution. The case helps articulate what it means to be a self-sufficient learner as a human being. It also helps put the program and professional status problems faced by school educators into a new perspective, one that looks critically at the institution in which the curriculum is taught. Is assimilation into adult life through academic achievement really beneficial to all young people?

To be an ethnographer the researcher must go to the site or institution in order to observe behaviour in a natural setting, just as an anthropologist who wants to learn about other cultures would do. The term ethnography is most often associated with such observation, or the “ethnographic account,” i.e., the documentation. Common techniques associated with data gathering are interview, documentary analysis, life history, investigator field notes, and participant observation (Cole, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988; Merriam, 1988; Tripp, 1993). The end product is a rich description and interpretation of the institution, sub-culture, and group being studied (Greenfield, 1993). The following statement by Wolcott (1988) captures the essence of what an ethnographer does and how he/she thinks.

To the group being studied, the ethnographer tries harder to know more about the cultural system he or she is studying than any individual who is a natural participant in it, at once advantaged by the outsider’s broad and analytical perspective but, by reason of that detachment, unlikely ever totally to comprehend the insider’s point of view. (p. 189)

Resolving this tension is the essence of ethnographic work, according to Wolcott. “Successful ethnographers resolve the tension between involvement and detachment; others go home early” (p. 189). Wolcott defines ethnography as describing a “way of life” of some identifiable group. To be successful, he argues, requires a willingness to be part of the culture and have a Martian detachment at the same time. The research in this case did involve total immersion for a period of six weeks. It also involved the reflections of the author, before, during, and following the experience. Interviews, participant journal entries, and author narrative combine to create the documentation.

Author’s Reflection

For years my disappointment with formal learning in schools was centred on the fact that schools prolonged adolescence, unnecessarily I thought. This was confirmed for me when I studied the sociology of education as a doctoral candidate. Now, years later, my disappointment centres on the actual program we offer our adolescents while they are being confined in schools. It seems natural to me that a significant part of that learning should be preparing them for adulthood and for living in some tangible way. The academic curriculum students currently contend with in North America is very university-centred, in fact, singularly so. If you try to follow some other avenue you risk being labelled a low achiever or outsider who doesn’t fit. Subjects like music, drama, art, technical and family

studies, and physical education are accorded a complementary rather than central role in curriculum and policy terms. The program hierarchy in schools is such an everyday part of its history; it goes unnoticed as an equity issue. Students are shunted in and out of courses like sheep in a merry-go-round attempt to broaden their perspectives and give the appearance of equality between book learning and practical endeavors, between contemplation and real life. Yet their perspectives are not broadened. Instead they come to know about standardization, group and institutional conformity, and book literacy. They miss what it means to learn through experience, for oneself. This is the nature and game of the comprehensive secondary school. The difficulty lies with what is prescribed by education authorities as necessary requirements for graduation and entrance to college or university. By the time students schedule their college or university preparation courses, there is little time left to accommodate other programs and ways of learning that may or may not be natural for them and that may meet a fundamental personal need.

I arrived at Fosen Folk School two weeks after the students. It was mid-September. The weather had been beautiful. The journal entry which follows (Signe) and the survey response from Turid convey something unique about Fosen. This is definitely not your typical school. On my first full day there [a Saturday] I joined the students on a hike to the top of the local mountain, a 1500-metre climb, complete with lunch, bagpipe playing, and a determined student with a prosthetic leg. Dewey (1925, 1938) would have enjoyed these excerpts as testimony to his “nature and experience” philosophy, i.e., that “education is life itself.” Signe is one of many students who got an abrupt introduction to “life” at Fosen in those early weeks. “No academic expectations here,” I remember many students telling me. No courses on living and learning about life. This is life. No simulations. Imagine the panic when the students in the boat in which Signe was travelling, realized that they faced a life-threatening situation. They had no experience on the North Sea. They had no experience to assure them that this boat could and would withstand the winds and waves. They had only themselves on which to rely for their comfort and safety. These inexperienced students had to stay focused and steadfast in their first adventure of many with Mother Nature as the teacher. Here is Signe’s journal entry. All names are pseudonyms.

Rolling against the wind on the fjord. One boat, five persons, no teacher. We’re all pretty exhausted. Some of us have got big blisters on our hands after hours of rowing. But we can’t stop to rest, we have got no time to argue about the job we’re doing. We’ve just got to continue steering straight. On to the waves which are growing bigger all the time. We can’t stop until we’ve made it to the nearest harbour. It’s our second week at Fosen Folk School.

The year here at Fosen is about being nobody but yourself. Perhaps having a fresh start without the emotional luggage we all tend to collect throughout the years. It's about drifting into this small society which is so intense that you sometimes completely forget the outside world. A society where age, sex, and cultural differences are less important, where we try to always see people as individuals.

We learn to know each other like we have never known anyone before. Spending days and nights together at the school, on a sailboat, in the barn. This makes the good times better, but also the bad times worse. Whatever we get into, we're in it together, at least for this one year.

I can allow myself to spend an entire day trying to learn how to do a knot. If I've got three hours of spare time in the afternoon, I might choose to spend them carrying hay bales at the school farm, before learning to play a new song on guitar by one of the other students. In the night I might drift into sleep by a fire in a cozy, hot gamme [outdoor teepee] and wake up freezing at 6 am in the morning.

Folk school is not fun all day long. But everyday I get to feel that I'm really alive.



Fig. 1: Sailing excursion for beginners

Signe had obviously been emotionally moved by her first boating experience. From my perspective she was a bright young woman who wanted to be challenged but had no idea this kind of challenge would be waiting. It was my introduction to a different kind of culture and view of learning, in this instance “learning for life,” learning to be self-aware and self-directed.

I could only imagine what was going through the minds of these young adults. Twelve years of schooling did not prepare any of them for this situation. Only an experienced sailor or instructor would know what to expect and be prepared for. This was life on the sea. This was life in a natural environment. This was learning in a folk school, I was to discover as a visiting ethnographer. The questions in my mind were numerous. What was the point of the boating story? Where were they going/coming from? Why wasn’t an instructor along? I would have the answers soon enough.

How many times do young people say, the ones who breeze through high school and the ones who struggle, “I just want to take a year off.” This ethnography is for those young adults, and teachers who strive to understand them. It provides an inside look at a form of education that stands in direct defiance of the rush to education and economic supremacy by nations. It heralds the importance of human development in a most basic way and at a most fundamental time—young adulthood when values and wisdom are nurtured. The underlying line of inquiry that emerges from the study is captured in the following question: What purpose does the predominant knowledge-oriented curriculum tradition in our schools serve? This analysis of the question criss-crosses the assumptions and premises behind today’s change in the education industry and places it in a larger and critical perspective.

The knowledge-oriented tradition as currently legitimized in North American schools enjoys a favoured position because few options to such learning are understood to exist. No words exist to formulate an apposition because as one interviewee put it: “we don’t have the experiences from which to make sense of the words.” The little-known institution along the coast of Norway, Fosen Folkehøgskole, is but one example of many in the Scandinavian countries that speak to a fundamental issue: What experiences are of most value to young adults as they contemplate their lives and livelihoods? The school is one of ninety-two such institutions that have served Norwegian and international students for over 150 years.²

Three themes emerged and are traced in the following written account of the Fosen Case Study. The first is the value of experience as opposed to, or in contrast

to, knowledge as the real precursor to learner understanding. What is the role of experience in learning and how does “learning by doing” actually happen? The second is a more complete understanding of lifelong learning and how the Nordic people, the inventors of lifelong learning, define and practice it. Finally, the third theme emerges from the social life that students experienced. What happens to young adults when the stressors of academic achievement are replaced by dealing with real consequences?

John the Rektor

The following excerpt from the Rektor of the school (school principal or headmaster) when asked about a turning point in his career conveys what it means to be human, in this case to be technical or practical. John was my point of contact for visiting Fosen, as such I felt a kinship to him. He had taken my request to visit the school to his staff of nine instructors and formally sought permission to allow a guest from abroad. They must have agreed to accommodate me although some were more cordial than others over the six-week stay. On several occasions when I had specific questions or needs I would seek out John. He was a warm human being. If there was some flattery in having a professor visit he didn't make much of it. Of all the staff he was the only one who lived away from the campus (two kilometres). Often I would see him driving up to the campus in his weather-beaten Volvo. I asked about a turning point in his career.

If there has been a turning point it must have been when I graduated from secondary school. At age of 19 I decided to spend a year at a practical school in a class that worked with building furniture (mobelsnekker). Through that year I got to know the inside of a real handcraft with its standards and qualities. It was very meaningful and from that time I have had this tendency to look upon all things in life the way a carpenter does, which I think is a very useful perspective, because it is both realistic (the chair has to be stable) and aesthetic (a beautiful chair is lovely to own). It responds to all sides of the personality in a way that theoretic subjects often lose.

So when I treat my wife in a carpenter's way or make my lyrics [when playing the piano] the same way or if I run this school according to carpentry standards I think the results often become successful. Besides, my dream is, when I am to retire as an old man, I want to be living as a happy carpenter. In fact this thought helps me going good through my days as a headmaster.

This excerpt is telling. It is one of the few written accounts from an experienced educator, one formally trained, where his social and technical thinking (S&TT), was admittedly more important in his career than any other institutionalized learning. It was refreshing to also read about theories he felt contributed to his development as a human being and educator.

As a teacher student (1979-1982) I got to know such names as Paulo Freire and Celestin Freinet and their thinking. I have always meant that schools should be the property of the people and I am very critical to the fact that schools, as other common goods in society, now are made objects exposed to competition between deliverers. There are values in society so important that they should not be measured in money.

I also have become more and more aware of the way the students' total health situation interferes with their ability to learn and grow. Normally we tend to think that personal development goes on only for the first 15-20 years in life, but it seems as if the whole society now is realizing that learning goes on for the whole life. In Norway we talk a lot of lifelong learning, which has become a priority field in education politics. I myself would like to add that this isn't just about lifelong learning but just as well about life-wide and life-deep learning. Let's make education three-dimensional!

In response to how the folk school meets the needs of young adults he was equally compelling in his writing and beliefs.

These human qualities [persistence, life skills, sense of purpose] are in my opinion very important to all people and cultures that intend to survive. Today's young people may have to struggle not against nature or to provide themselves with food and clothes, but rather against the commercialised and meaningless reality of today, and also the great information flood that every day reminds us that some catastrophe is waiting to fall over our heads one day soon.

My hope and belief is that people who get the chance to spend some time training up their practical skills, will be more able to find a way through any problem they have to face on their way through life. That is why Fosen is absolutely needed as a school to our students.

My notes from a brief interview show that John had been teaching in a folk school for fourteen years, six of which had been as Rektor. His speciality is woodworking although he also leads the morning singing sessions with the piano.³

Walter, a former Rektor at Fosen (I learned from John), was interested in this Canadian visitor and wanted to talk. I was told he was the visionary and founder of the school.⁴ We met for an hour in the student lounge. In spite of our cultural differences we found much in common. We shared stories about the value of life and work experience and about formal learning institutions. I wanted to know more about the nature of the instructors in folk schools. What about the modesty I was witnessing, and the soft-spoken nature of almost everyone. What was the source of this modesty?

The question turned out to be an important one as it opened up a discussion about how people learn. Walter, like the instructors at Fosen, believed their job was to instill a broader perspective (life learning) in students than that given in regular school. He introduced me to several Norwegian concepts, one of which was “Vok.” Apparently, in 1976 the law in Norway changed and education was provided free to all adult people (lov – law om voksenopplaring). In North America, the parallel would be to make adult education tuition free to all adults. Walter started his career at Fosen in 1978. He felt he was part of a new effort in Norway to humanize and democratize the formal education system for young adults.

“Learning for life” was the phrase he used to describe the movement. It meant several things—one was learning with and from other people. The boat-building program was one example he cited. The school wanted to preserve and celebrate the original Viking boat construction designs and skills from ten centuries earlier. Part of passing along that culture included how skills and knowledge were passed on. In this case, as with all other subjects/activities in the school, that method involved giving youth answers only when they were ready for them. First-hand experience was the bedrock of the learning philosophy at Fosen. Knowledge and wisdom followed. To re-establish the dying boat-building history they found the last person known to apprentice under a master boat builder (of original Viking boats) in remote northern Norway and hired him to come and live in their community. Part of the philosophy for learning was that young people should learn to stay focused on the problem at hand. To do this the students who enroll in boat-building must build and sail a boat while they are in the program.

I inquired about certification and training of teachers in folk schools. There were no credentials initially; now there are. Above all else work experience is important, teacher education is secondary. At Fosen the preference is to find teachers who have experience in their field, whether it be boat-building, sailing, woodworking, natural life (science), or farming. The word pedagogy came up. Walter felt that the language for pedagogikk (the Norwegian spelling) was unemotional and empty. Why

is it that we teach like we do in regular schools? Why don't we try something else? He eschewed "model thinking." To help explain the Fosen approach he referred to the concept of a Kibutz in Israel. The term means "learning on the farm." You must have both theory and practice to get respect. Another example he mentioned is captured in the fine art of music instrument building. To build the finest violin possible the artisan must be one with his/her tools and know the physics of sound. It is the same experiential learning view. A person must be capable of technical thinking and learning.

He described another key principle called "Variety and Time" (Mangfold og Tid). Part of this perspective is to never strive to be something special or at least to think of yourself as something special. This helped to explain the modesty I was witnessing around the school. No one here is trying to upstage anyone else or to be special. They are who they are.

Walter described schools as unhistorical. I asked what he meant. "They have no respect for local history," he said. I know now what he meant. The widespread use of a prescribed and standardized curriculum requires schools to focus on regional and national histories rather than local ones. This is very true in most history courses in North American schools.⁵ Part of the pedagogy associated with the Fosen learning philosophy includes using pictures as well as experience rather than words. In Nordic mythology, local history is told poetically using dialogue and narrative. In science, students have to start with the tree first then its name. This is what fits human nature best. He felt that teaching science out of a textbook was a less than useful strategy for helping young people to learn about science concepts, laws, and so forth. The student needs to "experience" the phenomena before he or she can digest and understand the words that label or describe it. Walter referred to a former Norwegian Minister of Education (Godmund Hernes), who in 1995, told an international gathering that the greatest contribution Norwegians have made to the world of pedagogical thought is the Folk School. I now know where the modesty comes from and how it fits.

Morton the Natural Life Instructor (Science)

Morton offered to have me join him for coffee at noon (this usually means something more than coffee in Norway—this time it was waffles with sour cream and fresh strawberries plus coffee). The interview was in his apartment adjacent to the school premises.

In addition to explaining some Norwegian terms and filling out my interview sheet he expanded on his philosophy as an instructor. He described his method of instructing by using the concept of a continuum. On the one end of the continuum he is someone who gives a lot of direction and information ["like a dictator"—his words]. On the other end he is someone who gives little information to the students. He describes this end of the continuum as "veiledning." The closest word for us in English is "facilitator" but he tells me that this is still not quite right. At the veiledning end of the continuum the students are completely self-directed. He is available to them but only when they have questions and even then in a limited or special way. I probed this only to uncover an old maxim that a colleague taught me years ago. Apparently as an instructor, Morton only responds to the students' questions when he feels they are "adequatio" or ready. He mentions that the signal for this is when students ask the good question. Morton's philosophy is to always seek the veiledning end of the continuum.

I am reminded of my discussion with Elmer [boat-building instructor] and how he watched the students shape the twenty-nine-foot boat keel for the original Viking boat. What is this I am witnessing? Is it self-directed learning? Project learning? Do we have words for it in our North American schools? He [Morton] brings out a page of paper on which is typed a poem in Norwegian, by Hans Borli, dated 1969. I had it translated two weeks later.

*You and the tree, a brotherhood/sisterhood
Deep as the soil
In the rush of sap
Under the bark
Your (own) dream rising
Dizzy, hesitating
In winding stairways of darkness
Up to the face of god
You stand there in Spring Wind
With ear pressed against rugged bark
And suddenly
You know whether it is you
You realize that you see the tree and the tree sees you*

My notes refer to the "veiledning" concept but also to a point that Morton made about admission to a folk school. There are no admissions criteria, no sorting of files and people. It is a first-come, first-serve admissions policy. As such, students

decide. No meritocracy here, just self-selection. My notes from the interview itself start with some demographic information. Morton had been teaching for five years plus two years with handicapped youth. He worked in the logging industry for one year and came from a farming family. His formal preparation for teaching in a folk school consisted of a short program (one year) that granted him a teacher certificate. For a short time he taught skiing in a gymnasium [high school]. His postsecondary education included one year of study in geography and two in outdoor life. Referring to life at Fosen Morton used the words, "Fosen is distinctive."

It is very stimulating to teach here—they know what they are doing. Folk schools are rebels [in the Norwegian education system] in a positive sense, especially Fosen. The main goal for students in most folk schools is recreation. At Fosen it is more meaningful.

In describing his philosophy of teaching he referred to an exercise that he does with his students each year, early on. He takes them into the countryside as a group and sends them out to find a tree. They are instructed to sit beside the tree for twenty minutes, feel the bark of the tree, get in touch with it. He then asks them to return to a point some metres from their respective tree, blindfolds them, and sends them out to find their tree. With great satisfaction he asks me what percentage of the students do I think actually find the same tree. A very high percentage, he tells me. The point of the exercise is to help students make a connection to nature, to get their own personal relationship with nature. "It's not about being better in that relationship than others," he reiterated [part of his philosophy that learning must be done in a non-competitive environment, unlike most schools]. "Nature is not to be challenged, but respected." It turns out that this is the philosophy adopted by not only Morton but also by the former Rektor Walter [notes from interview with Walter]. Such a philosophy maintains that any teaching should start with an experience, followed by book learning. This allows the student to be ready or adequate and thereby motivated for the information that follows, i.e., to know something about the subject personally before words are put to it. Referring to the students who come to Fosen, Morton repeated a common refrain, "I can see that the students are bored from competition in schools [regular schools]."

I inquired about working and learning in institutional settings.

A difficult question, he smiled. Mainly, it's how our society has come to be competitive in all ways. There are few arenas where you do things that can't be compared to others. These arenas are extremely valuable. "Nature life" is one of

them. I'm also convinced that we are losing many old techniques today, because we are so extremely focused on the future. I think that's a big mistake. In my subject I can do something about it. By learning about ancient techniques, I hope the students can see how complex and advanced they were.

Of the five students who responded to a journal-writing request, Turid's reflections may be the most typical. They are particularly important to what may be a widespread young adult perspective today, in Norway and beyond.

When I was in the secondary school I was sick and tired of studies and books, so my aim or thought was to try folkehogskole, and when I decided I only had Fosen in my head. I know many that have gone to Fosen and they spoke with giant good feelings about it. The Fosen school is very well known in the surrounding area where I live. My two sisters graduated in agriculture and they are happy I choose this school. As a student in Ph. Ed, running, etc., I felt I had to get away from the pressure of training. Last year I had problems with a bad infection. This school does not focus so much on training and that makes me feel good, and I enjoy trips, hiking, and sailing. When I choose this school I knew fellow students would enjoy a different life—they dress differently (funny) and nobody would say anything bad about it—rather they make fun of it. I also enjoy what this school gives—the culture and tradition with instruction. We learn not to take anything for granted. If a boat is to be built, one has to go in the forest and fall trees, so most of the teaching is practical. This is good for those who don't like theory. They get to be good at something. This school also aims at ecological thinking. For example, using ecologic food with the aim of a strong economy. There is practically nothing I don't like at Fosen school.

I have been at this school only one month but I know when I leave next Spring, I will miss this school very much.

Sincerely, Turid

This testimony is particularly germane in the context of curriculum priorities for formal secondary schools. The pressure to prepare for some unknown knowledge discipline places undue pressure on young people before they know who they are and what they want to become. An interview with the school nurse confirmed this need for self-analysis and sense of accomplishment.

Marit (Part-Time Nurse)

The meeting with Marit took place in her office at the local health clinic/hospital (about one-half kilometre from the Folkschool). I had telephoned a few days earlier to make an appointment.

Marit sees students from the school but only on a part-time basis. There is the occasional student injury to deal with (Ellen sprained her ankle, for example), but most of her visits are from the younger students who are away from home for the first time and feeling homesick or lost. This counselling function seemed to be something with which she was comfortable. I had noticed a good deal of boy/girl cuddling in the time I had been at the school and wondered if showing such affection in public was considered cool/normal behaviour in Norway among adolescents. Marit characterized such behaviour as quite normal, even to the extent of sexual involvement providing the participants were over eighteen years of age. Apparently the law in Norway is that when a person reaches age 18 they are considered a mature adult in Norwegian society and are then responsible for their own actions. I asked her to characterize the young students at Fosen. "They are scattered in their thinking. They don't know where they are going because they don't know where they have been or who they are, what they believe in for sure." About the folk schools she commented: "It allows these 'adults-in-transition' to develop questions from a range of areas, work interests, personal morals, social relations they had not thought of as yet. It gives the students a year in which to grow outside of their usual home surroundings and support network. For the first time in their life no academic expectations removes an important and nagging stressor." According to Marit, the result is that they have more time to think about problems. Because of the life and human-centred curriculum at the school and the many experiential projects/workshops, they build self-esteem and self-confidence.

I was quite emotional the day I left Fosen. My reflections mirror those from the beginning of this collaborated story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2000). How can life in schools, or the absence of it as John and Walter would say, be analyzed through students' stories? The following thoughts were documented while on the ferry from Fosen to Trondheim.

The road sloped gently down towards the village of Vanviken. Roald [Fosen student who drove me to the boat] is his usual self, full of the wisdom that made our discussions special. "For the first time in my life I feel free," he said. More wisdom, I thought.

As I write I am not sure what I said to Roald. How is an ethnographer supposed to keep track of conversational material on the one hand and record and reflect on the moment too? To do the three things at the same time is complex, as Wolcott's quote suggests. I must have told Roald I liked those words because I remembered to write them in my journal while on the ferry. I also probably listened because during all of our conversations over the six weeks I found his thoughts and actions to be mature beyond his years. I must try to capture that sensibility in words and to tell Roald's story. But first the "free" part and why these words.

Roald's Story

My introduction to Roald was on my first trip with the student group at Fosen. Fosen is located in a small community known as Rissa, population 2,000. Picture a small rural town nestled among rolling farmlands and surrounded by north-sea fjords (gentle-sloped ones). While this might sound isolated, it isn't when you live here. The Norwegian people are sure-footed (physically active in the outdoors), sure-minded (self-assured and practical), and hospitable when they befriend you.

Roald climbed up a 1500-metre (4500-foot) local mountain with all the other students, a little behind but not far. He did so with one prosthetic leg. I didn't really meet Roald that day but noted that he made the trip successfully and without any help from fellow students or instructors. In fact, I was struck by how aloof the instructor was that day, about all the students. He was responsible for leading the expedition but didn't make any special attempts to help specific students. It was clear that each student was responsible for his or her own actions. Even when three of the slower students asked permission to return to the school from the first rest point, he didn't seem bothered or disappointed. When I asked him about that conversation he said simply, "it is their loss." I was concerned about the possibility of others taking the path of least resistance (no pun intended) and returning to the comforts of the school and the valley floor. I later learned that this decision was part of a school-wide, perhaps even a society-wide, philosophy. The students are adults and are responsible for their own actions. No handholding or prodding here.

I came to know of Roald's maturity during many moments in the student lounge when students would socialize, be themselves. Roald wasn't interested in small talk among peers and outward showing of affections between boys and girls. He enjoyed being by himself or with friends in situations where he could learn or be challenged intellectually. He would play contract bridge with a group of us, or chess, or spend time in the wood shop, carving.

It was several weeks after I had left Fosen that I wrote to him and asked if he would consider telling me the circumstances about his leg. Roald's maturity had come, in part, through a life-threatening football injury that was eventually diagnosed as cancer. He came close to losing his life at age fourteen. Subsequently, he chose to follow an interest in boat building at Fosen. The wisdom from that experience gives perspective to what counts in life. But, why would an experience like this be thought of as "being free"? Free from what? Free from the cancer? Or, free from the existence of student life in a formal school? Roald had freed himself from both—two very significant and equally crucial life-changing experiences. John's point about life-wide and life-deep learning may be more crucial than I thought. The "life" in lifelong learning is just as important as the "long."

Analyzing social behaviour is not something with which this author is comfortable. I can't help but wonder how much of the student desire to be free, in Norway or elsewhere, has to do with a rebellion against institutionalized learning (Hansen, Carter, Gurney, & So, 2002) and on a societal acceptance of institutional solutions to individual, family, and community problems (leave it to or rely on the expert—a kind of abandonment of emotional and self-sufficiency—an oblivion).

This paper set out to improve understanding of informal learning through experience, and how it impacts on human development. How does such learning/thinking empower and liberate people? How does it enhance or restrict individual growth? The case puts institutionalized learning into a fresh perspective. The result is a new understanding of "learning and personal development." How much formal vs. informal learning should young people be encouraged to sustain? What is the role of experience in one's learning and development? Should school systems embrace a model of learning that values experience as well as knowledge? Will/should the influence of nature on learning be a factor in our thinking as educators?

Notes

1. Adapted from a previous report written by the author in 2004, entitled, "The Influence of Nature on Learning: A Year to Be Free (Report From Field Studies in Fosen, Norway)".
2. Grundtvig (1789-1872) is credited with developing the philosophy and setting the stage for a unique kind of learning (Borish, 1991). Called "Schools for Life," the folk schools don't denounce the importance of knowledge, they just place experience before it as the foundation upon which to learn and to practice democracy in a society. The predominant view that experience is but a complement or adjunct to the more important academic curriculum that pursues the acquisition of "knowledge," is challenged.
3. The student body meets each morning for planning and socializing. Part of that meeting includes joining voices in song. Another includes information sharing on school projects, another the sharing of stories by one another (usually in a thematic way articulated by the instructional team but involving the students).
4. Walter had been retired for several years. When he heard [word travels fast when a stranger arrives in a small community] that I was a visiting professor he expressed an interest in being a part of my research. That interest was genuine.
5. Folk schools don't have to adopt a standardized curriculum. As such, the important history and culture associated with boat-building in Norway was chosen as a goal by Fosen so that this important tradition could be preserved and celebrated. Youth learn about their history firsthand through intimate experience.

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Ronald Hansen is a technology teacher educator and researcher who analyzes and questions the assumptions and premises upon which school systems in Ontario are based. His research explores the relative value of life and work experience in apposition to academic learning. In a policy development context these two forms of learning are visible and invisible to the general student population and the public. A critical look at formal education systems provides Dr. Hansen with an opportunity to consider alternative curriculum designs for institutions and the people who inhabit them. His work challenges education leaders and mainstream policies which govern and sustain the momentum enjoyed by government-controlled institutions.

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Digital Media Meets Informal Learning: Opportunities for Generating New Participatory Roles

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the rich learning that happens between defined learning spaces, such as that between formal curriculum and informal projects. Here we apply the notion of “hybrid space,” to understand how such in-between learning spaces can facilitate a shift in participatory roles for college students engaged in a community media project. This study also highlights the ways in which media as a production medium can further transform the learning experience.

In both formal and informal education, learners are faced with the task of transforming the unknown into a something which can be incorporated into existing knowledge—a process which can be greatly facilitated by learner social and experiential participation (Flavell, 1996; Scribner, 1984; Rogoff et al., 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991). We argue that intersections between formal and informal educational contexts present unique opportunities for learners to participate meaningfully in their education, make personally significant contributions, and, in turn, gain access to future learning. Here, an intentional link has been developed between a formal learning environment, a university course, and community engagement where careful course design opens to the informal learning environment (Banks et al., 2007). In such intersections, digital media can act as a resource for a participatory process of investigation, reflection, analysis, and communication. Evidence from a study of college students’ participation in a community media project provides an example of

the ways learners are using media to redesign their participatory roles in the learning process. The project, called *Restore/Restory*,¹ uses audio story gathering and editing to address cultural histories and community-based experiences, and, in the process, helps students make the journey from school-based learning to community engagement and contribution.

We will describe a framework for understanding transitions from school learning to community participation, discussing the ways digital media anchors the experience. In order to understand the perspectives learners gained in this boundary-crossing practice, we use the notion of “hybrid space”—where learning is rooted in multiple contexts and facilitated by social engagement across those contexts. We then provide evidence from the *Restore/Restory* project to illustrate students’ journeys and realizations.

Intersections as Opportunities Based in Hybridity



Much of the work of young people is in establishing space to participate and develop in a rapidly changing society (Erickson, 1968). Inside formal learning environments it has been difficult to support learners in this process at a systemic level, in part because the process requires facilitating social engagement beyond the classroom. At the college level, pathways toward increasing participation beyond the classroom include capstone courses, service learning, participatory research, and internships, all of which provide support for social and skill-based aspects for learning (Baxter Magolda, 1994; Hettich, 2000; Rogers, Morrell, & Enyedy, 2007).

In an effort to understand and support the learning which happens at intersections of formal schooling, community, and other environments, theorists have proposed an examination of a hybrid or “third space” (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Engeström, 1993). Gutierrez (2008) described hybrid space as “a transformative space where the potential for an expanded form of learning and the development of new knowledge are heightened” (p. 152). These spaces emerge from *social engagement* facilitated by *cross-contextual* learning environments (Gutierrez, 2008; Yamazumi, 2009; Calabrese Barton, Tan, & Rivet, 2008). Moje et al. (2004) contend that hybrid spaces allow learners to generate new knowledge and new participatory identities. In this regard, hybrid

spaces can effectively reposition learners in new societal roles and even break down barriers that restrict access to societal participation (Engeström, 1991).

Restore/Restory, a project where students used a growing historical knowledge base and the tools of digital media to engage with a specific geographic community, provides an opportunity to examine the hybrid spaces generated and sustained through students' investigations into community members' place-based work. The project illustrates practices that make learning trajectories visible and accessible to learners in which digital media tools make it possible to integrate what has been learned in classrooms with what can be practiced in external environments. Moreover, the moment of return, when collected digital media and new skills are presented back to both the academic and external community, becomes a salient moment for both students and community members in defining the learning which occurred.

Learning as a Journey With a Moment of Return



Concepts derived from early anthropological work on Rites of Passage (Van Gennep, 1961) can be applied here as a useful metaphor for understanding the relationship between the physical process of going out and procuring media and the transformation of knowledge reported by students. According to this framework, initiates must separate

from their social context and go on journey to a transitional place in which they undergo some sort of transformation (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 2011; Wallace, 1966). They then return to their prior social context with a new identity, in some cases transforming the collectively held knowledge of the social group. The cycle highlights a journey from what is known, across a threshold that marks the beginning of a transformation that will result from grappling with what is unknown, and a return to share what has been learned. Youth media work can facilitate such a return to the community, in which the learner becomes a "master of two worlds" and can engage in boundary crossing between multiple participatory identities.

Evidence indicates that a critical experience for *Restore/Restory* participants was the return to the initial social context or community to which students were responsible, within their digital media production process. Many students reported the skills, knowledge, and relationships they gained opened new pathways toward future careers and other opportunities for learning. Thus the learning process can be

defined as a set of opportunities to begin the journey anew and take on increasingly complex levels of responsibility in the process. Such programs may facilitate a spiral toward increasing access to the rights of participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff et al., 2003), within which the use of digital media gives students a tangible resource for taking on new roles and participation structures.

Methods

Data for this study was collected during the first year of a two-year project, *Restore/Restory*. The project is a collaboration between a university outreach program² and the Preserve Conservancy, with the purpose of creating a multi-media public history of the site, including a site-based audio tour and interactive website. The project design involved many students, faculty, staff, and community members, creating an opportunity for college students to participate in a hybrid learning environment which spanned college courses and community involvement. Fifteen students in a seminar course titled “Community Media” participated for two quarters, examining theory and practice of public history, learning fundamentals of community media production, and recording and editing audio interviews focused on the natural and human history of the Preserve. An additional 46 Intensive Writing course students participated for one quarter, transcribing the interviews and creating written storyteller profiles. Independent studies course students created photo essays, and three graduate students were involved in a variety of organizational, production, and research activities. Community members working on the project included eleven on the advisory group (five of which were Conservancy staff and board members), and 48 storytellers who participated in project recordings.

Findings are derived from field notes from observational data collected across all project phases, including planning meetings, advisory group meetings, class sessions, and story collection days, totaling 35 hours. In addition, student participants filled out pre- and post-surveys and wrote reflective essays. Class debriefs and the final showcase were recorded and transcribed, along with interviews of the instructor and one student. Artifacts of student work include edited audio stories, transcribed and written storyteller profiles, and photo-journalist work.

Coding followed a grounded theory model based on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), which revealed both the importance of media to student learning and the salience of the moment of return—the latter encapsulated in a showcase of student work. Findings presented in this paper include types of learning which occurred in hybrid space as revealed through the process of “the journey”—going out and

collecting stories; and “the return”—presenting their collected, edited, and polished stories for the community.

Media as a Doorway to Hybrid Space



Engaging in digital media production provided students a means to access community members and community experience within a particular role. These roles (as journalist, historian, recording artist, etc.) gave students experiences and status which may not have been available to them in their previous role solely as “student” (Goldman, Booker, & McDermott, 2008; Soep, 2003). The

use of digital media facilitated students’ development along multiple pathways that included technical, pragmatic, and political practice (Booker, 2010). The combination of the technical aspects of the task, engaging with real people around politically complex concepts and viewpoints, and crafting a final product from the raw footage were anchored in the media practices as much as the community engagement.

In the Community Media Seminar, students were intimately involved in the project. After training with the project director on audio equipment and interview techniques, they were responsible for recording stories out at the Preserve (during five “Community Story Days”), documenting storyteller information, interviewing storytellers, and editing the final narratives to become part of a public website. They developed expertise, advising one another about microphone placement, background noise, and interview technique. By the fifth story collection day, they were confident and enthusiastic interviewers.

Students in the Community Media course experienced a significant role shift as they moved from students to teachers of media, a process which was corroborated through several sources of data (interviews, observations, and surveys). Instructor jesikah maria ross describes how she taught technology skills within the course:

I followed a process by which I would teach someone, and they would teach another person... I teach Amber, and Amber’s now going to teach Dane, and then Dane teaches Amy and I ask Amber to back him up. Usually the students pick up on what’s being conveyed, or what’s not being done properly, [such as] mike placement, 45 degree angle...

- jesikah maria ross, Community Media Seminar instructor

In surveys, almost all students reported learning skills from peers. During an interview, one student described how the becoming a teacher in this process allowed a metacognitive reflection of her own learning.

So I was teaching [the new students] to use this equipment, which is very expensive and very advanced...And it showed me how much I've learned in this whole process, being able to teach people not only how to run audio equipment, how to mike people professionally, but also the skills that go into interviewing a person and really getting onto their level without overshadowing what it is that they're there to share with you.

- Amber, Community Media Seminar student

Her statement indicates an increasing sophistication in her understanding of both the technical equipment and the primary responsibility to represent a point of view with integrity. As student teams conducted interviews during Community Story Days, the geographical space of the Preserve became the site of hybrid space, a space of multiple contexts—community, physical, academic—characterized by social engagement. In this hybrid space students engaged in teaching and learning of both technical media skills and social/interview skills. For example, at the beginning of the first story recording on one particular Community Story Day, John explained the layout of the Preserve to a few students new to the course, including where they could take storytellers for the best interview sites. Often students asked one another which role they should take (note taking, recording, etc.) and how to perform those roles. Once the story recording process got underway, students advised one another on how to proceed. For example, on one of the student teams, a student noticed the wind was too loud, creating interference with the sound. The other student suggested they use another angle, and demonstrated the new layout with her pencil. The recording student agreed, moved to the other side, and the two resumed the interview.

In addition, the specific roles facilitated by the use of digital media, and the skill sets needed for these roles, provided students a context within which to engage with community members with some level of expertise. During the observed story recording sessions, students in the Community Media course clearly took a leadership role in guiding the storyteller to an interview spot, as well as directing others amongst their team. They confidently explained the interview process to community members, and stopped the interview if necessary due to an external noise. They even occasionally corrected or made suggestions to the director, jesikah. For example, as storytellers were arriving, Amber suggested that jesikah create a place to keep their permission slips, thereby contributing to the organization of the process.

During the final Community Story Day we observed an additional 20 instances in which students took charge, remembered something, or advised *jesikah*.

Several comments corroborate and further explain the sense of student expertise. Dan Swale, a lecturer involved in the project who was observing during Community Story Day, was discussing student interview work when he mentioned, "They are co-initiators of the project...they make people feel so comfortable." Upon returning from an interview, a community member said, "this group is very professional."

Student comments from interviews and surveys, along with Dan Swale's comments above, speak to the shift from a participatory role of "student," learning about public history in a seminar class, to a different and more expanded set of participatory roles. These roles included those of media expert, journalist, contributor to a valued community project, and even project "co-initiators." These role transitions would have been difficult without a hybrid space between the formal learning environment of the university and the informal space of community interaction. This hybrid space in some ways facilitated stepping up to another level of participation.

Enhanced participation was also made possible through the use of digital media. It is reasonable to anticipate that students could conduct an interview without a recorder or other equipment, so the role of digital media was not simply to capture the interview. Rather, media production served as the impetus for students to play the role of a journalist or recording artist. As they researched the issues at the Preserve and raised questions, and as they developed a narrative about their subjects, they looked for opportunities to capture compelling stories. In addition, participants spent a great deal of time with their recordings, editing their pieces down in length and made difficult choices about what to include. The process of investigation, narrative development, and editing allowed them to use media products to hold open the hybrid space (in terms of the intersection of multiple contexts), in which their access to community events and processes of conflict resolution were kept alive through ongoing work with the footage.

In an interview, one student elaborated on the role media played in facilitating access to experience and understanding of the Preserve stories:

The role of technology in implementation of story gathering was integral in the sense that it was the vessel through which we were collecting and harvesting the information...From there the technology was integral

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because we went beyond the audio equipment and we took this digital version of the story and we integrated it into the final cut pro system and from there we were able to chop it up, spread it out, slow it down, piece things together...

- Amber, Community Media Seminar student

In participating in this project, students engaged in creative production of knowledge, in the form of edited audio/photo stories. These productive works extend beyond typical written school work in that they will be publicly displayed on a website. However, and perhaps even more importantly, there is a certain currency to digital works. Students were engaged in work more similar to the media integration in their everyday lives than normal school work, but beyond simple lay use of video or pictures, they learned, used, and taught with professional tools of the trade. Amber's use of the word "vessel" illustrates how media literally contained the experience of gathering and working with information—an experience within which they not only engaged in new participatory roles, but also encountered and integrated new knowledge.

Transformation of Knowledge



On the most basic level, the collection of stories through audio and visual media also created a context where students were able to explore a physical space (the Preserve) as well as an overlapping experiential space (community connection to and interaction with the Preserve). This then facilitated reflection on both how people negotiate contested spaces, and students' own relationships with place and community.

This contextualized learning process, facilitated by media production, provided a particular space for students to encounter and interrogate knowledge and experience. For example, the Community Media students reported that the *process* of recording and editing stories shifted their thinking. For many of them, it broadened their understandings of place and of how humans might interact with place, including whether people can live and grow up somewhere ecologically preserved, how an ecological preserve can be valued by a community, and how human relationships can impact the land in long-term ways. For Derric, an ecology major in the Community

Media Seminar, participation in the project increased his understanding of restoration as a complex and ongoing process without a perfect outcome. He described what he learned in this way: “The reiteration of the idea of restoration not being static, or about freezing time in a museum-like experience. Restoration is not really discrete, but rather a process.”

Much of this more subtle learning arose out of engagement with the conflict around the land preservation process. Although the Conservancy’s mission involves restoration, it was partially established by Terra Mining Company, and a few members of the board are connected in some way to mining. Aspects of community conflict around mining and environmentalism came to light in the initial meetings, exemplified by delicate negotiations and hinted-at issues. For example, several people expressed misgivings at known environmental activists being invited to join the advisory group. However, it was unknown whether students would encounter this “multiplicity” of community, and if so, how they would interpret or learn from the conflicts. Through analysis of transcribed meetings, interviews, and notes, evidence emerged that conflicts and multiple points of view within the community actually served as key aspects of the students’ learning process.

For example, Jamie’s comment about understanding the perspective of the miners provides an example of contextualized thinking which can be interpreted in multiple ways.

I loved the stories that brought to light the kindness of the miners, I think often miners and the industry are vilified and it was great to hear their stories and hear environmentalists credit them for the work they had done. It definitely changed my perspective.

This comment is illustrative of complex learning for several reasons; first, it is likely that, in the university setting, environmentalist viewpoints have greater credence than miner viewpoints, and this exposure to miner viewpoints helped a student develop greater compassion for and understanding of different points of view. It is possible that Jamie has a somewhat simplified view of the conflict due to not having all of the data at hand; nonetheless her viewpoint grew and encompassed more of human experience in relation to the land than it had when she was simply attending classes at the university.

Another example of students grappling with and learning from the community conflict comes from the debrief of the winter quarter Community Media course.

Dane discussed three storytellers he worked with, two from the mining industry (Brad and Russell) and one environmental activist (Ken).

For us we had three really perfect people, because each came from a really different background. We had Brad who was this miner who had been involved in this place...who had a really deep connection to the land, and then we had Russell who was this really funny, witty guy, this representative of Terra—he came from more of a mining background, that mindset. And he still had a deep connection with the earth. And then we had Ken, who was Mr. political activist, you know, down with Terra, you know, I had to fight all of these people off and so, I thought that the synthesis of those three stories...was just a great combination.

- Dane, Community Media Seminar student

Although the storytelling itself is a political process, in this case (due to the distribution of story collection, transcription, and editing) it allowed students access to multiple stories that provided insight into experiences different than their own. This is reflected in realizations such as “not all mining companies are bad.” The Conservancy community had engaged in a challenging negotiation, resulting in a collaborative process in which land was moved out of gravel production and into a form of restoration. In the process of working on this project, students became familiar with storytellers’ complex and sometimes conflicting relationships to the land and to one another. Students engaged in a questioning process regarding the value of restoration, the environmental commitments of miners, and the possibilities of collaboration.

The examples above, pulled from student surveys and interviews, illustrate the “transformation of knowledge” which happens as students move out of familiar space and into a new space characterized by social engagement across normally immutable boundaries (university and community), facilitated by media-making. However, what made the experience salient for students was the real-world context of the work—their responsibility to people beyond their teachers or themselves.

The Return

Once students engaged in the process of collecting data, creating stories, or shaping a media piece based on their experience, they returned to present their pieces to their community. This return included both a showcase of student work attended by community members, advisory group members, other students, and instructors; as well as the website in which student work was publicly displayed.



At the showcase, students from all courses presented their work. This work included two-minute, edited audio public history stories, photo essays, and written profiles generated from community member interviews. Community members reviewed the work, providing context and realistic feedback. Students also had an opportunity to examine the work of other students across courses and disciplines.

In final reflections, when asked to discuss what it was like for them to think about their writing appearing in a public context, many students noted the importance of the “real” nature of the product to their experiences as writers. Angel, a Writing Intensive student, wrote, “When a person’s work is put up for the public to see, it inspires the worker to do the best they can do.” As another student, Rommel, wrote:

I wasn’t just writing for a grade, I was writing for a real “thing” ...A new level of meaning was placed on my work. I knew that other people would be seeing it, reading it, judging it – forever. The transcript and the profile are public record and if that doesn’t make you think twice about how you write your paper or the respect and time that you put into writing it, then I don’t know what will!

Several also wrote that the contextualized nature of the project gave their work a sense of worth. As Rommel continued, “It kind of made the work I put into my writing worthwhile...more than just a professor or a TA would be seeing my work, so I guess I put a bit more pride into my work.” According to another student, “The profile I had written really did something... I had given the place a face. I had affected its reputation, thus affecting it.”

In addition to inspiring pride and a sense of worth, the hybrid space created by the intersection of student work and community feedback allowed for new ways of engaging with the act of writing, compiling, and editing, fostering a more complex set of skills. In a written response, Phuong, a Writing Intensive student, noted specific writing improvements which had not occurred to him before community viewing. “As people stood and viewed my work, I began to think of the improvements such as

what was the best length and format for the profiles." Others noted the political savvy involved in creating a profile for public consumption: "I wanted to write his profile in a way that respected his side of the story and to give the community members a look into Ken's motives at the time." The process of representing community members was fraught with difficult decision making, knowing they would see the end result.

In addition, students wrote of how they realized through the showcase process how their work fit into a larger project.

The campus event was extremely beneficial for me because...I was able to make a connection between our work and the whole project. It was great to meet and get to know all the people involved with the project. Seeing the passion and dedication to the project definitely made me more excited and honored to be a part of it all.

- Sara, Writing Intensive Course student

Interaction across diverse groups of students in the showcase provided additional opportunities for learning through juxtaposition of experience. In surveys, students mentioned their excitement in sharing with peers:

When I heard the audio profile I was very impressed that they could mold the words they heard so effectively...as to keep the personality of the individual they had based their profile on while ensuring that the words they said were clear and understandable. This is what kind of editing I had attempted to do on my profile, but now I realize I should have further edited her sentences.

- Tanner, Writing Intensive Course student

Tanner's comment implies a transformation of how skills are learned when multiple groups of students engage in various types of media production with the ultimate goal of public consumption.

Not all of the dialogic encounters between students' work and community feedback were positive; community members did not hold back in critiquing both student grammar and choice of topics, and aspects students had little control over, such as the spelling of names they had only heard. Nonetheless, the new layers of meaning derived from interaction with the community and other students in the moments of return lent gravity and complexity to student encounters with the material.

An oft-cited feature of experiential or project-based courses such as this one is student motivation and buy-in (e.g., Blumenfeld et al., 1991). As the learning experience moves closer to a real-world context, students consider the relevance to their lives, and the space of learning comes closer to bridging the personal lives of students with school spaces (Moll et al., 1992). Several student comments indicated an attitude that this was more than an assignment. Students voluntarily pored over interview questions, asked for advice, and introduced themselves to community members. In a sense, the interaction with community members reinforced the reality of the work—this was not a performance or a presentation in a class. On one hand, there were real social consequences to “messing up;” on the other hand, there was joy to be derived from a community member who reacted well to the students’ work.

In addition, students voluntarily reported on the significance of the project in achieving their career and educational goals. Here the transition to a new participatory role is most apparent. According to the survey responses of one Writing Intensive student: “I am an environmental science [major, so this project] was pertinent to my future and the work that I may be involved in...I gained some more understanding of what people in the environmental field can do for a job.” For this student the encounter with new forms of knowledge led to new potential forms of participation. In her interview, Amber spoke extensively on the value of the project for her college experience and her future career:

I feel like this project has been integral to my entire college career, which is ironic given that it has only flourished in the last two quarters. ... I never encountered a scholastic opportunity in which I had the ability to literally produce something, to come out of the end of the quarter with a living breathing project with a life of its own. So, for me, I see this project...as being the keystone to my college career... I have it on my resume for sure.

- Amber, Community Media Studies Seminar student

For the college students, the return was integrally rooted in the responses by the community and the relationship to their futures outside of the school environment. For some, the return thus poised them for a new journey, as van Gennep suggests occurs in a rite of passage (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 2011; Wallace, 1966), with a different or more detailed vision of their future as new roles were opened to them.

Discussion

In this paper, we have described the different ways learning new participatory roles can be supported through hybrid spaces between formal and informal learning environments (Gutierrez, 2008). Student comments and reflections show the importance of the way media created alternate opportunities for engagement and for new roles, as well as the importance of the public nature of the project in their motivation and learning. Conflict was productive for learning in this context, in part because the learners were responsible for characterizing the conflicts and examining the validity of varied viewpoints. The use of digital media was not simply motivating but served as an anchor for generating artifacts and acting on those artifacts to develop both knowledge and for applying that knowledge. Van Gennep's Rites of Passage provide a metaphor for understanding how such a return can be so powerful as learners transition into a new form of participation incorporating new knowledge. The return to position of learner is complemented by both new skills and a recognition of the new types of opportunities (jobs, careers) that await.

A discussion of transition and return begs the question as to how the return has transformed the school community. We have discussed above how students themselves encounter new knowledge and transform existing knowledge, incorporating it into their understanding and cycling into the next stage of their own journey, but how does this knowledge then transform the original learning context? Are schools transformed at any level of practice?

Restore/Restory students commented on the importance of the project in their schooling experience. Some focused on how their university education should include such an applied project, which, in Jamie's words, "added purpose" to the educational experience. Moreover, this project ended in a product, audio and written stories for the website, which were valuable, "fruitful," or "amazing." Along these lines, several students felt that there should be more projects like this established between universities and communities.

Such projects highlight an opportunity, but also serve as an example of issues of implementation. When asked about challenges which arose during the process, students most often mentioned time constraints imposed by the fast pace of the quarter system and their other coursework. Regarding this, several students indicated an important systemic issue—this course was offered pass/no pass and not required for their major. Even though many of them felt it was the most important class of their year, if not their college career, they were forced to prioritize their graded and required coursework. If such a course was worked into their major as a requirement it

would help ameliorate the tension expressed by students about a project which they felt was literally a “culmination” of all they were doing at the university, yet one which was underemphasized in major requirements.

Schools at both the k-12 and university level may benefit from incorporating such projects, especially if committed to learning which bridges school, home, and community contexts. The opportunities generated by the use of media and the boundary crossing spaces within community/school projects may allow for shifts in participatory identity, providing students with tools to engage in the next stage of learning with agency and activism.

Notes

1. Real names are used as requested; in all other cases names have been substituted for confidentiality.
2. The project is led by the UC Davis Art of Regional Change, a university-community engagement initiative that brings students, scholars, and artists together with community groups to collaborate on media arts projects that strengthen communities, generate engaged scholarship, and inform regional decision-making.

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Aspects of Museum Education in School

Susan Humphries & Susan Rowe

ABSTRACT

A group of teachers working with children, parents, and friends of the school have explored ways to develop environmental, artistic, social, and cultural awareness through events and workshops based on museum education. They saw power in the notion of collections of things that would impact on children's formal and informal learning. This article describes aspects of museum education in school.

Almost every child has a sense of the value of personal collections. These can generate a surge of memories about a holiday by the sea, support an interest in fossils, or extend the designs that children build with their modular kits. They can also be amongst their first attempts to categorize various countries from a hoard of overseas cards and stamps. No matter what the subject of the collections, each item tells a story and carries a personal history to the collector. It is one way for an individual to express values and current interests in much the same way as adults do when furnishing a home for the first time. Notions such as these had a bearing on teachers planning work for children that is aimed at deeper levels of participation. We thought that by exploring the children's treasures and the heritage of home, community, and school we could make collections of aesthetic and scientific importance. We could also make special links to the outdoor environment so that the spaces there would display a variety of beautiful rocks among growing flowers and trees in unique collections. These permanent exhibitions were sown, planted, and built up by the community over a period of thirty years and fulfilled a particular need, providing evidence for the children to study and get the taste for enjoying life in the natural world. Our collections advanced the prescribed national curriculum as well as providing opportunities for informal learning. Overall the plan was to bring together the indoors

and the outdoors in an integrated way. Adults and children would touch everything, socialize with one another, and connect with the features in the landscaped setting that would resemble a country park.¹ We saw all of this work as an application of the collections principle to daily life.

As discussions around museum style experiences went on, the teachers felt that one way to realize this on a regular basis would be through borrowing objects in a systematic way. Exhibitions could be put together for a short life of one or two days, the collections would flow from the thematic work that shaped our curriculum teaching and would be another axis for the exploration of the subject matter. Acquisitions would be honoured by their treatment as treasures: each shown in its own space positioned among related items and presented on textiles and other surfaces so that the artefacts were in a scene that invited people in to view. We would involve our school community in resourcing, setting up, and curating the different exhibitions and parents and carers would catch the children's enthusiasm for the projects when talking about them at home.

The collections and displays were as far as possible to hold true to the ideals of multisensory stimulation and follow some best practice in the museum service of conscientious provenance of objects meant to deliver a feast for the eyes in a contextual framework. Many exhibitions are simple and short lived: one was based on food from the sea.

Food From the Sea

A parent who managed a wet fish shop helped us to set this up by providing a generous donation of different species of fish and shell fish. These were laid out on a groundsheet covered with sand and shells. Each class of children watched as fish were washed, filleted, de-scaled, and trimmed and other parents dipped the fillets in flour and egg before frying them. The children ate their taster as they sat around the marine display and the fishmonger talked about the environmental goals of keeping the seas and beaches clean and about fish quotas. He also described the negative impact of industrial chemicals on our rivers and seas and the fate of creatures caught in oil-spill disasters. All the children in school visited the museum throughout the day and the supplies of fish were replenished from an insulated container. This sort of teaching echoes conventional environmental education and it also helps children and adults to become more aware of the interconnected nature of the planet.² Eating some of your learning makes it a part of you and the smell of the sea and of fish cooking makes up for the exhibition being only moderate in scale.

Geology Trail

Our school grounds have been transformed as a result of the teachers' determination to teach authentically from firsthand knowledge.³ Geology, geography, and botany are experienced through the quality of the collections that form a permanent resource. Large rock specimens have been introduced from different parts of the UK to make the study of geology an everyday interest. The children play on and around memorable landmarks that make powerful aesthetic contributions to the school setting. In every case the introduction of the groups of rock was managed so that they become references to heritage and early history. One group is the massive rectangles of Yorkshire limestone that were set in a circle so that they had parallels with the many ancient stone circles built to honour the sun and with the purpose of measuring time. Two of the blocks carry a stone crossbeam similar to those of the Stonehenge monument in Wiltshire: this tri-form orientates the circle for sunrise and sunset at the spring solstice. The children call this landmark "Coombeshenge." Parents used machines to dig holes to anchor the stones that have one third of their mass and length in the ground. This is ancient technology and is our attempt to respect the original methods as we put the work before the children. All through the day groups of children watched the work in progress and they observed the changes to the landscape; later they all helped to restore the ground after the installation was complete by spreading large quantities of bark chippings around the base of the stone circle.

Gritstone from Derbyshire was gifted by workers in a quarry where there was an adjacent dolmen (Neolithic burial chamber). We re-created an ancient chamber using similar-sized blocks and there is a strong resemblance to the original. Our version has the addition of cut and polished undersides so that the children can see the inner colours of the stone. When cut and polished the stone indicates its commercial value for the construction of fireplaces, floors, and memorials. Four or five children can sit in the covered area and there is space for twenty children to sit on the upper surface.

Two caves, one of pink granite from Aberdeen and another of red sandstone from Greta in Dumfries and Galloway, suggest the time when sheltering beneath the rocks limited access to predators and gave an easy-to-defend base for those who needed sanctuary. Each set of stones exists in the school surroundings as an example of the topography of the region from which the stones were accessed. The children go inside the caves to experience the accentuated sound, the gloom, and the hollow atmosphere.



Fig. 1: Geology trail – sandstone cave

They stand on the summit to call for attention, view their surroundings, or emphasize their climbing power because this is in keeping with the character of these places.

Twenty Cotswold rocks aligned to a pathway give an alternative route for children wanting to walk tall next to their adult parents and carers. These are stones of great antiquity and fossil rich. Four Faringdon sponge rocks formed near Oxford when tropical conditions prevailed in the area are simply millions and millions of dead sponges and sea creatures that have been coalesced into stone. The boulders give detail of an early climate change in Europe and the comparison between these stones and other types helps to suggest the immense span of time before human life became a feature on earth.

Welsh slate, Cornish granite, Purbeck limestone, millstones, conglomerate rocks from Somerset, Sarsen, stones and Lake District sandstone have been set up to form part of our school geology trail. Each group of rocks has its own appeal: together they are part of the school's resources as geological samples from mainland Britain. One long-term objective was that the collection would function as a showcase for the earth sciences and a fascinating study of our planet's history.⁴ Most are easy and safe climbing challenges for the children and enticements to understand more about geology and a variety of terrains. Our trail has taken eighteen years to evolve and is used for both formal teaching and informal learning.

Native Wildflowers

Early in our school's history we declared our intention to educate children about the environment and the need to be stewards of the planet. The pathways that lead children around the geology trail feature small wild patches that were typical across the ancient countryside for more than a thousand years. These wild spaces provide a statement about the balance that can exist between the needs of people and the needs of nature. Wildflowers used to be harvested for medicines and as dyes and once they are established they can become an enduring feature perpetuating themselves year by year. They are responsible for insect diversity and the flowers are also a constant source of pleasure for the children. The more diversified the flora, the more abundant the species of fauna. Birds need insects and as the flora gradually increases, a complex web of life evolves in these areas that become sanctuaries and feeding stations. Every year the wildflowers are renewed in some way. Sometimes this is through seed introduction when a small patch of prepared ground is sown by the children and protected with stakes and a net. At other times plants such as cowslips are introduced as plugs and merged into grassland.

Collecting evidence about plants is a great stimulus to learning: it can engage all the senses and be an artistic activity. The children gather tiny pieces of the flowers on cards that have a strip of double-sided sticky tape down the centre. These colour cards are packed with minute bits of evidence about the quality of the landscape and what can be found in it on any particular day.

Many artistic ideas are expressed through art ephemera.⁵ In order not to detract from the environmental ethic of care for native plants, we use seeds, fallen leaves, fruit, pebbles, feathers, and sticks to create artwork out of doors. The children work alone or in groups to set arrangements of these found objects from the school grounds. The selections are naturally short-lived and we capture them in photographs for the future. Sticks and pebbles are always returned to where they were found at the end of the activity. We avoid picking the wildflowers for these displays. Each year the children plant narcissus bulbs so that they can pick the flowers as gifts for their mothers in the following spring: some of these blooms are also incorporated into the children's ephemeral art. The teachers raise questions with the children about what can be picked and what should remain untouched in the wild. It is generally determined by who did the planting and why. The act of personal involvement in the planting and in the gathering and arranging at blossom time is a way of exploring creativity and the benefits of the garden. It also acknowledges the issues of responsibility for planting and harvesting that allows for living material to be taken from its source.

Wild plants have many stories to tell. Some offered remedies and were used to staunch bleeding or applied as poultices. Others were used to flavour food or beer and the flowers and berries of some were gathered to make cordials. Wild fennel and garlic were roasted and eaten and the nettle was an alternative to flax and an edible green vegetable. There are a wide variety of stems and leaves that can be harvested for salads, and in hard times our ancestors augmented their diet from the herbs and flowers of the untended land.

Arboretum

When we started planting our grounds it seemed practical to enhance the children's perception of trees and bushes by planting an arboretum. Forest trails are the best-known family walks and we created these trails over the years with help from the children and the community. The centrepiece of the grounds is the sports area: a football pitch that becomes an athletics track and is used for all team games and physical education. The southern periphery of this area is a low bank made much more striking by the addition of truckloads of soil. This surplus was available through a local road-widening scheme and a mixture of subsoil and loamy earth raised the level of the bank considerably. Forest trees were planted in this by the children and those trees that lived spread their roots to secure the bank and limit access to the perimeter pathway. The long wide bank on the south side of the school field tapers to a narrower bank on the west side. There is a change of level in the school grounds from the southern boundary to the northern boundary although the sports pitch was graded to make a level plain in the centre. The sloping nature of the site makes it much more interesting to plant and at the steepest part where the land falls away from the sports pitch we concentrated on further planting that has resulted in a small woodland.

Every type of indigenous tree and bush is represented in strings of planting and there are also groups of fruit trees all around the school. The fruits are gathered by the children as part of the lessons on healthy eating, biodiversity, seed-to-seed cycles, self-sufficiency, pollination, and symbiotic relationships. Leaves and seeds from the various trees are used for ephemeral art. The paths with wide sets of steps and informal seating make fun teaching spaces and a windswept bleak site has become a friendly setting for teaching. Simultaneously, the sports ground has been transformed because the planted edges and banks make the open area appear more prominent like a stage. Trees flanking the margins cut the wind speed and give shade, texture, and colour. In some spaces, teachers, parents, and children have tied the trees together. A group of six ash trees have been twisted into each other and secured with

ties: as these grow they form a highly original pattern with main-stem growth forming entryways that invite the children to go through or stop to feel the bark. Willow has been similarly treated so that it loops into a series of connecting arches. There are learning and playing opportunities, a choice of places to build dens and gain an experience of designing shelters. The woodland atmosphere has been produced slowly with imported bark chip and sawdust helping the previously almost waterlogged ground. The ambition and determination of teachers, children, and parents to make the whole planting a caring statement has led a step at a time to a fine collection of trees.

The route through the woods is waymarked by bark chipping paths and in the autumn rose hips, haws, elderberries, sloes, apples, and plums fruit along them. Birds have moved in for the insect life that trees harbour and bluebells are well established. This is a living collection for children transformed into a scene of beauty with blossoms, changing leaf colour, and the harvest of berries and fruit to look forward to.

Frost, snow, and ice play their part and sometimes we light candles on the pathways and invite the children and their carers to make candlelit walks during the winter. The arboretum is an aesthetic attraction: it supports wildlife and gives a sense of adventure to the regular explorations we make in the gardens. The wildflowers, the geology trail, and the arboretum are permanently on display: importantly they give children choices about where to play and what to look for and there is an element of pride in being able to describe the best views, the expeditions to the rocks, apple picking, or den building: these sorts of things have a personal meaning.

Spider Museum

In the autumn the presence of orb-web spiders is evident through their webs that are outlined by the heavy dew and frost. These hang in the spider's silk, revealing the geometry of the web and attesting to the strength of every strand. Sometimes we spray the web with car paint (making sure in advance that the spider is out in a resting place). We put a card misted with glue behind the web, cut the silk on the external framework, and capture the web to study. The spider is able to weave a replacement web in about two hours. Webs tend to be asymmetrical with the hub of the web nearer to the top: the spokes of the web are built in separate arcs and not in a continuous spiral as may be generally assumed. Most gardens have several types of orb-web spiders and also a range of other spiders to be found on trees and bushes as well as inside our houses, sheds, and on our lawns.

Learning to love the beauty in your own back garden is about teaching for transfer. Perception grows little by little and the lessons in nature such as the spider webs are scientific, mathematical, and spiritual.

The teachers thought we should have a one-day museum based on spiders. This would be a timely reminder to everyone of the value of spiders to wildlife in general and we could also acknowledge references to the spider in our literature as in *Charlotte's Web*, the tale of Robert the Bruce, *Brer Anancy*, *Miss Muffet*, and the like. Our local Chinese take-away restaurant donated boxes with transparent lids so that each teacher and child could take one home on a Friday. Explanations were given to the children about how to search for and humanely capture the spiders and notes went home a week before the collection describing techniques to the parents and details about care of the creatures. We asked for short written descriptions about the search and capture and emphasized the importance of the spiders' welfare and the fact that they would be exhibited according to the details supplied. During the weekend we constructed and fixed a floor-to-ceiling spider web in the centre of the school hall using string. We also set up an exhibition of pictures, books, and a film on loop as a guide to a spider's life as well as a number of display tables covered in black cloth. On Monday most of the children came to school with a spider referenced to its place of capture and with written information and sometimes photographs and children's drawings. The children were helped to place their spiders in the relevant part of the museum. Any children without a spider were helped to collect one from around the school site, using the tool shed, cleaners' cupboard, hedges, and fences. A local expert talked to all the classes about the spiders on display and also brought his own collection of living and dead creatures.⁶ At the end of the day, the children collected their spiders to take home and release safely back into the environment in which they had been found.

Chair Museum

Some themes have been so memorable that we repeat them every four years or so. An installation exploring the theme of chairs depended a lot on the contributions loaned by parents and grandparents. The gathering of old, unusual, or much-loved furniture offers great contrasts within a single category of items. In the last collection we had five high chairs, seven rocking chairs, a number of handcrafted chairs, and a comprehensive set of designer chairs. One section of the museum showed wheelchairs including a historic bath chair with a sepia tint photograph of a great-great grandfather using it. There were nursing chairs and a commode and in another section there were folding chairs and portable seats including milking and fishing

stools. The exhibits tell the story of individual family preferences in style and demonstrate modern and old versions of the same article. The commode chair brought giggles but gave us the opportunity to talk about growing old, changing needs, and incapacity. The answer to need is a design that provides a solution. A chair is primarily a perch to accommodate weight and a version of a resting place. Office chairs, bar stools, children's chairs, and other modern versions of chairs are easy to come by but it is important that the modern exhibits are viewed alongside older items. The key questions around design, function, materials, and relationship to comfort or fashion become easier if half the objects have a longer history.

The character of every display is defined by contributions from parents, teachers, and friends. It is vital to ensure that several curators are on hand throughout the museum's life in order to care for the exhibits and to give the children further information about them. Often parents will send their contributions with written descriptions and explanations and the curators will help the younger children to read these.

Employing a variety of layouts for the diverse collections is part of the purpose for doing this sort of work. It changes the atmosphere of the school hall or the classroom when the spaces are filled with non-school objects and it represents a bridge between home and school. Everyday objects become more interesting and can be seen for what they are: cultural expressions and items of taste, choice, or sentiment. A part of the work is about developing the discerning eye, separating function from ornamentation, making comparisons, and discovering personal preferences. All this is practice for identifying relationships between things and deepening our sense of design.

One log stump and one round stone represent the earliest seating and these are set together on a rush mat. The children are accustomed to these types of seating because they are a part of the school site and part of the playground arrangement. In the display they are a contrast to manufactured seating and can prompt us to reflect on first solutions followed by adaptation and invention. The tradition of chair making in the woods meant that the timber for this craft could be selected and cut on site. During the life of two chair museums we have identified suitable trees in the school garden, cut them down, and a craftsman parent has demonstrated the old skills of turning wood on a pole lathe and green wood joinery. Ash was used to make the first of our school chairs. The children still sit in this every day because it was made for them as part of their furniture. In a different chair museum, the same parent also made a storyteller's seat using willow and hazel. This is kept in one of our

tree houses but the timber was cut from the school site, and from start to finish the children visited the craftsman formally and informally while the different processes were followed. Essentially this connection between the woodland and the furniture is visual and the coppice re-growth is slow to fill the gap. Years of growth followed by a sudden empty space are elements of loss in the natural world and part of the production cost. Some trees flourish with this type of forestry, springing up later as a multi-stemmed tree and illustrating sustainable methods of production.

On another occasion we installed items of wooden furniture in relevant trees in the school grounds: a chair made of beech was winched into the fork of a young beech tree, a walnut bedhead was attached to the branches of one of our walnut trees, a folding table made of oak was suspended in an oak tree, and thirty wooden spoons were hung in an aspen. Eight different items decorated the willows showing the breadth of use of this type of wood. A pine rocking chair and a pine plank were propped against a Scots pine and spades, forks, and other garden tools with ash handles were hooked up to the branches of the ash trees. The children were entertained and informally educated as they walked the pathways in search of more exhibits.

When we call for loans the teachers and children try to make clear demarcations of function in order to place the different objects within broad bounds. We use rugs, blankets, and carpets on the floor to define the areas for each agreed-upon category. In practical terms this means chairs to test by sitting in them, the guarantee of touch and feel where seats are leather or velvet, chairs that move (rocking chairs, chairs with rollers or reclining features), chairs that are for the eyes only because of their long history or sentimental value. The idea of safeguarding for the future applies to fine arts, the natural world, and to personal history and is a piece of the whole teaching through museum-style projects.

The children come to the museums in their class groups and they make at least two visits. The first of these will be to enjoy the museum as a whole, to walk around, and talk about the exhibits and to touch and feel when appropriate. The second visit will invite more detailed examination and often the children will come with clipboards and paper to make notes or to draw from life.

Textiles Museum

The museums are semi-formal, ensuring things to touch and often relying on craftspeople to demonstrate the use of specialized tools. In their time many of these tools were innovations and the children need to appreciate the effectiveness

and elegance of hand tools and simple machines that rely mainly on human energy. Textile manufacture operated for thousands of years on this basis and one of the joys for the children is to see clothes and things of quality produced by people they know who are operating simple devices such as knitting needles, crochet hooks, and rug fastening hooks.

A two-day museum is regularly connected to the shearing of the four school sheep. Two grandparents and a retired teacher work on a loom using threads spun by the children and adults from the sheep fleeces. The children use carding combs to clean and untangle the raw wool and to make sure that the fibres are consistently lying in the same direction. A second process involving spinning is displayed by two friends from the local craft guild who work on spinning wheels to make dependable lengths for the loom.



Fig. 2: Textiles museum — spinning

Children and helpers use spindles to wind threads for the loom but this process is not easy as it is hard to get thread of a regular density. By the close of the museum on the second day a small blanket is manufactured from start to finish. Artefacts in the exhibition include patchwork quilts, crocheted shawls, hand-woven blankets, hooked rag rugs, knitted toys, baby clothes, and sweaters. There are appliquéd patterns and pictures and examples of tapestries and felt work. Many children make felt from the surplus fleece and produce dyes from plants in the garden to colour the fabrics. One parent worked her early twentieth century hand-operated sewing machine for the entire two-day period and its lack of sophistication gave the children scope to recognize the techniques mastered with this invention. As a contrast to the old machine, a computerized version was being used on the opposite table by a parent who did garment alterations as part of her job. The support from the local craft guild, parents, grandparents, carers, and their friends is needed to make these projects happen: they become working exhibitions such that the children can experience textile production from the past with its demanding routines and its rewarding social implications. Getting to know the substance itself—wool in all its adaptability—is also revealing: the smell and texture of the wool, the clatter of the loom, the sounds of sewing machines, knitting needles, feeling the nap on the felt and on the surface of a blanket, and discovering the smell of heated wool and its blending characteristics as it is turned into felt.

Whenever possible we talk about renewable energy sources. Obviously work of the type described is about promoting craft skills so these might become leisure activities in the children's future. This is all about sustainability because it suggests that to make something oneself can help individuals to be less dependent on commercial products, and it keeps alive our interest in the old tasks and crafts.

One table in the exhibition holds a button box, button-hole scissors, threaded needles standing in a pin cushion, an old needlework box, hooks and eyes, press studs mounted on tape, a tapestry frame holding a part-worked tapestry, and two samplers from 1820 and 1860 made by children in those times. These small details reflect old skills and it is the intrinsic heritage value of an item that is more important than its monetary value. Each time, the museums are different because the people engaged in them vary. The specimens that are loaned have a story and all are linked in some way to the children in school. Because of this the collections help us to be conscious of what we have in our own locality and in our own community.

Transport

A focus on transport can be so extensive that it can become hard to manage. We prefer to examine one or two aspects of transport in depth. On one occasion we based our work on horsepower: this was not a static display but rather an example of learning in action. Horsepower was formerly an imperial unit of power equal to about 750 watts and was for many years in common use as a measurement of engine power. We decided to approach the idea of transport through the daily visits of the postman because the children had some active knowledge of the work of the postman on his rounds at home and at school. We arranged for all the classes of children to meet the postman in his van at the front of the school and to collect the school post. He gave them an overview of his work, bringing a delivery bicycle on two mornings and a post office van on two other days. He also explained that the delivery of letters was originally financed by the receiver of a letter prior to the introduction of the Penny Post in 1837 and that postal deliveries were made on horseback or mail coach.



Fig. 3: Transport museum — horsepower

In the following week, special postal deliveries were made by a “postman” on horseback who carried a letter for every child in school: this illustrated our former dependence on the horse at a time when it was fundamental to the delivery of most goods and services.

Each child paid a penny to the postman on receipt of the letters. Following this, all the children were pulled around the school field in a pony and trap to evoke the old means of transport.

We extended this project to make a display of vintage cars, bicycles, motor-bikes, and tractors sourced from our local community, and this helped us to trace the development of transport from a dependence on the horse to a dependence on machines. All the motor exhibits were ridden and driven across the playing field and up and down the school drive by members of our parent group. The engines idled with open views to the working parts and the journeys made in front of the children were memorable because the vehicles were all so striking. The machines were curated by their owners who revved the engines, sounded the horns, and gave personal anecdotes about the history of the vehicles. The help of many parents and friends of the school allows these cultural adventures to happen every term.

Art

We try to bring the exhibitions to life through art. All the arts enable us to have a greater understanding of life and can give us a glimpse into the past as well as into a possible future. One of our recurring activities with the children and adults is pavement art where we are all participants in an instant art gallery. We use chalk and charcoal to draw on the paved surfaces outside. The pictures drawn blend into each other and the gallery can be visited during and after school with parents and carers. Pictures in these media have a very short life and are washed away by the first shower of rain or trample of footsteps. The exhibition depends on collaboration and cooperation as well as on spontaneity and is often recorded photographically for later discussion.

Two or three times during a year we draw exhibitions of pictures together. The core of these collections are displays of sunflower pictures by artists who have been inspired by these flowers and scenes of gift-giving displayed in January. The tenet of these art galleries is in revealing more details about what we already know. In the case of the sunflower images they have a bearing on the mass planting of sunflower seeds by the children in the early summer.



Fig. 4: Sunflower art

The exhibition of pictures synchronizes with the blooming of the sunflowers in September. Art gallery reproductions by Monet, Vincent van Gogh, David Hockney, Van Dyck, Georgia O'Keefe, Isaac Fanous, and others are the inspirations.

Conclusion

Our intention in offering regular exhibitions is that the children are encouraged to want this kind of exploration for the rest of their lives. The learning style is about independent fact finding, prospecting new tastes, and making the most of what a community might offer. It is also about reciprocity in that giving time, talent, and interest to a project has a big impact on the children who will hopefully develop these lifelong dispositions.

If parents never go to museums, art galleries, great gardens, or fine collections how do their children get their bearings among such things? One purpose of the collections/museum approach is to bridge the divide between different kinds of cultural appreciation because the divide is artificial. We need to help children and

the community to extend their appreciation so that they can view the world anew, making fresh interpretations when looking at images and artefacts, handling collections and craftwork. This stretches aesthetic awareness and presents a bigger scene of life with different challenges. Experiences are what shape us: our disposition and learning potential are hooked into the stimuli we receive. The brain's expansion is consequent upon the networks of connections between brain cells. These cells are set to respond to sensory stimulation and the more cells are called upon to function the more they are extended. The best conditions for all children are those that are stimulating, multi-sensory, and full of positive feeling, and we endeavour to provide them through our museum approach to informal but lifelong learning.

Notes

1. J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*. Dover Publications, New York, 1958. Dewey stresses the importance of children's experiences in the outdoor environment.
2. Father Thomas Berry, 1914–2009. A cultural historian and Ecotheologian. Founder of the Thomas Berry Foundation, 1998. See Father T. Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1988. Father Berry discusses the interconnected nature of the planet and our place on it.
3. This type of authentic curriculum was advocated by Comenius many years ago. See J.A. Comenius, *The School of Infancy* (edited with an introduction by E.M. Elter), University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1998.
4. S. Rowe & S. Humphries, *The Coombes Approach*, Continuum (Bloomsbury). Publications London, 2012. Chapters 4 and 8 give more detailed descriptions of the Geology Trail.
5. Andy Goldsworthy: a British artist and sculptor whose ephemeral artwork with found objects in the natural environment has influenced our work at school.
6. Bruner emphasizes the need for dialogue between “the more experienced and the less experienced” in order to enhance learning. See J. Bruner, *The Culture of Education*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996.



Susan Humphries was the founding headteacher of The Coombes School in Arborfield, Berkshire, UK and she led the school from its opening in 1971 until her retirement in 2002. She is a Trustee of the Learning Through Landscapes Trust and in 2011 was awarded an honorary Doctorate of the University of Agricultural Sciences in Uppsala, Sweden. She still works on a voluntary basis at the school.



Susan Rowe worked at the school starting in 1978. She became deputy headteacher from 1991 and in 2003 became headteacher. She has also worked on a part-time basis as a Lecturer with the Open University, leading a one-year course that offers specialist training for classroom assistants and also with Reading University, teaching elements of a Foundation Degree for classroom assistants and pre-school leaders. She retired in 2010.

The authors have collaborated on a number of books and other publications and have recently completed a book describing the work, ethos, and development of The Coombes School.



Lessons From the Field: Creating Sustainable Engagement in Organizational Learning

Ellyn Lyle

ABSTRACT

The philosophies of Join-Up with horses extend to inform theories of learner engagement. Drawing from these theories, and theories in adult education, I discuss paths to creating sustainable engagement of learners within industry-based education initiatives. Embracing a reflexive narrative approach, I consider the efforts of two large organizations to establish and grow learning cultures. Critically deconstructing these applied learning practices, and their successes and failures, reinforces my assumption that deep communication, trustful interaction, and choice are integral to the creation of meaningful and sustainable learning. This assumption leads me to consider the ways in which these philosophical commitments manifest themselves in physical learning spaces.

Riding embodies a rare friendship in solitude. In the quiet way it carries me through life, it is my metaphor. On horseback, I am never travelling alone. My thoughts, my joys and tensions, are felt keenly, so I'm called upon to pay attention to my own subtleties and exercise care with those who look to me for direction. I must also be awake to learning from those I lead. If I am conscientious and honest, the journey will be more joyous than it might have been. If I grow arrogant or careless, I am apt to find myself in a ditch with mud on my face. Deservedly.

Living my metaphor continues to teach me much about life and myself in it. It also encourages me to think deeply about my role as educator. The centrality of honesty, integrity, and humility in learning with horses provides me with an interesting lens through which I view my other teaching experiences. Monty Roberts, a

veteran horse trainer and the founder of Equus University, first introduced these values to me. Coined as a term referring to a non-violent approach to starting green horses, the message of Join-Up extends to include philosophies about communication and trust in the learning relationship.

Usually initiated with two year olds, Join-Up frames the way I begin formal training. I bring the horse into a round pen, and I take my place in the middle. With a long, lightweight line, I shoo the horse away from me. Predictably, the horse takes flight in response to what it understands as my aggressive behaviour. As the horse keeps to the rail and lopes circles around the pen, I turn with him, always keeping my shoulders square on him and my eyes locked on his. When he seems to be getting comfortable in this exchange, I abruptly flip the line a few paces in front of him, causing him to reverse and flee in the other direction. What I am communicating is that I am not willing to Join-Up with him, so he best look for a way out of the situation. He does. First, as he flees one way; then, as he flees the other, my behaviour does not change. As Irwin (2007) reminds me, horses don't like ambiguity, so I remain with my shoulders square and my eyes locked on the horse. Again, when the horse seems to be settling into a comfortable gait, I ask him to change direction.

Then I wait and watch carefully for the expected signs. The horse will slow his gait to a jog and his nearest ear invariably flicks inward and points to me. He is saying, "I'm listening." Next, the horse will drop his head, first just below the level of his shoulders, and then almost to the ground. Roberts (2004) says this is the horse's way of saying, "I'm ready to negotiate; if you want to call the meeting, you can be the chair." Finally, the horse will begin to chew and lick, indicating an eagerness to have the conversation. At this point, I look away and drop my shoulders off to a 45-degree angle. My body language communicates that I understand the horse has accepted my invitation and I am ready, too. I then turn my back exposing my own vulnerability and wait. The horse will slow to a walk and tentatively circle in toward me. I remain still with my back turned as the horse approaches me. He will sniff a bit; soon I will feel his breath on my neck, and he will softly nudge my shoulder with his nose: Join-Up. I turn then, eyes averted, and gently rub between the horse's eyes. Then I walk away. The horse follows me. I stop. He puts his nose on my shoulder. I repeat the action. He repeats his response. In this response-based learning, we are communicating deeply. Each of us understands the other, and we are engaged with the process. We are building trust and are ready to begin learning together. Working with people is not unlike working with horses. Our greatest successes come from approaching each other in partnership. This pedagogical framing has deeply influenced my work within learning organizations.

My first real emersion in a learning organization came well before I was able to name it. Having fled the public school system and then spent years consulting in non-traditional learning environments, I found a chance to return to the classroom full-time. This opportunity was at a local processing plant. The company was a large corporation with more than 800 employees. It had no previous experience offering learning and development, so its approach was one of tempered enthusiasm. Not knowing how the program would evolve, or if it would be sustainable, human resources posted an advertisement for a workplace instructor and decided to leave the program's parameters and development to the successful candidate.

As that successful candidate, I inherited an empty boardroom and 12 weeks to prove the sustainability of the program. Looking back, I guess I knew that there were a few key values that had to be honoured if we were to be successful. Foremost among these was the element of choice. Retrospectively, I know now that assumption is what led me to seek out the human resource manager on my first morning. Although we only spoke briefly, I was relieved to discover that the employees had requested an on-site learning centre, and only those interested in participating would enroll. Confident any potential learner will have chosen to join me, I was eager to meet with the employees.

I dedicated the first two weeks in my new position to having one-to-one chats with each person who expressed interest in the program. All of them carried unique stories of disconnection as well as personal reasons for wanting to re-engage. Although each story was equally important, I remember one with particular clarity.

I was sitting at my makeshift desk, a table in front of a plate glass window, looking out over the front grounds. I was lost in a reverie about my own experiences of disengagement and those shared with me that morning. I was jarred back to present by an impatient knock and the formidable presence of a gargantuan man I'd yet to meet. There was no point inviting him inside as he had already closed half the distance between the door and where I was seated. Noticing the mud on his boots, he stopped, fixed his eyes on me as a little smirk tugged on his red, bearded face, and then stomped his boots clean in the middle of the classroom floor.

"Hope you gotta broom," he said.

"Don't worry about it," I replied. "Have a seat wherever you like."

He picked up a chair as if it were one of those little seats in primary and dropped it within a foot of my desk.

"Here good?"

"Sure," I replied.

"Don't wanna get too close and get dust on that fancy suit of yours," he goaded.

I asked him what brought him in to see me. He said that he had come to get his "edubacation." Sensing he was having a bit of fun at my expense, I asked what education he was after. He said he wanted to get Grade 12. I explained that we could move forward in one of at least two ways: he could self-identify a level and we'd go from there; or he could complete an assessment and we'd establish his level and build on that. He asked when he could be tested, and I replied that I was available at his convenience.

"No time like the present," he said. "You best git out yer abacus and slates to see whatcha gotta learn me."

I invited him to move to the centre table where he had more room, and I gave him a package that I used to assess the baseline of those I assumed were quite literate, perhaps about a Grade 10 or 11 equivalency. It normally takes about an hour to complete but he handed it to me in 35 minutes. I thanked him and asked when he wanted to come in for a follow-up so we could develop a learning plan.

"What – yer not gonna grade it?"

I explained that I generally completed the assessments after learners left so that I could prepare a recommendation for them.

"Just get out yer red pen, Teach, and tell me how I did."

I invited him to read while I went through his assessment. Instead, he wandered around as I found section after section of his assessment completed and correct. Delighted, I told him that he was ready to begin at G.E.D. preparation and I anticipated that he would breeze through his high school equivalency.

"Geez, Teach, you must be surprised. A big woolly bugger off the farm knowing his ABC's, huh? Who'da thunk it?"

I replied, "having grown up on 1000 acres not 10 miles from here, I figure there's a few of us hayseeds who can count to ten. Perhaps since you're so bright, we'll see if we

can give you a little extra-credit work to help you overcome your assumptions." Pre-empting further exchange, I turned my attention back to my desk and left him to find his own way to the door. He sat quietly for a minute before he got up. As he made his way to the door, he barked out a laugh.

"Teach? If you're a farm girl, you probably got some jeans. Why don't you retire that fancy suit and put on some real clothes."

I didn't dare look back or respond for fear I'd laugh. I wanted to create a space for real people to engage meaningfully with learning. Well, it didn't get a whole lot more real than this.

I continued for two weeks to engage prospective learners in deep communication about their goals, anticipated challenges, and ways we could ground their learning. When we opened the doors to the learning centre in the third week, we had 32 students. Together, we created a program that was learner-centred and generative: learners opted in to the program without coercion or recommendation; their programs were developed individually, based on careful needs assessment; the individual learning plans were kept confidential; and there was no reporting mechanism back to human resources or supervisors. Word of the learning environment travelled and enrollment grew. Within six months the 32 had become 60 and by the end of the year more than 100 employees were enrolled. Although the program originated to help employees earn high school equivalency diplomas, the needs were as diverse as the learners, so the programs evolved to include a range of courses from adult basic education and essential skills to support with master-level degrees.

Having based the program heavily on Freirian philosophy, I assumed it would empower employees, improve their opportunities for advancement, boost morale, and position the company as a place of opportunity. Further, by offering programs for all levels of learning and staffing, I hoped the learning centre would transcend traditional barriers and become a place relatively free of rank. Long before we could determine our overall effectiveness as a learning centre, we saw evidence of success.

I was living in a world of hats. I realized this almost immediately after taking the job. You see, the front-line employees wore only white hats. The white hat suggested rank, pay level, and lack of power. The green hats were worn by maintenance. They were items of envy because they were not among the hated blue hats but essential enough to production to be spared wearing white ones. The blue hats were resented by all who didn't

wear them. Under them were the supervisors, a most unenviable position in my estimation. Having the appearance of power to those below them and only obligation to those above them, supervisors represented the highest turnover and lowest engagement. Then there were the no hats. These folks were management and generally regarded with disdain by all who wore hats. The hats (or lack thereof) were evident on the floor, in the yard, and at lunch. They determined who sat with whom on breaks and even where you parked your vehicle. The hats had amazing power. Their power was so awesome that, in checking the hats at the door, the learning centre became a place of equality. I'll never forget the day that it all began to change: a senior manager who had been in his role for more than 30 years joined the learning centre. Of course, we had met privately to establish a baseline and to build his learning plan, but the other learners did not know that a manager was about to join them. The first day he walked in to the classroom, the atmosphere grew thick with tension. Two of his employees already at the table looked at me with a combination of suspicion and fear. I offered them a quick glance of reassurance as I welcomed their manager to the table. He sensed the tension and handled it brilliantly. He knew I would not disclose why he was at the learning centre, so he simply asked if there was any room at the table for a man with only Grade 8 education. As looks of surprise replaced looks of suspicion, the barriers weakened. Within a week, the manager asked one of his employees for a bit of extra help with his fractions. A month later, they were poking fun at each other as the manager struggled to make sense of algebra. Overhearing the conversation, I suggested that they think of their chemical formulas as algebra and work backward to see how unknown variables are useful. Their learning became both collaborative and relevant, and more barriers fell away. Six weeks after that first manager walked through the door, two more followed. In a world so strictly governed by rank, this egalitarianism was radical.

I was delighted that the learning centre was becoming a place free of rank. Founded on choice, deep communication, and trust, it was proving itself to be both relevant and sustainable. The business, however, required that it also quantify its value. I decided to conduct surveys and hold informal interviews to determine if the program was successfully meeting the needs of both individual learners and the organization. The results were clear: as individual knowledge grew, collective organizational knowledge was growing; this new learning boosted the performance of individuals, departments, and the organization; supervisors reported significant improvement in morale; and turnover among the learner population was two percent compared with the 11 percent among non-learners. These returns, together with the breakdown in the caste system, indicated that we were not only achieving a quantifiable return on the company investment, but also helping the company transition to a learning organization.

So far, I've focussed primarily on how the learners and I created spaces for them to Join-Up with me on their learning paths. But the company also made some important contributions that facilitated this process. For example, the program was entirely employer-funded, yet it was completely employee self-selected and governed. Additionally, the employees were compensated in one of two ways to attend: they were either paid half of their regular hourly wage to attend off shift, or they were permitted one two-hour learning period twice weekly during their paid shifts. The philosophy behind this compensation was that learning benefits both the employee and employer so it should be cost shared. Presumably coming back to school on days off involved fuel to drive in, childcare, and time away from other part-time work. Therefore, for every two hours spent in learning on the employee's own time, the employer paid one hour's wage. Those employees who worked the same hours as the centre was open, and who were therefore unable to come to school, were permitted four hours weekly of paid study time. The trade-off for this latter group was that there was no extra compensation available to them for time spent in learning. Perhaps the company's most important contribution was its distance. Other than receiving attendance reports to facilitate compensation, the organization was wholly uninvolved. There were no strings, no payback clauses, no reporting mechanisms, and no loopholes. Learning became personally meaningful and relevant.

This type of program also presented some challenges. Entirely employer-funded programs are often cost prohibitive, which make them difficult to sustain for many organizations, particularly small- and medium-sized businesses. In addition to the salary of a full-time teacher and the cost-share initiative with employees, the program required extensive infrastructure: classroom, computers, and learning materials. The organization must also have a large enough employee base to cover those participant-learners who leave the floor to study in two-hour blocks of time. Finally, scheduling must be agile enough to accommodate the diverse needs of many employees. Both financial ability and staffing agility demand a high level of commitment from the learning organization.

In this particular company, though, the program was a tremendous success for everyone involved: in the four years I was with them, more than 250 learners succeeded in meeting their goals across more than 18 programs; the organization received national and international attention for its commitment to workplace education while benefitting from more skilled and engaged employees; and I found a space where education was collaborative, personally meaningful, and relevant.

In our fourth year, the program had brought benefits to the company significant enough that I was offered the opportunity to move to its corporate office and develop the model of learning further so that it might be introduced in the corporation's six other business units and made available to its more than 7,000 employees. Excited about the possibilities, I accepted the opportunity to join the corporate team as its Organizational Development Specialist. After training a replacement for our learning centre, I transitioned to the corporate offices. Almost immediately, though, I recognized serious barriers to successful inter-business implementation.

At the corporate level, the company did not have the framework to be a learning organization. First, the corporate headquarters were independent of all business units and, by design, physically removed from all business sites. As such, any individual learning was contained in silos and therefore could not congruously contribute to organizational knowledge. Likewise, because the learning occurred in silos, it was unable to affect overall organizational performance. Finally, because the corporate level was primarily executive-level staff, it was not organically involved with practical operations of the individual business units. Perhaps the most serious barrier to effectively leveraging learning across the businesses was situating it within the corporate headquarters. An elite distant unknown to most of the businesses and their people, the corporate office did not have the trust of its independent units. It was regarded with disdain and reputed to know little about the ground-level operations of each business and therefore believed to implement one problematic solution after another.

Had the actual learning model created in that first business been shared with each of the other businesses and then grown organically in-house, thereby honouring the principles on which it was founded, there might have been an opportunity for success. Unfortunately, because the company was determined to leverage one solution through one person to multiple businesses all across North America, I could not envision paths to successful Join-Up. Having recognized this incongruence, I brought my concerns to my executive team, where I learned that the structure was unlikely to change. With no foreseeable solution, and unwilling to become mired in an ineffective system, I tendered my resignation.

Although I wasn't able to accomplish at the corporate level what I'd hoped, my experience there led me to an important realization: learning initiatives seemed to be most successful when they were grown organically and collaboratively. Eager to move to a new space that had the capacity to embrace this model, I accepted an offer to join a global Human Resource firm as its National Manager of Learning and

Development. My directive was two-fold: to manage the training opportunities and teams aligned to existing external clients, and to inform the growth of a new learning and development service that the company would offer nationally.

Unlike the processing plant, where learning was entirely internally focussed, this new organization had two learning mandates: to promote learning and development of its own employees, and to sell learning and development services externally.

From an internal perspective, the company seemed to be a solid example of industry best practice. It offered its employees an above industry standard of 10 paid training days and 2,000 dollars tuition reimbursement per calendar year. Employees also had access to more than 4,000 electronic courses and e-books to assist them with personal and professional development.

In addition to these self-directed learning opportunities, employees participated in face-to-face training developed and delivered by the company's internal training team. These courses were designed to make transparent performance management, engagement, operational changes, and strategic initiatives.

Offering opportunities that aligned employee development to organizational growth allowed the company to optimize both individual and collective knowledge. By making learning plans a central part of its performance management system, the company focussed on both employee development and organizational performance. These practices, as well as its use of engagement surveys to systematically collect and respond to employee feedback, suggested the company was a learning organization.

As one of its newest employees, I was pleased that the company created spaces for its employees to engage with learning in personally meaningful ways. As its national manager of external training, though, I was tasked with a different challenge.

I had just completed my doctoral residency and was delighted to be offered a position with a global firm newly established back home. Although I didn't have all the details of my new role, I knew that the company had a sizeable learning and development contract that was in jeopardy and the executive was looking for someone with a strong background in education and business management to create realignment and grow the external learning department.

When I arrived in my new office, I found a damaged team, disappointed client, and disintegrated curricula. Wanting to understand the brokenness, I met individually with each member of my new team. I heard repeatedly that misalignment with previous management had left them feeling overworked and under resourced. Since the removal of that leadership, each person named feelings of abandonment by the company. With the permission of each who confided in me, I asked if we could meet as a group to collaboratively plan moving forward.

With them onside, we got together to discuss two explicit objectives: determine how we could contribute individually, and identify those areas where we required support. This approach helped to create transparency and alignment. Next, we brainstormed requirements for success. This exercise helped us to create a shared vision of learning and development. Third, we negotiated role expectations so each of us had clarity and, as a team, we could identify gaps. At this point, we arrived at a place where individual roles were evolving, a shared vision of learning and development was budding, and gaps were being uncovered. Implicitly, we were communicating our way to trustful relationships that would establish sustainable commitment to working together.

Next, we turned our attention to rebuilding client confidence. We met with key stakeholders so that we could understand better their unique requirements and then collaboratively determine ways to meet their objectives. Both the clients and my team were delighted to be involved in planning and expressed excitement about continued partnership. We were on our way to joining-up, but we needed new curricula.

The current curricula were highly Americanized and laden with case studies situated in the private sector. Considering the clients were in the Canadian public sector, we decided to throw everything out and begin fresh. Guided by the principles of Join-Up, we established several meetings at which my team and our client could collaboratively identify areas for professional development. Honouring deep communication, trust, and choice, we all participated in identifying the intent of the new curricula. Once this intent was articulated, our clients began a communication campaign to reintroduce learning and development to its employees, and our team began the task of development.

After months of collaboration and research, we had a canon of 24 new professional development seminars when we kicked off training that fall. Three years and more than 400 sessions later, the learning and development team continues to honour communication and choice: advisory partnerships meet monthly to discuss learning requirements, and learners are encouraged to complete evaluations after all seminars and suggest areas for improvement. These evaluations are collated and analyzed annually, and

both the raw data and the executive summaries are forwarded to clients. The relationship of trust grew and the clients committed to transitioning from a year-to-year agreement to a long-term service delivery commitment.

I had been hired first to create realignment, foster engagement, and build sustainable client relationships, and second to grow our professional development seminars into curricula that could be sold nationally to a diverse clientele. Having risen to the challenge of the first task, I turned my attention to the second one.

In addition to managing the requirements of our existing clients, I was asked to become a member of an executive advisory group that would lead the development of learning as an externally marketable product. Despite the individual and collective passion, there was immediate misalignment: the project manager insisted on accountability and timeliness of delivery; the product manager was focussed on branding and marketing for consistency and repeatability; the training manager was driven by engaging sales and providing delivery collateral for a network of contract trainers; the director was committed to collaboration so that various business units could successfully coexist while meaningfully contributing their areas of expertise to the development of a new product; the executive vice-president was focussed on long-term fit for market growth; and I was determined that we bring nothing less than theoretically sound and practice-proven programs to our clients.

For my part, which is really all I can speak to, I struggled with conceptualizing learning as a product to be sold. Additionally, bringing to the team curricular expertise, I disagreed with the notion that all training should be standardized and sold as a boxed solution. My arguments in favour of organically grown learning initiatives, the engagement imperative, and curricular integrity were outweighed by the seduction of a low-maintenance, one-size-fits-all approach to securing a high profit margin.

Committed to contributing and determined to encourage what I assumed to be best practice, I agreed to provide a generic curricula on the condition that all contract trainers would be educated in subject matter and prepared by my team for a dialogic approach that would let them customize the curricula to suit the needs of individual clients. My team worked tirelessly to meet our commitment and submitted a solid canon of professional development programs. Once the collateral was delivered, the advisory group decided that training the trainers was too costly, and opted instead to use scripted facilitator guides. This approach was so incongruent with the intent of the programs that I went on record as strongly opposed to this

new direction. Although I continued to meet with the advisory group and inform development of the company's external learning product, I did so as the voice that questioned an approach that positioned learning as a static commodity. I cautioned that such a one-size-fits-all approach was decidedly incongruent with the principles of adult education and counter to the market's desire to have customizable learning opportunities responsive to unique business cultures. The appeal of a greater profit margin won, and the product was brought to market as a boxed solution to be delivered by facilitators guided only by script.

Now in its second year, external learning has failed to entice even existing clients and has lost the support of the executive. Internal resources were reassigned and divisiveness in our group continued to fester. The presence of competing agendas continued to create misalignment, and the lack of process resulted in unpredictability and inconsistency. As this space became a breeding ground for misunderstanding, communication was neither safe nor respectful. Trust was not achieved.

The absence of effective communication, the breakdown of trust, and the impossibility of choice impeded Join-Up within our executive advisory group. Some people left the initiative; others were removed. External learning, as a marketable product, continues to fall desperately short of anticipated revenue. Its lack of success to date, I assume, is partly due to the sales and marketing model that positions learning as a product and does not understand it as a process.¹ I also assume that the lack of market uptake is due in part to the product itself, which does not present learning as organic, collaborative, and dialogic.

Critically deconstructing these applied learning practices, and their successes and failures, reinforces my assumption that deep communication, trustful interaction, and choice are integral to the creation of meaningful and sustainable learning. Wanting to understand the practical implications of this assumption led me to consider how these philosophical commitments manifest themselves in the physical learning spaces.

Supported by the work of several scholars,² I believe that teaching emerges from who we are. For that reason, it's imperative that I am awake to the ways in which my theoretical beliefs are operating in my teaching. Although each of us crafts a distinct practice, I've found commonalities in the characteristics we embody as we try to create spaces for our learners to Join-Up. I understand these tendencies as falling loosely under four themes: communication, democracy, responsiveness, and integrity.

Healthy learning relationships are made more meaningful through open communication. I think, as teachers, we are really good at articulating our expectations and then providing feedback. These bits of communication represent the outgoing messages and are clearly related to our expected outcomes. Perhaps more subtle, though equally central, is careful listening. I wonder if we hear our students with the same clarity that we speak to them? If we are to create spaces for Join-Up, the proffered learning ought to be born of the students' goals and honour their lived experiences. Although we often have outcomes that must be met, there are multiple paths that will lead us to them. A commitment to deep and continuous communication sets us up for an engaged and successful learning experience.

Teaching for democracy is also essential. Based not in equality of power, as that would be dishonest, this democracy is evident in the delicate relationship between a teacher's ability to lead and her willingness to follow. If I am to create personally meaningful learning for each of my students, I need to take a seat among them and be open to learning through their experiences. This pedagogical approach does not pretend away my position of power; it encourages me to share it. In the sharing, the learning environment becomes a space of negotiation, and the learning unfolds as a dynamic and reciprocal process.

Responsiveness is born of my commitment to communication and democracy. It is validating for learners as it allows them voice and agency. It frames their experiences in a way that concurrently encourages them to seek meaning in their learning and collaboratively inform its development. In doing so, it also encourages accountability. In co-authoring their learning, students are sharing ownership in the whole process: curricula, assignments, and assessment. Even bound by predetermined outcomes, this practice may lead us to paths we were previously unable to imagine—to places where we reconceptualize the learning relationship and create spaces for Join-Up.

At the heart of integrity in learning is a commitment to honesty, fairness, and respect. Each of us, teacher and student, is a learner at heart. We approach scholarship with unique experiences and knowledge that can enrich each other and augment our own learning. I must acknowledge the power inherent in my role as teacher but never allow it to overshadow the opportunity to learn with my students.

I think it is also helpful to name those characteristics of place that encourage learners to Join-Up with learning. Influenced by Palmer (1998), I understand these tendencies as being situated within five thematic areas: bounded openness; charged affability; voice; solitude within community; and deliberate wakefulness.

Space should be both bounded and open. A learning environment must have enough parameters to make it safe; otherwise, it risks becoming a void. Both in my reading of Palmer (1998) and in my own studies of praxis, these parameters may take the form of desired outcomes, subjects for study, relevant materials, and negotiated rules for safe learning spaces.

The learning environment should be both affable and charged. The risk in creating a learning environment that is open is that the competing agendas and diverse passions of those participating may grow the space into a place of potentially risky discovery. Caution must be partnered with passion so that learners are safe to engage in the learning community without fear of being silenced, judged, or lost.

Third, and certainly closely related, the learning space should honour voice. In addition to creating space for the voice of each person participating in the learning environment, we should also take care to foster the development of a collective voice. While the former encourages individual criticality, the latter fosters collaboration.

Similarly, learning spaces are most effective when they provide room for individual reflection and dialogic learning. Solitude encourages reflexive contemplation, while conversation provides context for our experience and epistemological claims.

Finally, if we are to Join-Up with learning, we have to be awake to individual interests and power imbalances. This wakefulness requires that we deconstruct not only the positions each of us takes, but also pull at the threads of those positions to reveal the underlying interests. Only when we look for the undercurrents of power and privilege can we hope to generate less oppressive paths to learning.

Each of us comes to learning with varied and diverse lived experiences that inform not only what we know, but also how we know. To deny these experiences, or bar them from the learning environment, is detrimental to those trying to engage with learning. Further, it is apt to result in conditions incongruent with Join-Up, thereby damaging the potential for personally meaningful and sustainable learning. In an attempt to champion spaces for students to engage more fully, I continue to maintain that education is made more joyful when approached with an undivided heart.

Notes

1. Drawing from the work of Argyris & Schön, 1995; Bruner, 1977, 1986, 1990; Jarvis, 1987; Kolb, 1984; Lave & Wenger, 1991; and Smith, 1999, I understand learning conceptualized as a product to be driven by outcomes and measured by observable changes in behaviour. It is assessed in terms of change and valued by getting the most change for the least investment. Learning conceptualized as a process exalts the importance of the journey and acknowledges that the variables of human capacity and lived experience often make learning outcomes unknown. Still change centric, this conceptualization views learning as open-ended and tends to juxtapose the purpose and process of learning while questioning the influence of the systems on this matrix.
2. Brookes, 1992; Cole & Knowles, 2000, 2001; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellsworth, 1997; Foucault, 1984; Knowles, 2001; Knowles, Cole, with Presswood, 2008; and Palmer, 1993, 1998.

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Shared Stories of Successful Graduates of Juvenile Residential Programs

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored stories of successful graduates of residential programs regarding their experiences while in treatment. Participants were purposefully selected. Data were collected through audio-taped interviews and analyzed for themes. Shared stories indicated the impact of counselors, negative and positive aspects of programs, and peer relationships.

Context

Criminologists and lawmakers often ponder the rationale for juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Several risk factors have been linked to define the problem of juvenile crime such as poverty, peer relations, school, family life, and community dynamics. Young people who are negatively influenced by these risk factors have greater chances of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system (Brank, Lane, Turner, Fain, & Sehgal, 2010; Contraras, Molina, & del Carmen Cano 2011; Matjasko, Needham, Grunden, & Feldman Farb, 2010; Stein, Milburn, Zane, & Rotheram-Borus, 2009). Granello and Hanna (2003) reported that high rates of criminal activity by adolescents have increased the number of adolescents being court-ordered to correctional facilities, adult jails, and juvenile residential treatment programs.

Young people are committed to juvenile residential programs of various levels (e.g., level 4 – low risk, level 6 – moderate risk, level 8 – high risk, and level 10

– severe risk) (See Appendix A). Their successes or failures within and/or after commitments may depend on how motivated they are to become rehabilitated, the program commitments to providing services that are geared toward youth competency development, and the community involvement after young people are released back into their natural environments. This presents a question that many stakeholders continue to ask: How do key stakeholders address juvenile delinquency in a balanced way? Court systems continue to modify policies in an effort to provide solutions that are beneficial to the community and juveniles.

Theoretical Framework

Hirschi's Control Theory and the Differential Association Theory (Sutherland & Cressey, 1970) provide theoretical perspectives on juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Both theories establish rationales for why young people engage in deviant behaviors. Control theory suggests that young people select friends who have similar inclinations to delinquency (Knect, Snijders, Baerveldt, Steglich, & Raub, 2010). The Differential Association Theory holds that all behavior is learned, delinquent behavior is learned in small groups, and delinquent behavior is learned from collective and specific situational events (Knect et al., 2010; Sutherland & Cressey, 1970).

Literature Review

Risk Factors for Delinquency

Jensen and Vance (2004) offered an analysis of a New Hampshire juvenile correctional system's strength-based perspective in measuring clients' risk and protective factors. They credited the system for assisting youngsters in developing protective factors. It is common that "youths with risk factors who do well also have protective factors in their lives such as support from positive peers, rules, and routines at home, the ability to function as a good student and some perceived competency" (p. 16).

Family.

There is much evidence for the correlation between family characteristics and youth crime (Estévez & Emler, 2010; Matjasko et al., 2010; Yu & Gamble, 2010). For example, good marital relationships and strong family cohesiveness have been more

commonly found in families of non-delinquents than delinquents (Clemens & Miller, 2001; Peterson, Buser, & Westbury, 2010). Stein et al. (2009) note that positive paternal relationships and attachment to fathers is a protective factor. Parent monitoring of activities and parental supervision of peers also has a positive influence (Brank et al., 2008; Yu, 2010).

On the other hand, a family's inability to positively address children's emotional, intellectual, and social needs often leads to crime (Brank et al., 2008; Matjasko et al., 2010; Yu & Gamble, 2010). Furthermore, certain negative behaviors by parents often lead to negative outcomes. For instance, Brank et al. (2008) discuss the relationship between a lack of parental monitoring and violence. Matjasko et al. (2010) observe that harsh parenting and a lack of family closeness are contributors to crime. Stein et al. (2009) point out that parental drug and alcohol abuse often lead to negative behaviors. In addition, broken homes, family disruptions, and one-parent homes often lead to delinquency (Contreras, Molina, & del Carmen Cano; 2011; Grunwald, Lockwood, Harris, & Monnis, 2010; Schroeder, Osgood, & Oghia, 2010).

School/education.

Effective schooling for students in the juvenile justice system often leads to more positive outcomes. Mathur and Schoenfeld (2010) note that education for young people in the juvenile justice system will likely be the greatest way to influence behavior. Sander (2010) suggests that skill building and school experiences that are positive are essential, and Mathur and Schoenfeld (2010) stress the importance of teachers and peer tutoring. Brodie (2009) points out the value of schooling that has high standards and expectations. Mathur and Schoenfeld (2010) in their discussion of education for young people in the juvenile justice system, assert that, "To succeed in providing a high-quality education to adjudicated youth with special needs, correctional facilities must change their focus from an emphasis on custodial care to the academic success of students in their schools" (p. 25).

Peers.

All young people need friends, and peer relationships can be positive or negative (Brank et al., 2008). Troubled youth need positive peers; however, this is often not the case. Youths who find themselves involved in antisocial peer relationships are more likely to engage in negative behaviors (Brank et al., 2008; Miller, 2010; Yu & Gamble, 2010). Harding (2009) points out that there is a large correlation between negative peer relationships and delinquency/drug use and adds that disadvantaged youth are more likely to associate with older peers, and this can be problematic. Grunwald et al. (2010) discuss the problems associated with unsupervised peer groups,

and Smith and Chonody (2010) contend that negative peer influence often leads to drug abuse.

Matjasko et al. (2010) discuss “peer networks” and how these relate to violence, noting that peers often seek out others who are violent and that “peers are a critical determinant of violent perpetration” (p. 1055). Mouttapa et al. (2010) point out that some young people who are not gang members identify with the gang member mentality and then adopt some gang member behaviors. In addition, peers can often negatively influence the behavior of others while they serve time in the same correctional facility (Bayer, Hjalmarsson, & Pozen, 2009).

Poverty/socioeconomic status.

The socioeconomic status (SES) of families is often a predictor of crime activity. Young people who are poverty stricken and living at disadvantage are more likely to engage in criminal behaviors than those who are not living in poverty (Kirk, 2008). Low SES often leads to violence (Matjasko et al., 2010) and frequently to substance abuse (Peterson et al., 2010). In addition, economic disadvantage may contribute to drug dealing, reoffending, and recidivism (Contreras et al., 2011; Grunwald et al., 2010).

Community/neighborhood.

Deprived or disadvantaged neighborhoods often have juveniles who turn to offending behaviors and recidivism (Estévez & Emler, 2010; Kirk, 2008; Matjasko et al. 2010). Grunwald et al., (2010) discuss several aspects of deprived neighborhoods, noting that neighborhood processes often lead to juvenile violence, drug dealing, and drug reoffending; they add that residential mobility may be a predictor of juvenile property crime. Little and Steinberg as cited in Grunwald et al. (2010) report that “adolescents who sold the most drugs were more likely to live in contexts characterized by high physical and social disorder...” (p. 1069).

Matjasko et al. (2010) report that violence is highly concentrated in disadvantaged communities, and the young people who live in these deprived communities have to deal not only with their own problems, but also with the problems of others in the neighborhood. Kirk (2008) maintains that the cultural norms of the community contribute to negative behavior, and the norms often lead to a tolerance for lawlessness and criminal behavior.

Program approaches.

Wertz (2004) advocates a multi-systemic approach to reducing adolescent

crime, recidivism, and substance abuse. Multi-systemic Therapy (MST) involves the school, family, and community to achieve positive behavioral changes for juvenile offenders. The major objective of MST is to address the familial, school, peer, and community-related sources that positively impact children's behaviors. Knorth, Harder, Zandberg, and Kendrick (2007) discuss the value of programs that apply behavior-therapeutic methods. Likewise, Lowenkamp, Makarios, Latessa, Lemke, and Smith (2010), in their discussion about juvenile facilities in Ohio, note that "cognitive and behavioral modalities" contribute to effectiveness (p. 697). Sung, Chu, Richter, and Shlosberg (2009), in their examination of Teen Challenge USA (TC) emphasize a different approach—faith-based recovery services. However, Sung et al. (2009) call for collaboration between social scientists and the faith-based therapists.

Program focuses.

Several researchers and writers focus on employment and responsibility for rehabilitated youth. For example, Selm (2001) demonstrates how at-risk young people can be assisted in making positive turnarounds from further delinquency in a discussion of a program designed to rehabilitate young people and strengthen community and family support, encourage gainful employment, and create a sense of responsibility. Similarly, Cohen and Piquero (2010) discuss the YouthBuild (YB) Defender Program that aims for future employment.

Life experiences can provide a perspective about how young offenders can be reached (Bond, 2001). *Operation Outreach* is a specialized prison facility within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) designed to provide juvenile offenders with a prison perspective and to help them realize the possible results they could face if they continue their criminal behavior. This program helps young offenders gain perspective, self-awareness, lose bad habits, and learn tools for life (Bond, 2001). As well, promoting effective life skills is the aim of other programs (Cohen & Piquero, 2010; Sander, 2010).

Staff members.

Qualified, experienced, and well-trained staff members are an integral part of effective treatment programs (Lowenkamp et al., 2010; Knorth et al., 2007). In fact, Knorth et al. (2007) assert that "the staff of a residential program seems to be more critical in assessing behavioral progress than youth themselves and their parents" (p. 136). Lowenkamp et al. (2010) point out that well-qualified, trained staff members help to reduce recidivism. As well, qualified, credentialed counselors add to the effectiveness of intervention programs (Leone, Roget, & Norland, 2008; Lowenkamp et al., 2010).

Research Question

Finding ways to reduce recidivism continues to be one of the most challenging issues in the area of crime prevention. The review of literature specifies that the major issues surrounding delinquency and recidivism are family, school/education, peers, neighborhood/community, and/or poverty and that researchers need to understand how the aforementioned affect society as a whole. Key stakeholders are encouraged to consider the “lived experiences” of those individuals who have experienced this phenomenon. Therefore, the research question that guided this study was: What are the shared stories of successful graduates of residential programs regarding their experiences while in treatment?

Methods

Philosophical Paradigm

Constructivism serves as the philosophical paradigm for the study. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) indicate that the constructivist/interpretivist perspective allows for multiple realities to exist. This epistemological assumption establishes a basis for determining the essence of knowledge, the relationship between the knower and the known, as well as the nature of truth. The knower interprets and constructs a reality that is based upon experiences and interactions within the environment. Through these lived experiences, truth can be explained from an emic perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Rationale for Selected Approach

Phenomenology is the approach that was used to unravel the essence of this study (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009). An important characteristic of phenomenology is the belief that human behavior is contextual. Behavior is observed and studied holistically and in context rather than being reduced to parts and manipulated (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Within this holistic perspective, “the whole phenomenon under study is understood as a complex system that is more than the sum of its parts; focus is on complex interdependencies not meaningfully reduced to a few discrete variables and linear, cause-effect relationships” (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 205).

Data Generation

Participants.

Data were collected from nine young adult participants who had satisfied their court-ordered sanctions in different residential facilities and who had successfully completed their aftercare supervisions (See Appendix B). Participants had been adjudicated as delinquents by the courts and committed to the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. These young adults had previously served in a level four (low-risk), level six (moderate-risk), level eight (high-risk), or level ten (maximum-risk) treatment program and were currently receiving post-secondary instruction in a college/vocational school or were gainfully employed.

Instrument.

The interview protocol emerged from the review of the literature (See Appendix C). The interview question that is examined in this paper is Question 1: What stories can you share regarding your experiences in a residential treatment program?

Data Collection and Processing

The interviews were tape-recorded by a digital recording device, and the researchers took handwritten notes in order to highlight important points that were expressed by the participants. A professional transcriptionist transcribed the interviews. The verbatim transcripts were reviewed and checked for accuracy.

In order to protect the rights of the participants, all information they provided was held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Any published results of the research will retain the confidentiality of the participants; pseudonyms were used in place of actual names. Confidentiality was maintained to avoid privacy invasion and potential psychological harm to the participants, and participants were informed that their participation was voluntary (Berg, 2004; Gay & Airasian, 2000).

Data Analysis

Once the transcription process was completed, the researchers coded the transcripts in order to find themes, patterns, or clusters of meanings that the participants revealed in their responses. Each response to the interview questions was reviewed on a line-by-line basis.

The researchers used NVivo software to organize text and/or audio and data files. Further interpretation allowed the researchers to develop a textual description, a structural description, and an overall description of the experience or essence (Creswell, 2007).

Steps to Ensure Trustworthiness

Guba's model for identifying rigor in qualitative research includes truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality (as cited in Krefting, 1991). Trustworthiness is often used in qualitative studies rather than internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. In order to ensure credibility, the researchers used peer examination, reframing of questions, triangulation, and reflexivity. In order to enhance dependability, the researchers used triangulation, a code-recode procedure, and qualitative analytic software.

Confirmability is similar to objectivity in quantitative studies (Milinki, 1999). The rationale behind confirmability is that it helps to ensure the interpretations of the inquiry have logical and clear linking associations. Reflexive analysis was used to make certain that the researchers were aware of any personal influences (Berg, 2004).

Findings

The nine participants were asked to share stories regarding their experiences in residential treatment programs. Some of the participants shared similar experiences, and other participants reported diverse encounters. The impact of counselors, negative and positive aspects of their programs, and peer relationships were all issues that emerged from the participants' responses. "Sincere" described his experiences as different:

The environment was different. You have to learn to live around people that you have never lived around before. The experience was different from what I was used to back home in Miami. The staff there in Central Florida was mostly white. They wanted you to behave like them. It was a lot of work from 7 am to 8 pm. Sometimes we did stuff that had no meaning (with emphasis). For instance, the guards instructed us to dig a hole. After the hole was dug, we were told to cover it up. I believe that we were told to do certain things just to waste time. It was a new experience, an eye opener. I saw people who

would come there who would be playful, social, or just be loners such as myself.

“Happy” shared variant perspectives of his environment in a level eight program:

The environment was crazy because sometimes when you think you are doing the right thing, the program staff make you seem like you are doing the wrong thing; they sent us a lot of mixed messages. When I tried to put forth my best effort in fulfilling my goals in the program, somebody or something would just hold me back. But then I began to remember and apply what I learned from my level six program. I started writing down ways to handle complex situations that I faced daily.

“Happy” observed situations and positioned himself so that he would not get caught up in the dramatic episodes of the program. He acquired these skills from his previous level six program. Throughout the program, *“Happy”* reported gaining confidence and greater determination.

Impact of Counselors

Counselors had a major impact on how the participants perceived their programs. In fact, three of the participants reported that successful programs have counselors who are competent, compassionate, and who use tough love to “break you down and build you up.” The counselors were looked upon as rationales for why some youth succeed and why others fail; the compassionate counselors assisted greatly in the success of young people. *“John”* distinguished counselors as either bad or good:

Good counselors talked to me and used a tough love approach by telling me that I scarred my life by involving myself in negative behaviors. They did not judge me but tried to provide me with a better alternative to crime. Bad counselors were negative towards me and called me a “bad ass git” (meaning an ungovernable young thug). They treated me and others like “shit” and often reminded me of my faults and criminal past, which in some way caused me to lose faith in all counselors.

“Sincere” shared personal accounts on counseling services:

Some counselors provided insight and helped me conquer some of

my problems. Other counselors were just vague and went through the motions. The older counselors were more serious and more practical than the younger ones. The younger staff had difficulty listening to us. But the older counselors (some who were Vietnam Veterans) were able to provide us with some of their difficult experiences that gave us more insight about the world we had never heard about.

"Sam" stated that the counseling services within his program were beneficial:

The counselors had an interest in us: about what we thought and felt; they interacted with us in ways that made us comfortable. They assisted us with our problems. For example, when we talked about our crimes, they would provide us with good solutions; they helped us understand how to think before we act. They would allow us to be part of the solution by saying things like: What could you have done differently to get a better solution?

The effective counselors appeared to be the reformers: the ones who assisted greatly in juvenile rehabilitation. The ineffective counselors (that John described as bad) had a tendency to spoil the whole bunch: they were perceived negatively by young people and may have created a trust issue between the counselors and youth.

Trust was an important issue for counselors and those receiving counseling services. Two of the participants highlighted trust as major determinants on whether they opened up to people. *"John"* noted that he could trust some counselors because they maintained respect for him and kept confidential matters private. Conversely, *"some counselors were not trustworthy, and that alone could damage you because you place your trust in them and they talk about you."* *"Tom"* expressed that sensitivity is a prerequisite for gaining trust:

Within my program, I don't feel that the counselors were as sensitive as they should have been. I feel that they should have put a little more effort in trying to understand the person and his issues first. And when things get difficult, don't just give up hope because it might take a while to gain the trust of somebody; but once you have gained their trust, that is when you can really help them.

"Happy" shared that he built a level of trust with his counselor that proved beneficial to his successful transition:

I was initially having some rough times in my level six program, so I sat down with my counselor and asked for help. He helped me put together a “to-do” list that included good objectives and bad objectives. My counselor told me that if I followed the good objectives, I would make my stay in the program a lot less stressful and I would achieve success. Some of the things that I realized needed to change were: 1) My attitude: instead of approaching people in a rough manner, I generally learned how to respect others by saying things like “Good evening, and How are you doing?” 2) Focus more in school. I practiced and strengthened my academics by asking for more challenging work. 3) Learning to bond with peers better—basically, I had to bond with them as I would bond with a child or my brothers and sisters. Once I did these things, I gave the impression to the program staff that I was ready to go home.

Counselors have myriad roles in the process of juvenile rehabilitation. Their effectiveness was derived from four areas: competency, compassion, sensitivity, and trust.

Negative Aspects of Programs

Several participants shared negative experiences about their programs. One participant described negative situations he encountered in the system that proved detrimental to his ability to fulfill his program objectives. Three of the participants expressed complete dissatisfaction with the educational services. There was no rigor in the educational component. The teachers were described as being ineffective. “John” and “Happy” explained further that the teachers did not teach; “They just gave you work and stated that you will need this for credit towards graduation.” The school component was just a way to “kill” time. “Bob” indicated that he used to crawl behind the teacher’s desk and go to sleep; he also reported that he made straight A’s for six months. “John” and “Happy” reported receiving satisfactory educational services in their outpatient programs.

General program components included negative aspects as well. “Sam” commented about the directors of his program. He expressed that the directors abused their power. He specifically disagreed with the way the directors assumed a superiority-inferiority complex when dealing with the clients:

They do things that make you want to catch another charge: like talking to you any kind of way. They know that we are powerless because if we say something back, they can violate us and then we’re back in front of the judge with a possibility of being sent to a higher level program; they test our limits.

"Mike" stated on several occasions that he witnessed staff inappropriately use improper restraining procedures toward clients in a level 8 (high-risk) program. "Mike" had been in a variety of residential programs and could demonstrate proper restraint procedures:

I know how to restrain somebody correctly because I have been locked up in the system for so long. I don't like to see other people get hurt. I put myself in their situation so that they would stop messing with the other people and focus on me. I put my hand on staff and I got kicked out of that program.

"Mike" observed this situation from a critical theorist's perspective; he discovered a particular injustice towards clients in the system and took actions in his own hands. His efforts were detrimental to his ability to attain success and further delayed any attempts at rehabilitation.

"Bob" shared that he received a positive termination from his program although he felt that it was not earned. He believed that the program administrators wanted him out. "Bob's" negative perspective of his program stemmed from the fact that the program was too heavy on rewarding clients for completing menial tasks. For instance, "If you swept the floor two days a week, you would qualify for an 8- to 12-hour home pass."

Positive Aspects of Programs

Five of the participants provided positive insights regarding their programs. The programs' environments, educational services, and program events were cited as positive aspects. Although other participants experienced negative perceptions of the educational components of their programs, three of the participants applauded the efforts of their teachers. Few of the teachers used non-traditional methods in commanding the interests of their students. "Sincere" indicated that he was given an opportunity to learn from teachers who were very practical in their teaching methods. In particular, the math teachers often interpreted math concepts with items from the students' natural environments (i.e., the streets). "Jim" shared that the teachers in his program were knowledgeable and assisted him with a smile. "The teachers helped transform my non-belief in education to making me believe in school and love it." Jim reported further that the program linked the counseling services with the educational components, resulting in a cohesive team management philosophy.

"Tom" was satisfied with his educational services:

The educational services were made readily available to me. Most of the teachers were helpful; the classes were small, and more individual help was given when needed. There were always decent supplies. I received my general equivalency diploma (GED) while I was there.

“Sam” described the educational component within his program as good. He shared similar perspectives like both of the previous participants. He credited the teachers for their willingness to assist all students at their individual levels and provide extended assistance when warranted:

You understand them well. They were not the kind of teachers that became frustrated quickly and move on. I feel that the teachers in my program were better than the teachers I had in my regular school because they take their time with you to make you understand.

The same positive regards were shared about their program’s environment.

“Sincere” learned how to adapt to what he called a “strange environment,” being that he was from an urban environment and was placed into a rural environment. “Tom” expressed that being in his environment was a learning experience. He valued the opportunities to see different races of people from different backgrounds (i.e., people he was not accustomed to being around). This experience “gave me a broader perspective on the way things really are, and I got a chance to get to know a few good people.” “Sincere” articulated further that in a level 10 (maximum-risk) program, “You become less bold and prideful because they will break your pride down real fast. Fast; the hard labor will do it. I did not talk back to the officers; I decided to comply with the regulations so that I could go home when my time was completed.”

Peer Relationships

Juvenile offenders in residential programs maintain daily interactions with each other. Four of the participants shared accounts of conflicting situations they either experienced or witnessed firsthand. “Tom” reflected on his past as one reason why he encountered negative associations with peers:

It was very hard for me because growing up, I really did not follow the crowd and I just did not get along with other kids. People looked at me differently and treated me differently. Therefore, there was a lot of conflict with peers when I was in closed environments. I got into fights; people tried to steal from me, that led to more fights.

“Mike” shared a similar occurrence:

Basically, I had an anger problem, and when I went to my first level six program for mental health reasons, a lot of people used to “talk trash” and start trouble with me. Since I have an anger problem, I would just swing on (i.e., hit) them. I have an issue about my neck, and if they would grab me, then I would swing on them again. I don’t bother anyone unless they start with me.

“Jim” explained that his difficult peer relations almost caused him to be transported back to the detention center:

I was accused of snitching on someone, and my peers began to threaten me, spit in my face, and did a lot of ridiculous things to get me to snap. It wasn’t a fun experience. They made my time in the program very difficult. I prayed for those home passes so that I could get relieved from what appeared to me as torture.

“Sincere” witnessed fights on a daily basis. He described the fights as either territorial or racial:

Each county had [cliques] of people who represented where they were from, and the larger population of people from a particular county picked fights with the other people from counties who did not have a large [clique]. The population in the program consisted of mostly whites and blacks; the Hispanic population was the minority.

These same offenders also reestablished relationships with peers in their natural environments when they were released from these programs. Four of the participants provided suggestions for young people (who are currently in juvenile residential programs) when they return to their home environments. “John” advised returning youth to focus on how they enhance themselves and to relinquish negative peer associations. “Mike” expressed that “it is good to help others, but you must first help yourself first: that goes along with loving yourself before you can love someone else.” He suggested that it is better not to have any friends for a while and use discernment in their associations.

“Jeff” personalized his statement by explaining that consuming drugs and being disobedient towards his parents resulted in him becoming a product of the juvenile justice system. He concluded by saying that partaking of mind-altering

substances (e.g., drugs and alcohol) may prevent young people from using good judgment and decision-making, subsequently preventing them from attaining successful life outcomes. “Sincere” witnessed strong-minded individuals being consumed by drugs:

Once they took that first puff of marijuana, they were led to other negative things. Drugs are killing the younger generation because these young people are engaging in more serious drug usage. Smoking and negative peers could lead them back into the system.

“Sincere” advised young people to rid themselves of negative friends and to conceal their trust. Trust changes dramatically when they return to mainstream society. He asserted, “Many people who succeed know how to use discrimination when it comes to trust.”

Implications and Conclusions

The impact of counselors, negative and positive aspects of programs, and peer relationships were all issues that emerged from the participants’ responses. Counselors had a major impact on how the participants perceived their programs. Participants reported that successful programs have counselors who are competent, compassionate, and who use tough love to “break you down and build you up.” The counselors appeared to be the reasons why some youth succeed and why others fail. Participants described the good counselors as ones who talked to them, used a tough love approach, provided insight, helped to conquer problems, were compassionate, showed an interest in them, respected them, and promoted trust. These findings regarding the impact of good counselors is consistent with existing literature (Leone et al., 2008; Lowenkamp et al., 2010; Knorth et al., 2007).

Some participants shared negative experiences about their programs. Several participants expressed complete dissatisfaction with the educational services, one indicated there was no rigor in the educational component, and teachers were described as being ineffective. This finding corresponds to the findings of Mathur and Schoenfeld (2010). Certain program components were also perceived negatively. For instance, participants reported some directors abused their power, some displayed a superiority-inferiority complex when dealing with the clients, some just wanted to get rid of clients, and some used improper restraining procedures toward clients.

Leone et al. (2008), Lowenkamp et al. (2010), and Knorth et al. (2007) all reinforce the need for well-qualified and well-trained facility staff members.

On the other hand, several participants provided positive insights regarding their programs. The programs' environments, educational services, and program events were cited as positive aspects. Participants applauded the efforts of their teachers and indicated that teachers were knowledgeable. Several participants were satisfied with the educational components of the program. One saw his environment as a learning experience, and another indicated that youth were rewarded for meeting requirements. Similarly, Brodie (2009), Mathur and Schoenfeld (2010), and Sander (2010) point out the need for effective schooling in juvenile justice systems.

Several participants shared accounts of conflicting situations they either experienced or witnessed firsthand regarding peer relationships. They discussed fighting, anger issues, and difficult peer relations. Participants also provided suggestions for young people (who are currently in juvenile residential programs) when they return to their home environments—relinquish negative peer associations, learn to help oneself, avoid drug use. These findings correspond to the findings of existing literature including articles by Brank et al. (2008), Harding (2009), Miller (2010), Matjasko et al. (2010), and Yu and Gamble (2010).

Participants provided a phenomenological view of their experiences in residential treatment programs. Counselors, peer relationships, and program components often determined their successful completions. These stories are important for other juveniles at-risk for delinquency, directors of treatment programs, teachers, and correctional leaders and can be viewed as examples for why some youth succeed and others fail while in treatment. This study explored a social reality that continues to plague the world today. When society establishes a critical look at the juvenile justice system and qualitatively assesses and determines key factors for success, perhaps a consensus for endorsing methods for reducing juvenile delinquency and recidivism can be reached.

Appendix A

Program Descriptors

Once juveniles become adjudicated delinquent, they are mandated by the courts to fulfill judicial sanctions. These sanctions range from adhering to community control (i.e., probation) to commitment status—both sanctions requiring youths be supervised by the state’s juvenile justice system. The following descriptions represent the risk levels associated with being on commitment status with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (Adapted from the FDJJ website):

- 1) Level 4 (Low Risk) - Current offenses range from first to second degree misdemeanors or third degree felonies. Offenders serving at this stage typically have failed to complete their diversionary programs and usually have poor family structures.
- 2) Level 6 (Moderate Risk) - Juveniles who are sanctioned at this stage have been found guilty of committing repeated law infractions. These infractions are typically considered to be serious property crimes.
- 3) Level 8 (High Risk) - Juveniles at this stage are considered a high risk to the public. They require close supervision in a structured setting that provides 24-hour secure, custody, care, and supervision.
- 4) Level 10 (Severe Risk) - This level is considered to be similar to adult prisons. Juveniles are in single cells; these offenders have committed serious violent offenses and other serious felonies. Juvenile offenders who are sanctioned by the courts to this level are given one final chance at rehabilitation before being sent to adult prisons.

Appendix B

Participant Demographic and Delinquent History

Age	Race	First Arrest	Subsequent Arrests	Types of Arrests	Commitment Levels	Siblings
John (22)	Black	3 rd Degree Felony	3 rd Degree Felonies	Drug Possession Assault/ Battery	Level 4 Level 6	One brother and three sisters
Bob (22)	White	1 st Degree Misdemeanor	3 rd Degree 2 nd Degree Felonies	Vandalism Burglary Robbery	Level 6	One step-brother and one stepsister
Tom (19)	White	1 st Degree Misdemeanor	Misdemeanors 3 rd Degree 2 nd Degree Felonies	Petty Theft Vandalism Drug Usage Robbery Burglary	Level 6	One younger brother; one stepbrother and one step-sister (both older)
Jeff (22)	White	1 st Degree Misdemeanor	Misdemeanors Felonies (3 rd Degree)	Marijuana Usage Underage Drinking Burglaries	Level 6	One younger brother
Mike (21)	Black	1 st Degree Misdemeanor	All Felonies	Aggravated Battery Assault on an Officer Escape Charge	Level 6 Level 8	Two younger sisters and one older brother
Sincere (21)	Hispanic	1 st Degree Misdemeanor	Felony	Petty Theft Armed Robbery	Level 10	One older sister
Sam (18)	Black	1 st Degree Misdemeanor	Two Felonies	Criminal Mischief Burglary Grand Theft Auto	Level 6	Four sisters and two brothers
Happy (18)	Black	1 st Degree Misdemeanor	Misdemeanor Three Felonies	Petty Theft Marijuana Possession Burglary Larceny	Level 6 Level 8	One brother and three sisters
Jim (20)	White	3 rd Degree Felony	Felonies	Burglary Robbery Drug Possession	Level 6	One sister

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

1. What stories can you share regarding your experiences in a residential treatment program?
2. How were you able to overcome the repeating pattern of further delinquency?
3. How are you able to remain focused and goal-oriented given your past juvenile delinquent record?
4. Given your experiences in a residential treatment program, what experiences can you share that could assist young offenders in making a positive transition from a residential program to mainstream society?
5. Given your experiences in the juvenile justice system, what changes would you recommend to correctional leadership?
6. From your recent residential experience, what can you share regarding the educational component (e.g., school and counseling services) within your program?
7. Reflecting on your past experiences in and out of residential treatment programs, how can you account for why some succeed (including yourself) and why others fail?

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Narrative Inquiry Into Two Worlds of Curriculum Making

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on a long-term multi-site narrative inquiry into the curriculum-making experiences of children, families, and teachers. We draw upon our earlier understandings of two worlds of curriculum making, the familial and the school, to inquire into tensions shaped for one family, in a place of school, as they experienced the meeting of their familial curriculum-making world with the school curriculum-making world. Familial curriculum making is curriculum making in which children are engaged as they interact with family and community members. We wonder how we might move forward as we create situations with children in both curriculum-making worlds, situations in which they can find ways of making sense of the two constructions of themselves in these two worlds.

We first met Loyla and her mother, Orie, in the late summer of 2008 as Loyla was about to begin Kindergarten. As we were beginning a narrative inquiry¹ with children, families, and teachers to understand their curriculum-making experiences at a time of increased achievement testing, we invited Loyla and Orie to participate. Our narrative inquiry was multiperspectival in that we wanted to inquire into the storied experiences of teachers working in classrooms, of families with their children at home, and of children as they lived in both homes and schools. While we have written about the broader study in other places (Clandinin, Murphy, & Huber, 2011; Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011), in this paper we focus in particular on Loyla's and Orie's experiences. Because the starting point for our

work with Loyla and Orié was in their home, we heard stories of Loyla's experiences in school as she told them to Orié and Janice, as well as Orié's experiences at home and when she interacted at school as she wrote about them in her journals and shared these experiences with Janice.

First, we introduce Loyla by drawing on field texts² that show our coming to know her as a child who began Kindergarten in fall 2008. Following are some of the ways Loyla described herself to Orié and her grandmother, Ruth, in November of her Kindergarten year.

I know my name
Lots of numbers
And my address and phone number
I am a friend
And a music-maker
Together, and alone
This is my long-time friend, Golden Pony
I know a bit about Japan
I love my new puppy, Bella
I am a birthday cake maker
And a cookie maker
I carved four Jack-O-Lanterns
This is number 2
I love Halloween
My daddy and I decorated our tree with ghosts
I am a chicken lover
I know how to gather eggs
I am a picture maker
I am a pattern maker—smooth, smooth, swirly
I am a ballet dancer
And a bike rider
I know about height
I am a letter writer
I am a card maker
For my friend Laken and her mommy, Jill,
Who live where I used to live
I love books
And I have been reading with my mommy for a long time
I am a song singer

And a Mandarin speaker since birth
 I know it's very sad when your dog dies
 And that my Grandma teaches me a lot.
 (Orie's journal entry, November 21, 2008)

This journal entry was one of a number of field texts that began to awaken us to new understandings of curriculum making.³ In earlier narrative inquiries we worked from a view of curriculum making as occurring in schools and classrooms where teachers' and children's lives met around subject matter (Huber & Clandinin, 2005). We understood curriculum making as a life-making process (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992) in which identity making, that is, stories to live by,⁴ was central. We imagined "how curriculum could be seen as a curriculum of lives" (Huber & Clandinin, 2005, p. 318). Our understanding of the negotiation of a curriculum of lives as children's and teachers' lives met in classrooms was grounded in the idea that "the composition of life identities, 'stories to live by' . . . [is] central in the process of curriculum making" (p. 318). We understood that the "complex negotiations at work in the composition of a curriculum of lives" (p. 318) drew attention to *family stories* and *stories of families* (Clandinin et al., 2006). However, in all of this, we understood the making of a curriculum of lives as firmly situated in school curriculum making; that is, schools were the only place of curriculum making. Attending closely to Orie's and Loyla's interactions as they made them visible to us in the field texts of the study enabled us to see another place of curriculum making, a place we termed "familial curriculum making" as distinct from the place of school curriculum making (Clandinin et al., 2011; Huber et al., 2011).

As we lived in this multiperspectival midst, we began to see, and to tentatively name, familial curriculum making as the process negotiated between Loyla and her extended family members as they interacted in their home and community places. In this way we began to reconceptualize curriculum making in order to give an account of both the in-school curriculum making and the curriculum making outside of school, that is, what we named familial curriculum making. We understand familial curriculum making

as an account of parents'/families' and children's lives together in homes and communities where the parents and families are an integral part of the curricular process in which families, children/learners, subject matter, and home and community milieux are in dynamic interaction. (Huber et al., 2011, pp. 7–8)

Based on the overall study, we now understand that familial curriculum making is as important to the negotiation of a curriculum of lives as in-classroom, in-school curriculum making.

There is much we came to know about the different aspects of Loyla's familial curriculum making over the 2008–2009 school year including “that it is intergenerational; that many curriculum makers come alongside; that it is a kind of responsive curriculum making which begins with the child's, Loyla's, knowing, with her negotiation of her stories to live by” (Huber et al., 2011, p. 40). We drew on field texts such as the extract from Orié's journal entry, included above, as we explored Loyla's familial curriculum making. While we explored each of these three aspects of Loyla's familial curriculum making in more detail (Clandinin et al., 2011; Huber et al., 2011), our intention in this paper is to move with Orié and Loyla to a place of school to see what happens in the meeting of familial curriculum making and school curriculum making; that is, as Orié attends a school performance in which Loyla and all of the children in the school are performers. In what follows we share an interim research text we composed that drew on field notes of a conversation between Orié and Janice.

Crisis in the Gym

It was mid December 2008, when Orié called Janice to talk about a recent experience at a school concert in which Loyla was a participant. She noted that it was not named a Christmas concert, which was a typical practice for this school, but rather it was billed as a school program.

“It was awful, highly disturbing. You won't believe this,” exclaimed Orié.

She recounted her building tensions as she sat in the gym alongside her neighbours, other parents, and her friend, Tina, the mother of one of the children in Loyla's Kindergarten classroom. Tina had leaned over and whispered to Orié, “I know you are going to hate this.” Orié reported how Tina had been to the afternoon production and had returned to this evening's performance to confirm her disbelief about the production.

Orié recounted how as the production started some of the older children in the school described the school focus on peace. She couldn't recall all of the scenes in the production because she was overwhelmed by the entire experience. The production began with a scene set on the playground, a scene of children bullying another child and then, as the scene unfolded, other children with guns arrived and stopped the violent bullying.

"It was just too stupid for words," she commented. Orié said she really stopped watching the scene on the stage as she directed her gaze to Loyla who was sitting on the edge of the risers as one of the supporting singers for the production.

The production continued and another scene appeared situated in a home as a family watched Lady Gaga on television. As this scene ended Loyla and her classmates, as well as the children in Grades 1 and 2, were marshalled onto the stage where they sang a song, which included the refrain, "Junk in, Junk out." The message was that when you put junk in, such as watching the TV program from the scene in the production, you get junk out. Older children stood up to explain this explicitly to the audience, that when children are watching those kinds of videos or listening to that kind of music and if children are not monitored, then junk will indeed come out. Orié began to be aware of parents whispering in the corner of the gym in which she sat.

"I was so outraged, I spoke loudly saying, 'We should focus on the junk in, junk out that goes on in schools.' The parents around me agreed," she told Janice. This was happening as the children were herded off the stage as a new scene was organized.

A new scene began to unfold, Orié recounted. In this one a child was seated at the dining room table and her frenzied, flaky mother character entered and exclaimed, "Look honey, it's your birthday, you get to have chocolate" and the mother dumped out a bag of candy all over the table and it spilled onto the floor. The child screamed, "In school we've been learning about healthy eating and I do not want this." The mother character acted angrily and hollered at her daughter to go to her bedroom. The scene shifted to the child sitting on her bed and suddenly a fairy god-mother appeared granting the child a wish. The child wished for a "nicer family," words which Orié clearly recalled. No sooner was the wish spoken aloud than the door bell rang and into the house burst a group of people who identified themselves as social services, "We're here to take your daughter away." In the next scene, in a different house, this child was seated at a table with a different mother, father, and another child. It was calm and they were eating a bowl of healthy stew and vegetables.

The same group of K-Grade 2 children returned to the stage and began to sing a song. In her outrage Orié could not remember the entire song, but the refrain, "something's got to give, something's got to change, we think it might be you" stuck in her head as the children sang, pointing and shaking their fingers at the audience. As Orié looked around the gym at the faces of the audience she was struck by the

thought that there were people who had lived stories of social services and the apprehension of children. Orié recounted how the watching parents became angrier and more vocal. Stories began to surface of things that had happened to their children at the school.

When the performance was over, Orié quickly left the gymnasium, not wanting to be drawn into the conversations taking place around her. She quickly retrieved Loyla from her classroom, despite Loyla's desires to stay and play. When they arrived home Orié recounted the performance to Ruth, expressing her disbelief and anger. Loyla, sitting at the table with Orié and Ruth, asked, "Is that how it happens?" when Orié was describing the scene when the child was taken by social services. In that moment Orié realized that Loyla was asking if this could happen to any child, maybe even herself. It was evident to Orié that Loyla was uncomfortable and uncertain.

Over the next few days the fall-out around the performance continued as Orié heard from her friend Tina about her continued disbelief and outrage, as well as similar reactions from other parents. In one such story Orié was told of a grandmother who was so overcome by the performance that she cried inconsolably, distraught over what she understood as what her young granddaughter was learning in school. (Interim research text⁵ based on field notes, December 2008)

As we inquired into field notes in order to compose the above interim research text, what struck us about the performance at the school was that this provided an opportunity for Orié to see Loyla within a school curriculum-making place. Early on Orié noted that her attention was drawn to Loyla who was seated on a riser at the edge of the stage. There were not many opportunities for Orié to observe Loyla engaged in school curriculum making. As Orié spoke with Janice, she noted that it was made clear early on in the evening program that this was a school curriculum-making event focused on teaching children to be peacemakers, both at school and at home. In the first scene, bullying on the school playground was stopped by children with guns who stood up to the bullies. In the second scene, Lady Gaga was constructed as an inappropriate performer whom children were allowed to watch on television in their homes. The third scene, also set in homes, moved from one home where poor parenting was represented by a frenzied single mother and poor nutrition which resulted in the intervention of professionals who took the child away to another home. In this second home, the two-parent family and the food were portrayed as desirable and healthy. In this two-scene skit it was clear that the familial curriculum making was judged as inadequate and the school curriculum making, with an emphasis on healthy eating, was judged as superior.

As the scenes unfolded there was an apparent growing discomfort among the audience. From where Orie was seated, she heard parents first whispering with one another and then more loudly sharing stories of what their children had experienced in the school curriculum making, as described by Orie as the “junk in, junk out experienced in school” (Personal communication, December 2008). When Orie and Loyla arrived home, Orie recounted to Ruth her dismay about the portrayal of families.

As we wrote this interim research text we saw ways familial curriculum making was portrayed as unresponsive and irresponsible to children, and profoundly miseducative. While we do not have Loyla’s words about what her experience was of this situation we do know that Orie storied Loyla as troubled. We can only imagine Loyla’s embodied tension as she stood there on the stage and shook her finger in a chastising way at her mother.

Wondering About *Worlds* of Curriculum Making

Inquiring into our interim research text took us back to our earlier writing about two worlds of curriculum making in which we drew on Lugones’ (1987) understanding:

In coming to think of familial and school curriculum making as comprising two worlds, we resonated with . . . understanding that a “‘world’ need not be a construction of a whole society. It may be a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society. It may be inhabited by just a few people. Some ‘worlds’ are bigger than others” (p. 10). Lugones’ exploration of differing worlds is shaped by her experience as an “outsider to the mainstream,” as a woman “of color in the U. S.” (p. 3). Similar to Lugones’ sense of herself as needing to “travel” to different worlds, worlds in which she constructs herself and worlds in which she is “stereotypically” or “arrogantly” perceived or constructed by others, we see that not only are children’s worlds of familial and school curriculum making shaped by differing physical places but also by differing ways of being and interacting and, therefore, of knowing and knowledge. (Huber et al., 2011, p. 108)

In the above interim research text, we gain a sense of the two worlds of curriculum making: the school curriculum-making world and the familial curriculum-making world. Further, we gain a sense of the school’s construction of familial curriculum making as miseducative, at least as it was portrayed in the December performance.

We also gain a sense of the dismay of the families who saw what they were living at home, that is their curriculum making, as being arrogantly constructed by the school performance. The families' dismay was, at least in part, shaped by coming to know ways in which the familial curriculum making was constructed by the school curriculum making. Even more troubling as Orie shared with Ruth her story of her experience at the school performance, was Loyla's expression of her experience of the school curriculum making. Loyla expressed her fear of being taken away if her familial curriculum-making world was judged as inadequate. She seemed to recognize, perhaps for the first time, that the school curriculum-making world may be able to overwrite what she knows in her familial curriculum-making world.

We can only speculate on Loyla's experience as she travelled from her school curriculum-making world in which Orie was positioned as an observer to her familial curriculum-making world where she heard Orie make visible the differences between the school curriculum-making world and the familial curriculum-making world. Again, Lugones is helpful when she describes *worlds* and *world-travelling*. Lugones wrote that "those of us who are 'world'-travellers have the distinct experience of being different in different 'worlds' and of having the capacity to remember other 'worlds' and ourselves in them" (1987, p. 11). Lugones described this "shift from being one person to being a different person" as "travel" (p. 11). Lugones' concept of travel means that to travel is to be constructed, and to construct oneself differently, in different worlds. As Loyla moved from the school curriculum-making world to her familial curriculum-making world we saw her engaging in this *world* travelling (Huber et al., 2011).

For Orie, too, there was *world-travelling* as she awakened to ways she was being constructed as Loyla's mother within the school curriculum-making world. Orie realized that her familial curriculum making around food, television watching, behaviours, and family composition could all be called into question. Orie also awakened to an understanding that it was Loyla who needed to travel each day between the familial curriculum-making world and the school curriculum-making world, travelling that opened up the possibility that Loyla could be constructed in arrogant ways. Orie also seemed to become awake to how she, too, could be constructed in arrogant ways from within the school curriculum-making world.

What Now?

As we described elsewhere (Huber et al., 2011) and also showed above, we argue that there are two curriculum-making worlds: the world of familial curriculum making and the world of school curriculum making. To stop with only this description

of the two curriculum-making worlds and an understanding that children travel between these two worlds each day carrying with them embodied tensions could leave us in a place where the only possibility is blaming and judging one another, those who live in the other world.

As became evident in Orié's experience of the school program, there was a sense of dis/ease for families in the meeting of the school and familial curriculum-making worlds. We imagine that, at least for some of the teachers, there was a similar sense of dis/ease as they watched the children perform the skits in front of their families. As in the interim research text above, sometimes families gain a glimpse of these two worlds. So, too, it is for teachers. It also becomes evident in our other writing, and here, that children, such as Loyla, travel each day between these two curriculum-making worlds. They carry with them the embodied tensions of negotiating their life making in these two curriculum-making worlds (Huber et al., 2011).

While some readers might find the above interim research text and the situation it portrays, extreme, we saw it as offering the possibility for further inquiries. Frequently, the meeting of the two worlds of curriculum making happen in less extreme, less conflicting ways and, as a result, we do not stop and attend to the tensions. Again, Lugones (1987) is helpful to us as she writes about different constructions each of us has in the differing worlds we inhabit:

In a "world" some of the inhabitants may not understand or hold the particular construction of them that constructs them in that "world." So, there may be "worlds" that construct me in ways that I do not even understand. Or it may be that I understand the construction, but do not hold it of myself. I may not accept it as an account of myself, a construction of myself. And yet, I may be animating such a construction. (p. 10)

For children who acted in the performance, part of the school curriculum-making world, in front of their families, part of their familial curriculum-making world, they were animating one construction of themselves, perhaps knowing they were simultaneously violating the construction of themselves in their familial curriculum-making world. Loyla's question about social service apprehension allows us some small glimpse into her experience of the tensions of visibly demonstrating one animation while at the same moment remembering herself and other constructions of herself in her familial curriculum-making world. We do not want to end with merely describing the two worlds and without a sense of how we might move forward as we create situations with children in both curriculum-making worlds, situations in which they can find ways of making sense of the two constructions of themselves.

Narrative Inquiry Spaces: Shaping Forward-Looking Stories in Familial and School Curriculum-Making Worlds

We turn now to imagine how we might live differently alongside children as teachers in their school curriculum-making world and as families in their familial curriculum-making world. As we reflected on the lives of the children in the two curriculum-making worlds and their travelling between the two worlds, we sensed the importance for children to tell and retell their lived experiences in both worlds. We wonder, for example, where Loyla might have found a space in her school curriculum-making world to inquire into the construction of herself that portrayed her as chastising her mother for her inadequacies around nutrition, behaviour, and television watching. We wonder, for example, where Loyla might have found a space in her familial curriculum-making world to inquire into the construction she was required to animate and, also, the possibility of social services taking her away to another home.

We see these spaces as narrative inquiry spaces. We wonder where these spaces are and how we might begin to compose them with children. Where are the spaces in either curriculum-making world for children to narratively inquire into their life making?

In other studies, we learned that when teachers experience tensions and do not have inquiry spaces on their professional knowledge landscapes, they tell cover stories⁶ (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Teachers frequently search for these inquiry spaces yet often find themselves engaging in the telling of their lived stories in secret spaces (Craig, 1995) or in places off the professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Sometimes, but not always, these secret spaces become inquiry spaces.

With our attention on children's experiences of composing life identities as part of curriculum making in both worlds, we now wonder about the spaces for children to inquire into the meeting of their two worlds. We realize that part of composing such narrative inquiry spaces requires us to understand the necessary features or dimensions of such spaces. We do know some features that need to be in place for narrative inquiry spaces for teachers and other professionals. We know, for example, that narrative inquiry spaces need to be safe, storytelling spaces (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). We understand, too, that narrative inquiry spaces need to be in sustained relationships and intentionally focused on "telling, retelling, and reliving stories" of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 253). We also know that these narrative inquiry spaces, while they need to be within sustained relationships, can happen informally and in brief temporal moments (Cave & Clandinin, 2007).

The narrative inquiry spaces we highlighted above are inquiry spaces filled with uncertainty, the uncertainty that comes with not knowing and with the opening up of self to inquire into felt tensions (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Murray-Orr, 2010).⁷ Living at the heart of these kinds of narrative inquiry spaces is the understanding that “the educational promise of storytelling” emerges “when storytelling becomes part of our inquiry into what it means to live an educated life and what conditions are educational” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 251). We wonder if these dimensions of narrative inquiry spaces are similar for children and youth in their school curriculum-making worlds and in their familial curriculum-making worlds.

In other places we have written about narrative inquiry spaces we shaped with children and youth, such as peace candle gatherings (Huber, 1999; Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2003), response groups (Chung & Clandinin, 2009), report card found poetry (Murphy, 2004; Murphy, 2011), and, inquiry into memory boxes (Huber et al., 2011). As we think again about these spaces we note that while each of these narrative inquiry spaces were situated in the school curriculum-making world, there were, at times, spaces where children told and retold stories lived in their familial curriculum-making worlds. While we were not yet awake to the familial curriculum-making world as we earlier engaged in these spaces alongside children, we cite these examples as possibilities that might encourage other imaginative practices.

In moving forward, what seems significant is that in acknowledging the familial world of curriculum making and the school world of curriculum making as two distinct places where we may be constructed differently and construct ourselves differently, the possibility of “arrogant perception” as well as the possibility of “loving perception” is opened up (Lugones, 1987, p. 8).⁸ It is in *playfulness* that Lugones finds hope in shifting from arrogant perception to loving perception. In Lugones’ (1987) words, “playfulness is, in part, an openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred and finding ambiguity and double edges a source of wisdom and delight” (p. 17).

We realize that little, if anything, experienced in the meeting of children’s familial curriculum-making worlds and school curriculum-making worlds is playful. As we inquired into the ways in which Orie and Loyla experienced the performance enacted as part of Loyla’s school curriculum-making world we saw no openings for playfulness. The only forward-looking story that seemed possible from this interaction was the already dominant story of judging and blaming. In earlier work Keats Whelan and colleagues wrote that

when blaming starts to happen we, as story tellers and story lovers, immediately construct protective walls around ourselves and our stories. In doing so, we are kept from each other and from imagining each other's worlds. There is no conversation, no possibility for imagining new stories. (Keats Whelan, Huber, Rose, Davies, & Clandinin, 2001, p. 149)

We realize we do not yet know enough about familial curriculum-making worlds to describe the possibility of narrative inquiry spaces in those worlds. We also recognize that our narrative inquiry alongside Loyla and Orié in their home, and alongside the additional children and families with whom we engaged in inquiry in their homes (Huber et al., 2011) was initiated by us as three narrative inquirers who entered into their familial curriculum-making worlds. We wonder if in future narrative inquiries we might begin to learn more about these inquiry spaces on familial landscapes. We wonder too about the possibilities of in-between spaces where children can inquire into their embodied tensions as they world travel each day, each week, each month, each year between the two curriculum-making worlds of home and community, and school.

Notes

1. We draw on Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) understanding of narrative inquiry, that is: "People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which their experience of the world enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomena under study" (p. 477).

2. We engaged in our narrative inquiry over 5 years and came into relationship with multiple children, ranging in age from 4 to 10 years old, and their families and teachers. In two sites we participated in classrooms. In each site we engaged with specific children and their families in more intensive conversations. Teachers in each site also engaged in conversations with us. In the third site, which we describe in this paper, we participated in inquiry in one family's home alongside Loyla and Orié. As we negotiated the inquiry with Loyla and Orié and all participants, we were guided by the relational, multiperspectival nature of narrative inquiry. From September 2008 to August 2009 Janice engaged in a series of audio-recorded conversations with Orié, and sometimes with Orié and Loyla. These conversations, along with artifacts from home and school, field notes of conversations and events, and Orié's journal entries, were field texts.
3. The concept of curriculum making has been used in the educational literature for many years (Bobbitt, 1924, 1926; Campbell & Caswell, 1935; Hopkins, 1941). At first the concept applied mostly to teachers and others who attended to curriculum making in relation to the mandated or planned curriculum, that is, to curriculum documents or plans and to curriculum materials. We draw mostly on Clandinin and Connelly's 1992 work on curriculum making which builds on Deweyan (1938) notions of experience and education and Schwab's (1969) ideas of curriculum. Curriculum making in the ways it is usually used, seems to focus on teachers and others outside of classrooms as making curriculum. For Hopkins (1941), and for Campbell and Caswell (1935) who stated "[e]very teacher is a curriculum maker" (p. 468), the focus was on the teacher. The focus was not, for the most part, on children as curriculum makers. We, however, do see children and others as central in curriculum making (Clandinin et al., 2006).
4. In response to identity questions that teachers ask, Connelly and Clandinin (1999) developed the idea of *stories to live by* as a narrative way to understand the connections among teachers' knowledge, contexts, and identities. Stories to live by are a narrative way of thinking about identity.
5. In order to move from field texts to interim research texts and research texts we worked within the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), which entail an exploration of temporality (past, present, and future), sociality (the dialectic between inner and outer/the personal and social), and place (the concrete physicality of the place or places in which experiences are lived out and told). To think narratively, a simultaneous exploration of all commonplaces is necessary; one commonplace cannot be emphasized without

inclusion of the others, for all three “specify dimensions of an inquiry space” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). We composed, shared, and negotiated interim research texts that allowed for the voice and signature of both researchers and participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Murphy, 2004; Huber & Keats Whelan, 2001).

6. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) describe *cover stories* as the stories teachers tell on out-of-classroom places on their professional knowledge landscapes as a way to appear as though their lived practice is in line with dominant school stories and stories of school.
7. As we earlier attended to the place of tensions in narrative inquiry we highlighted (Clandinin et al., 2010) that “for many teachers, and indeed for many people, tensions are thought to have a negative valence, that is, tensions are something to be avoided or smoothed over. If there are tensions evident in a school it is usually seen as a problem” (p. 82). Through years of engaging in narrative inquiries we now understand “tensions in a more relational way,” that is, that the “tensions . . . lived between people, events, or things . . . [shape] a space between (p. 83)”, a space with much potential for inquiry.
8. As Lugones (1987) wrote, “To the extent that we learn to perceive others arrogantly or come to see them only as products of arrogant perception and continue to perceive them that way, we fail to identify with them—fail to love them—in this particularly deep way” (p. 8). Lugones explained the complex ideas of *world* travelling with loving perception and noted that this requires us to see how we are constructed in an other’s world, how we are constructed in our world, how we construct an other in our world, and how we construct an other in an other’s world. It is, Lugones wrote, through travelling to each other’s “worlds” that enables “us to be through loving each other” (p. 8).

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Informal Learning and Volunteering: The Case of an Unemployed Certified Teacher in Ontario

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ABSTRACT

Newly certified, unemployed teachers in Ontario, Canada are volunteering in schools as a way to gain access to the teaching profession. This paper reports the case of one volunteer teacher in Ontario who reported informal learning and acquisition of professional knowledge as central to his volunteer experience. Specifically, the participant demonstrated learning in the areas of (1) pedagogy and classroom management and (2) non-instructional duties and responsibilities. Implications for unemployed teachers, teacher education, and administration are discussed.

In Ontario, Canada, newly certified teachers are volunteering their services in schools and classrooms in unprecedented numbers. Given the paucity of current research that examines this population in detail, we embarked upon a qualitative study to investigate the experiences of these teachers. What we have found is a diverse and complex relationship with volunteering amongst a small set of teachers. Amid the findings are vivid examples of informal learning. Reported in this paper is a summary of responses from one teacher, Matthew (pseudonym), who represents a particularly rich case of informal learning initiated by volunteer experience. Matthew's case gives us a starting place to discuss professional knowledge that he has acquired through volunteering, and possible implications for teacher education programs and administrators responsible for teacher hiring.

Context

Teacher Certification in Ontario

In Canada, individual provinces govern education, with publicly funded elementary and secondary education overseen by a provincial Ministry. The public school system in Ontario is geographically divided into 72 school boards that are responsible for administering educational programs. The Ontario Ministry of Education educates just over two million students, and employs approximately 114,000 teachers¹ (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011).

In order to teach in an Ontario public school, an individual must have completed at a minimum, a three-year undergraduate degree in addition to a one-year teacher education program. Teachers are initially certified to teach in one of three division ranges, consisting of two consecutive, age-based, divisions: Primary-Junior (Kindergarten to Grade 6), Junior-Intermediate (Grade 4 to Grade 10), or Intermediate-Senior (Grade 7 to Grade 12).² Once certified by the Ontario College of Teachers (the province's regulatory body for teachers), an individual is granted the OCT (Ontario Certified Teacher) professional designation (Ontario College of Teachers, n.d.). After their initial certification, many teachers take additional courses and programs called Additional Qualifications (AQs) that update and expand professional knowledge (Ontario College of Teachers, n.d.).

Once certified, teachers searching for employment in the province typically apply for positions through online employment sites such as Apply to Education.³ Many new teachers in large, urban school boards first find paid employment on an occasional list as “supply” or “substitute” teachers before moving on to long-term or permanent contracts (Ontario College of Teachers, 2011).

Current Teacher Employment Market

Over the last decade, falling student enrollment and teacher retirement rates, coupled with a relatively constant number of teacher certifications (from new graduates and the arrival of internationally educated teachers), has meant a surplus of teachers in Ontario (Ontario College of Teachers, 2011). The surplus has resulted in growing wait times for newly certified teachers to obtain full-time employment: a teacher who is certified today may wait as long as five years (McIntyre, 2011), and will experience a mix of unemployment, occasional (supply) teaching, and long-term non-permanent contracts while they wait. Newly certified teachers are using various strategies, including volunteering, in order to compete in the teacher job market,

which currently has an unemployment rate of 24 per cent (Ontario College of Teachers, 2011).

Conceptual Framework

This paper seeks to examine unemployed teachers' volunteer work in more detail at the individual level. While there are important and challenging issues associated with certified teachers volunteering, including marginalization (Duggleby, 2007; Pollock, 2010), underemployment (Livingstone, 2010), and position in the professional hierarchy (Pollock, 2008), no study has probed individual perceptions of the volunteer experience for newly certified, unemployed teachers. Learning is of particular interest as it is frequently overlooked in investigations about volunteering (Ilsley, 1990; Schugurensky & Mundel, 2005) even though in many circumstances, the volunteer is surrounded by opportunities for learning, which are often unplanned and informal (Ilsley, 1990).

This paper situates informal learning in the context of work. Unemployed teachers who volunteer in schools are uniquely suited to speak about learning in this setting as they are positioned at the nexus of two spheres of work: paid employment and volunteer work. While this seems like a contradiction, the individuals in the study are giving their time (volunteering⁴) at the site of *future* paid work. Livingstone (2000) reported that there is a strong association between informal learning and the three spheres of work: paid employment, housework, and community volunteer work. That is, informal learning increases as the amount of time spent at work increases. Given the unique context of work for these teachers, exploring how informal learning manifests itself may provide some important insights.

Methodology

The single case reported here is from a larger qualitative study completed by one of the authors (Pearce, forthcoming) that explored the volunteer work of unemployed teachers in Southwestern Ontario, Canada. Newly certified teachers who had no paid teaching employment of any kind were interviewed (n=6) in an effort to find out how these teachers understand their volunteer work. Semi-structured interviews (60-90 minutes in length) were conducted that specifically asked about the activities

that they were engaged in while they volunteered in schools, as well as their perceptions of work and learning. Given the potential to explore the informal learning of this distinct group, the questions that were asked in the semi-structured interview that pertained to learning were adapted from the National Survey of Learning and Work (Livingstone et al., 2004), which probed volunteers about their formal and informal learning activities.

One interviewee in particular spoke acutely about the knowledge and skills he gained through his volunteer work. It was apparent that informal learning was central, rather than peripheral, in his experience. This piqued our interest and made it a thought-provoking case to report on in the context of informal learning. This paper will briefly summarize his responses, and demonstrate that he acquired explicit and tacit professional knowledge from his volunteer work.

Participant

At the time of the interview (Fall 2011), Matthew was a single male in his late twenties, aspiring to teach in a full-time classroom in an elementary school within a large, mostly urban school board in Southwestern Ontario. He was working full-time as a manager of a retail location, which paid well and provided job security, as he had a good relationship with the owner of the store.

Professional work.

In 2009, Matthew graduated from an Ontario teacher certification program (Bachelor of Education, B.Ed) with a certification to teach in the Primary-Junior division. He applied to the occasional teacher list immediately after graduation in the spring of 2009 but was unsuccessful. During the remainder of 2009 and into 2010, Matthew completed two additional AQ courses, which certified him to teach all grades in the public education system (Kindergarten to Grade 12). In the fall of 2010, Matthew applied to the same occasional teacher list and was unsuccessful once again. At the time of the interview (Fall 2011), nearly one year after his last application, there had not been any additional openings for supply teachers at the school board in which he desired to teach, but he was confident that was going to change in the very near future.

Volunteer experience.

Matthew began volunteering in a classroom very shortly after graduating from his Bachelor of Education in 2009. While not told explicitly that he was required to volunteer, the sense he received from other teacher candidates, as well as from his

instructors during his B.Ed, was that volunteering was a good idea; it would help him stay connected in some way to teaching given the growing competition for jobs. Matthew approached the teacher who had supervised him during the practice teaching requirement (or “practicum”) of his B.Ed to see if she would take him on as a volunteer. Due to the good rapport they had developed, she agreed to have him volunteer as much as he wanted. Over the course of three school years (April-June 2009, September 2009-June 2010, September 2011 to the time of the interview in Fall 2011), Matthew volunteered approximately one full school day per week, averaging 6-7 hours per day, spending most of his time in a Grade 7 elementary classroom. In total, he has spent approximately 65 days volunteering, contributing over 400 hours. He engaged in a range of activities in the school, from setting up for assemblies to teaching full lessons in the classroom. He described a positive relationship with the classroom teacher he worked with, school staff and administration, as well as students.

Findings

For Matthew, it appears that his informal learning has led to the acquisition of explicit and tacit professional knowledge in two areas: (1) pedagogy and classroom management, and (2) non-instructional duties and responsibilities of a teacher. First, we will demonstrate that Matthew is learning informally, and then we will discuss examples of the knowledge he has gained in the two identified areas.

According to their preliminary research findings, Schugurensky and Mundel (2005) suggest that the primary mode for learning in volunteer activities is incidental and informal, and results in tacit knowledge (Eraut, 2000). Matthew is no different in this respect. He referenced the value of his volunteer work, which, in particular, allowed him the opportunity to learn beyond his formal teacher education. He mentioned that while the formal education had some value, it was the amount of time he had spent in a school beyond his B.Ed that was the most valuable:

...all of that momentum [gained in the practicums] is gone [by the time it ends]. You have to stop and go back to class, and sit there and learn about things you know don't work [...] or they don't work for you. [With volunteering for three years] the beginning was going in, open-eyed, open-eared and trying to take everything in because it's all really new...and from year to year you grow, and the things that you really needed to think about the first year, you don't have to think about as much anymore, they're kind of more automated.

Here, Matthew described how his behaviour in a school became more automatic. There is an increased situational understanding (Eraut, 2000) that has been developed over three years of experience in a school. He explained how he approached his volunteer work, taking the opportunity to learn informally, and build on the knowledge that he had acquired in a supportive school environment:

[...] The progression changes from year to year, and you take on new challenges that you wouldn't have had before or wouldn't have *been able* to do before [...] I have developed an appreciation of what my skills are, what my weaknesses are, [and can] target what I want to work on in the classroom... You can make yourself work on things you're not comfortable with, but you have the safety net of an experienced teacher...so you can't screw up too badly, but the opportunity is there to succeed or not succeed...

From this quotation, we see evidence that Matthew is a reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983), using his volunteer experience to his advantage, which is helping him improve his current and future practice. When asked if his volunteer work makes him a better teacher, Matthew emphatically agreed: "I feel that I have definitely matured more. I have more capability. I have more tools I can draw on from being exposed to them."

Matthew's growing confidence as a teacher is apparent. His confidence likely originates from explicit and tacit knowledge he has gained in two general areas related to teaching: pedagogy and classroom management, and non-instructional duties and responsibilities, which is what we will turn to next.

Pedagogy and Classroom Management

Several times, Matthew made reference to how he was able to see the application of theories he had learned in his teacher education related to pedagogy and classroom management. For example:

I would go and see how the gym teacher instructs, and see what they do that's different from the other teacher, and when you're going from class to class, it's easier to compare those types of things cause you saw just how they were interacting and how the students were responding, and then you see a different approach and how the students were responding, and you can see the merits in all of the different ways that teachers approach it...so I feel that that was a great thing to see because it's difficult to appreciate how something works in reality when you're learning about it at school, it's just all

theoretical—so they might say if you encroach on a student’s space, they’ll stop talking, and it’s like, sometimes that works, sometimes that works for one reason, but sometimes it doesn’t, but you get to see that play out in reality, which is I think beneficial.

The learning and knowledge acquisition from this example is apparent. Matthew explained the process of how he assimilated practical knowledge about classroom management into the theoretical knowledge he had already obtained. While he did not perceive the value of some of the theoretical work he had to complete, being situated in the school context compelled him to consider what he had learned formally, and use that information when making professional decisions while volunteering. The outcomes of his decisions while in the classroom had real implications, which appear to be a component of the informal learning process taking place during the volunteer experience. In another example, he also explained how volunteering taught him in areas where he did not have preexisting knowledge:

When you’re around teachers, you kind of learn how they set up things, and that’s something you don’t really get when you’re at teacher’s college. Teacher’s college is a very “how to deal with things,” it’s a base layer of learning, it gives you the building blocks you need to kind of figure out your way when you finally get into a classroom, but it doesn’t *practically* teach you how to manage a day book, or how to sort what needs to be marked immediately from what doesn’t. You never get that “real world” application of theory from the classroom. So by seeing an actual teacher being like at the end of the day “I’m going to take this stuff home but not this stuff” and I would mark things during the day so she wouldn’t have to take things home, so you kind of figure out kind of the priority stuff and what needs to be marked right away and why—students need feedback on math things immediately, it’s very important to take up math right away...

Here, Matthew discussed some of the more nuanced decisions that a teacher must make in an average day that contributes to the long-term performance of the classroom. This differed from the practice teaching that was a part of his B.Ed, which he described as too punctuated, never seeing the lasting outcomes of his professional practice and decisions on individual students and whole classrooms. Volunteering over the course of an entire school year, even though it was only one day per week, compelled Matthew to consider classroom routines and their outcomes in a different way. These are just two examples that demonstrate that Matthew has learned beyond his formal teacher education about facilitating student learning and

managing student behavior. He discussed many other examples of this, as well as teacher responsibilities that extend beyond the narrow confines of a classroom.

Non-instructional Duties and Responsibilities

Seventy-six percent of Canadian volunteers reported that they engaged in some sort of learning related to their volunteer work (Livingstone et al., 2004) mostly in the domains of interpersonal and communication skills. Matthew reported learning in these areas during his volunteer work, but also included computers, budgeting and financial management, health and well-being, new equipment, language skills, and increased knowledge about social/political/environmental issues. Certainly a wide range of seemingly unrelated areas, but his answers all related to the teaching profession in some way. For example, his response to learning about health and well-being:

...I've always been a person who will volunteer their own time for the sake of personal well-being from time to time...but when you see the responsibility of a teacher [...I realize] that if I get sick, I'll get so far behind, and they [the students] can't accomplish any of the stuff. So it's like life considerations being made regarding your health, but for your job. It's not something I ever really thought about in my regular job. If I'm sick, I don't go...it's not like things will totally fall behind...but that can happen in a classroom.

This response in particular demonstrates that his volunteer experience has exposed him to a reality about teaching. Volunteering in a classroom setting has led Matthew to consider his own health and well-being in a different way that may impact his choices in his day-to-day life, as well as in the future as a classroom teacher. He also articulated an example that pertained to teamwork:

When you are in a school you get to see a lot of the behind-the-scene dynamics that you never get to see when you're a student, on the other side of things, when you're hanging out with the teachers in the staff room, and you hear them talking about a student who wasn't having a good day and what they can do about it, or keep an eye out for it, you get to see a lot of the actual camaraderie and behind-the-scenes work that goes on amongst teachers because you don't ever see that as a student, you always see them on their own, you don't see them collaborating behind the scenes with somebody on something.

In this example, the knowledge gained is more tacit in nature; Matthew was able to observe the dynamics of teamwork and collaboration, which demonstrates how he might work with his colleagues to solve problems in the future.

Here is one final example Matthew gave when asked about learning related to budgeting and financial management:

...they have a field trip that they do every year, and I have never really seen the process that you have to go through to actually implement a field trip. I mean, you hear about it in teacher's college—you need insurance, you need consent forms, but to actually see it come together, negotiate the bus contracts, figure out the amount of money that needs to be kicked in by the students, what is kicked in by the school...I got to learn how to actually set something like that up.

While still taking place in an informal context, this example represents deliberative learning (Eraut, 2000) about a specific task. Presented with assisting with this task while volunteering, Matthew took the opportunity and became engaged in the process. He actively solicited information about the logistics and has learned how he might go about implementing something similar in the future. Learning in this area expands Matthew's knowledge in relation to activities that extend beyond the classroom that involve other parties, such as school administration and external service providers.

Discussion

Over three years, Matthew has gained a great deal of explicit and tacit knowledge (Eraut, 2000) related to the teaching profession. That is, knowledge he is able to recognize having, and is able to discuss when probed, as well as knowledge that can be inferred from his responses. His increased confidence and efficacy is evidence that he is building situational recognition and understanding (Eraut, 2000) in the teaching context and is gaining skills towards becoming a more experienced professional (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986).

Could this knowledge have been gained in another way other than in the volunteer capacity? Certainly, if Matthew had been hired to teach in a classroom immediately after his B.Ed he would have had some similar experiences in his first

year of teaching and learned informally from these experiences. Unique to volunteering, however, is the opportunity for additional mentoring and valuable professional feedback. In addition, finding full-time employment immediately after certification is unlikely in Ontario at the present time. One might also argue that the knowledge Matthew gained through volunteering could have been acquired through practice teaching during his Bachelor of Education. However, in addition to the feedback from Matthew that the practice teaching sessions were too short,⁵ we also posit that his volunteer experience differs from his prior practice teaching experience, in that he had more control and autonomy over his volunteer work. Livingstone (2001) suggests that those engaged in discretionary spheres of working life engage more actively in informal learning. The high degree to which Matthew reports learning from his volunteer work may reflect the relative amount of autonomy he was given during the experience. Although in some sense this volunteer work is not functionally at his discretion (his perception is that he would be remiss if he did not volunteer), he has found an exceptional situation in which to volunteer: the teachers and administration in the school where Matthew volunteered allowed him some freedom to choose the type of volunteer work he did as well as the flexibility to decide when he could do it. Consequently, because he has volunteered, Matthew has learned some skills and knowledge that will help him be a more effective teacher when he does find paid employment in the profession. In effect, Matthew has more experience now than he did when he finished his B.Ed, even though he has not yet found paid work.

A further question thus remains: is Matthew's volunteer work recognized as legitimate experience when it comes to hiring decisions? Given that he has been passed over twice for an interview at the school board of his choice, one might speculate that it is not. Speculation aside, we can look at the Apply to Education online system where teachers search for jobs, complete individual profiles, and upload their resume and supporting documentation to be viewed by potential employers. Presently, in the "experience" section of the online profile, there is no explicit place to enter volunteer work (although, there is a catchall section dubbed "Other" where one can enter additional information of any type). Looking at Matthew's individual case, and the identified knowledge acquisition he has engaged in while volunteering in the school and classroom, it would be difficult to deny that his volunteer work has given him some sort of teaching "experience." For school boards and school administrators, there could be implications. Careful inspection of resumes for references to volunteer work in schools may assist in finding the more experienced individuals amongst a large group of newly certified candidates. In addition, inquiring about the details of these volunteer activities in interviews may reveal significant proficiency in a number of unexpected areas, akin to what Matthew has described in the interview examined in this paper, due to the informal learning opportunities afforded to these volunteers.

Conclusion

Broader structural solutions are needed in Ontario in order to correct the imbalance in the teacher employment market. Ultimately, the “need” to volunteer should not have to exist to gain access to the profession, as it can and does lead to marginalization and exploitation. Matthew has made the best of an unfortunate employment situation; not all new teachers who volunteer find themselves with this type of positive, more “authentic” experience, where a meaningful mentoring relationship can develop. Many struggle with fitting volunteer work around other paid work in order to stay financially stable; others are involved in menial tasks and are alienated from school communities (Pollock, 2010; Pearce, forthcoming).

Perhaps by looking at Matthew’s case, lessons can be learned that contribute to a solution. While finding meaningful, supportive volunteer opportunities may be a short-term solution for some; it may be worth considering the implications at the teacher education level. What Matthew has described is similar in some respects to an extended practicum, except that he has been given more control: he was able to choose the school and classroom teacher he worked with, the days he volunteered, and to some extent, the content of the experience. He has gained skills and knowledge that help him progress in his professional practice (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). It is worth considering at the teacher education level how extended practicums, with more control and flexibility afforded to the teacher, can be constructed to build on the professional learning. Ideally, designing these kinds of practicums that transition more directly into paid employment would eliminate the need to volunteer and build professional learning.

In addition, there are broad considerations for human resource administrators beyond those in Ontario school boards. Given the instances of informal learning and tacit knowledge acquisition provided in this single case, it is clear that something more substantive may be occurring in such volunteer experiences than is traditionally assumed. Thus, volunteer activities of new teachers, and other professional groups where there is a significant volunteer population, should be explored with further rigor. Highly relevant instances of informal learning that may be taking place for a significant number of volunteers who are newly certified in their profession have not been sufficiently examined and quantified. Further investigation is needed, as there are implications, not only for unemployed teachers and school boards, but also for other professionals, organizations, unions, and human resource administrators.

Notes

1. Full-time equivalent teachers.
2. Technological Studies teachers do not require a postsecondary degree, but they must have five years of paid experience and proof of competence in their specialty (such as a trade certificate) in addition to a secondary school diploma. They are certified to teach Technological Education for Grade 9 to 12.
3. As of January 2012, 55 of the 72 school boards in Ontario use Apply to Education (<http://www.applytoeducation.com/>) to post teaching jobs and recruit applicants (Apply to Education, n.d.).
4. Using the term “volunteer” in this case may be problematic for some readers as the degree of self-benefit in this situation may be considered high (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996). Regardless, in this investigation, the activities performed by unemployed teachers are generally undertaken as an act of free will, involve no remuneration, and have had a social benefit beyond the volunteer, to others in the school community such as teachers and students (Schugurensky & Mundel, 2005).
5. The Ontario College of Teachers Act states that graduates of teacher certification programs in Ontario must have a “minimum of 40 days of practical experience in schools or in other situations approved by the College for observation and practice teaching” [s 1.2(2 v)]; at an average of 7 hours per day, this equates to about 280 hours. Matthew’s program required him to complete 10 weeks of practice teaching, or about 350 hours. For comparison purposes, teacher candidates in Quebec must complete 700 hours (or 100 days) of practical experience in the classroom to be certified (Gouvernement du Québec, 2003); nearly two-and-a-half times that of an Ontario graduate.

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Holistic Education: A Pioneer Narrative

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on the personal narrative of a Canadian pioneer woman who grew up during the 1920s and 1930s. The story epitomizes a holistic approach to learning, which embodies facets of family, community, and the land. Conceptualized through narrative inquiry, the purpose of the article is to capture an innovative meaning for holistic education. I employ Deweyan philosophy as an analytical lens for her story and provide pedagogical relevance to the narrative.

Introduction

A story that is founded upon historical events and has present-day significance holds great potential to resonate with a variety of readers. This statement represents the hope of this article. Recounted in 2012, the personal narrative depicted herein is the voice of an 86-year-old, Germanic, first-generation Canadian woman. The description of her youth represents her intellectual, emotional, spiritual, social, and historical knowledge and embodies the social conditions that were experienced by many pioneer people living on the Saskatchewan Prairies during the 1920s and 1930s. Conceptualized through the woman's story, the purpose of this article is to capture an innovative meaning for holistic education. An offshoot of the woman's holistic learning is that it influenced the present-day lifestyle and pedagogical views of her daughter.

Stated upfront, the woman in this story is my mother, and the aforementioned daughter is me. Rephrasing the purpose under these boundaries, this article highlights my mother's dominant life lessons learned while negotiating an existence

within the natural environment. The article includes an explanation of how my mother's holistic education is intergenerational, as some of it exists within me, the youngest of her seven children. In addition to the personalized information threaded throughout the article, I explain the genesis of the concept of holism and provide modern definitions of holistic education. I explain the methodological approach used in collecting the narrative data and discuss the past, present, and future essence of narrative inquiry. I supplement aspects of my mother's story by employing features of Deweyan philosophy as an analytical lens, and I provide pedagogical relevance to the narrative.

The information contained herein is significant for a number of reasons. First, my mother's story is first-hand documentation of the positive and challenging experiences of a Canadian pioneer family living in the Prairie Provinces; such verifications are becoming increasingly isolated during modern times. Another reason why this article is noteworthy is that a large portion of this writing depicts holistic education via a non-academic worldview. Holistic education is about life experiences, which are not solely bound by kindergarten to grade 12 schooling or postsecondary education. Knowledge and education should not be exclusively defined or confined within the walls of schools or educational institutions. Although this point has limited voice within academic literature, it is a dominant thread woven throughout my mother's story.

Origins and Modern Description of Holistic Learning

The concept of holistic education stems from the overarching philosophy of holism. In his epic book entitled, *Holism in Evolution*, Smuts (1926/1987) first coined the term *holism*, where he uses it to describe the natural mechanisms of the universe. More specifically, he states¹ that holism is:

The ultimate synthetic, ordering, organising, regulative activity in the universe which accounts for all the structural groupings and syntheses in it, from the atom and the physico-chemical structures, through the cell and organisms . . . The all-pervading and ever-increasing character of synthetic unity or wholeness in these structures leads to the concept of Holism. (p. 317)

Smuts continues his explanation of holism by expressing that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This point implies that the individual pieces of any

all-encompassing system, organization, or entity neither can exist nor be fully understood unless each piece is related to the functioning of the entire structure. The living environment constitutes a web of relations (McDonald, 2004). As Tolle (2005) points out, “All things in existence, from microbes to human beings to galaxies, are not really separate things or entities, but form part of a web of interconnected multidimensional processes” (pp. 275–276). This concept of omnipotent wholeness is exemplified aesthetically through the sense of awe that one might feel when viewing a picture of planet Earth taken from outer space or when witnessing the overhead vastness of an endless starry night—scenarios that emit feelings of pure harmony.

Modern literature contains many hybrid phrases developed from Smuts’ notion of holism. In particular, *holistic learning* and *holistic education* are popular expressions often used by academics and other educational leaders in a variety of settings. Within schools and formal educational environments, a general aspect of holistic learning is the provision of education where demarcated, specialized subject content (e.g., English, math, art, biology, etc.) becomes blurred. Instead, subject-specific knowledge is transformed into experiences that are interrelated, interconnected, intersected, integrated, incorporated, interdisciplinary, and interdependent. As Miller (2006) explains, “Holistic education cultivates a *curriculum of connections*” (p. 101). An underlying principle of holistic learning is that education is effectively acquired when individual parts of knowledge are synergistically connected to each other.

Holistic education also promotes the importance of teaching the *whole child* (Miller, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2006, 2010), which includes intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, and spiritual aspects of the individual and his/her learning process. Orr (2005) defines holistic education as “[striving] to teach the whole person as a human soul which includes mind, body, emotions, and spirit” (p. 87). Maria Montessori refers to fostering a type of cosmic education where children gain a sense of self-purpose through hands-on experiences nurtured within a perfectly synchronized universe. In referring to cosmic education and the child, Mario Montessori (Maria Montessori’s son) (1992), believes cosmic education develops “their [children’s] minds, their visions, and their creative power, whatever the level or range of their personal contributions may be” (p. 101). Aboriginal epistemology also aligns with the notion of educating the whole child. From an Aboriginal stance, education is about strengthening one’s mind, body, emotions, and spirit and, in turn, balancing one’s physical and metaphysical features to experience a fulfilled life. Many other authors refer to the importance of implementing pedagogy that promotes teaching the whole child, rather than prioritizing knowledge-based learning. For example, through personal teaching examples, Kessler (2004) and Preston (2012) describe how

to foster learner spirituality within the classroom. Palmer (1998) and Moore (2004) speak about promoting a type of teaching that inspires the *soul* of the child. In all these references, educating the whole child is much more than just attending to a set academic agenda; it is about promoting the richness of a balanced, physical-spiritual lifestyle that is open to multiple ways of learning, knowing, and experiencing.

In relation to these popular descriptions of holistic education, within this article, my reference to holistic education is somewhat unique. In a simplistic and general sense, I define holistic education as dominant lessons learned from experiencing life. Every person is undergoing a distinct lifelong learning journey; in turn, everyone possesses a type of exclusive certification in holistic education. Because every individual begins life at a unique starting point and, throughout life, is accompanied by varying degrees of support and challenges, it is impossible for everyone to acquire one dominant learning experience. Furthermore, there are many and varied options in life; each chosen decision abounds with knowledge, wisdom, challenges, and pain. These personal experiences generate contextualized dominant life lessons. Through the narrative data, I document one woman's starting point and present a unique aspect of her holistic learning journey.

Aligned with my definition of holistic education are core features of Deweyan philosophy. Dewey asserts that education is the full experience of living, and he criticizes the supposition that learning only happens in schools, colleges, and universities (Hansen, 2006). In Dewey's book, *Democracy and Education* (1916), he argues that any person who understands how to learn and is open to interactive learning experiences is well posed to becoming an active democratic citizen. With that stated, Dewey does not confine the concept of democracy to an electoral process and its political structures. Rather, he believes a democratic citizen is someone who prioritizes the ability to resolve problems, anticipate and plan for possibilities, remain modest in one's claim to truth, and to act on what is good for the individual, the community, and the society at large. "According to Dewey, education, democratic life, and human flourishing are all one" (Hansen, 2006, p. viii). These philosophical concepts are interspersed throughout my mother's pioneer story.

Narrative Inquiry and Methods of Data Collection

Elliott (2005) states, "Stories rely on the presumption that time has a [linear] direction, moving from past to present to future" (p. 7). Dewey (1938) emphasizes

the continuity of an experience by saying, “Every experience lives on in further experiences” (p. 27). Likewise, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, “Experiences grow out of experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (p. 2). The views of these authors highlight that describing an experience means referencing the historical past, understanding it in real time (the present), and enabling it to evolve in the future. Through the application of a narrative research design, I document the experiences of a pioneer woman and attend to the past, present, and future aspects of her story. More precisely, in what follows, I describe my mother’s youth, therein describing the origins of her holistic knowledge. I fast-forward to the present and discuss how I inherited aspects of her holistic education. As well, I ponder about the ways in which my mother’s story might influence others in the future. In sum, through the incorporation of narrative inquiry, I attempted to gain a fuller understanding of the continuity of my mother’s lived experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Comfortably and Credibly Documenting Mother’s Story

As the starting point for the collection of my mother’s history, I asked her if we could have a semi-formal conversation and explained what this process would involve. I would supply her with 8 to 10 open-ended questions, which she could review before our actual discussion. We would then set up a time for a visit, and I would formally ask her these guiding questions. I told her I intended to tape the entire conversation, create transcripts from the dialogue, and provide her with an opportunity to check the discussion transcripts. Even though, in other research endeavors, I had utilized a similar format to document personal information, my description of the data collection process deterred my mother’s interest. She explained that the tape recorder intimidated her, and she feared she would not be able to answer the questions properly. She voiced concern about the potential negative effects of using technology to infinitely store her life; she was concerned that the recorder would amplify the grammatical mistakes she might make when talking. In response to her apprehension, I asked if she would be more comfortable with simply writing out answers to questions. She liked this idea and perceived that a written response would both alleviate conversational jitters and provide her with the time she needed to contemplate answers before responding.

Following this initial discussion, I provided her with 10 questions, which I believed to be conducive to narrative answers. Questions/statements included: “Tell me about your childhood, your family, and how you grew up.” “Describe a typical day when you were a young girl living on the farm.” “Tell me about a time when you or

your siblings were sick and how your family dealt with this sickness.” “What kind of food did you eat and how did you prepare it?” Under this guidance, she completed about 15 pages of hand-written answers.² In an effort to aid the readability and flow of the narrative, I typed out her written answers, while attending to minor grammatical and writing issues. During this review of her answers, I found that, in some areas, I wanted more detail; in such a fashion, her story generated follow-up questions, which I mailed to her. After a couple of weeks, she provided me with an additional five hand-written pages. I typed out these new responses (again attending to minor grammatical and writing issues). I added the new information to her former work, and provided her with a copy of all the answers she had generated. I asked that she check the compilation of answers to ensure that the meaning she initially intended to convey was accurately presented within the typed transcript of answers (Inman, Howard, & Hill, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 2010). In writing the final draft of this article, I once again transformed aspects of her written answers (e.g., inserting adjectives, connecting simple sentences, etc.) to create her biographical narrative. When finished, my mother and I sat together and read her entire story to ensure that the narrative was an authentic representation of her youth.

My Mother's Story

I am a mother of seven children, a grandmother of 12 children, and great-grandmother of 11 children. All my life, I have been a homemaker and worker of the land, but, in particular, on these pages, I reminisce about my early life experiences, giving my memories of when I was a young girl growing up with my mom, dad, and 12 siblings. My youngest daughter asked me to describe my youth and the knowledge I gained from these experiences. She believes my recollection of living through the *Dirty 30s* contains specialized information about pioneers and the way in which they depended on the land for food, entertainment, and all aspects of existence. I never thought my story was of any importance or interest to anyone, as my story is typical of people my age who lived from the land; however, my husband and many of my family members and friends have now passed on, and I realize that perhaps my story is becoming an informational artifact about life in the early 1900s. Perhaps my daughter can find a use for my story and in that process support her own growth and, in some fashion, someone else's growth. That would be nice.

Establishing the Basics From the Land

I was born in the fall of 1925, the third of 12 children. As a young child, I remember my father taking up a homestead in northern Saskatchewan, where he bought 160 acres of bush-land from the government. At that time, he paid \$10 under the agreement that for the next three years, he would clear and plant 10 acres of newly broken land each year. To meet this grave, labour-intensive commitment, all the family members were required to cut down trees with axes, pull out roots and stumps, clear away heavy rocks, and then plough and seed the black, rich, virgin land.

Obviously, we needed a place to live during this process, so we built our house with wood reclaimed from the trees during the clearing and cultivation of the land. To build our house, which contained a kitchen and three bedrooms, we chose the prize logs and stripped off the bark and branches. To construct each of the four walls, logs were piled atop of each other, and the cracks between the logs were filled with plaster prepared from mud, straw, and water. In each corner, the logs were fastened with wooden pegs, which we constructed from whittling wood into peg-like shapes.

During the construction of our house, we did not build a chimney; rather a stovepipe ran from our kitchen stove upward into the roof. Our trusty and beautiful stove was a seminal part of our existence. Not only did we use the stove for preparing meals, canning fruits, canning vegetables, and preserving meats, this wood-burning furnace was our only heat supply; other than snuggling close to family members while sleeping, our stove was the one thing that prevented us from freezing during the bitter cold winter months.

It seems that everything we took from the land was put to great use; little went to waste. This point held true for the wood ash we collected from our stove. In the spring, we sprinkled this ash into the garden rows before sowing the seeds; the ash was a natural deterrent for seed-eating worms. In the late summer, the valuable wood ash was sprinkled on the potato plants and cabbage plants, because the ash was a natural pesticide for potato bugs and white butterflies. We also used wood ash to soften our water. About once a week in the evenings, we filled a 45-gallon barrel of water drawn from the hand-dug well and stirred two or three gallons of ash into the water. By morning, the ash had settled to the bottom of the barrel and transformed the hard water into soft water, which was needed for washing clothes.

On the topic of washing clothes, our precious water was drawn from a 15–20 foot well that we dug by hand. We heated the water on our cook stove and poured

the boiling water into a hand-turned, wringer-style washing machine. Towels, dish-cloths, and other heavy soiled clothes had to be hand-scrubbed on a washboard before going into washing machine. For us, bleach did not exist. Rather to ensure brightness, we boiled our white clothes, underwear, and flour bags on the stove. We hung the germ-free clothes and flour bag material on the wash line, and they were bleached with sunlight. Soap was made by boiling lard, tallow, and lye; the lard and tallow were supplied from the butchering remnants of hogs and cattle, and the lye was purchased in small cans from the store. These ingredients were cooked together, cooled, and cut into soap bars.

The Environment Provided

All around us, the environment provided us with ample food and supplies. The wild blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, cranberries, pin-cherries, chokecherries, and swamp blueberries made delicious pies and tasty jams. In addition to being a bountiful food source, picking berries was fun, because it usually involved the five oldest children walking and crawling through the bushes, the girls singing loudly as we quickly filled the gallon pails tied around our waists.

The large majority of the meat we ate was wild—deer, moose, rabbit, and prairie chickens were shot in the fall. As a child, we cleaned the rabbits, after dad killed them. I can still remember the smell of those rabbits, which, to me, was not a very good smell at all! Often my family and the neighbors got together to butcher cattle and hogs; they cut up the meat and divided it among them. Sometimes, we butchered our own meat, and, in those times, we preserved large quantities of raw meat by soaking it in a strong brine solution for a week or so. (The brine had to be salty enough so a raw egg would float on top of it.) Other meat was preserved by curing it in our smokehouse. We caught and canned a lot of fish, too. We cleaned the fish, packed it into 2-quart glass jars, and placed the 14 jars into a big boiler. We set the boiler on the wood stove and cooked the fish-filled jars for three hours. After the jars cooled, this treasured food was stored in our dirt cellar.

Chickens and cows were important to us, too. We raised our own chickens by *setting* the clucks. To help them *set*, we made them a soft straw nest in an isolated area where no other chickens or animals would bother them. We provided them with grain and water and let the clucks sit on their eggs for three weeks until the chicks hatched. As for the other hens, we ate their nutritious eggs and, throughout the year, butchered chickens when needed. Our cows provided us with a plentiful supply of milk and rich cream. We loved to drink frothy warm milk straight from the cow. We

were thankful for the cream (retrieved from a hand-turned cream separator), and we churned much of the cream into butter, which we used for many things including making a rich array of scrumptious desserts.

We also canned many vegetables transforming them into mustard beans, yellow bean pickles, beet pickles, sweet and sour pickles, and dill pickles. As children, we ate a lot of homemade vegetable soup made from the peas, corn, and carrots grown in the garden. We ate rhubarb straight from the garden; it was good, especially after coming home from school when we were very hungry. During the winter months, we also consumed an abundance of carrots, turnips, and beets, all of which were root-plants that kept well in the cellar.

In particular, sauerkraut, a type of preserved cabbage, was very important to us. Throughout the year, we always had a big wooden barrel of sauerkraut sitting in the cellar. To make this delicious food, first, with a special cutter, we shredded a couple of heads of cabbage and added a few handfuls of salt. Then we pounded the salted, shredded cabbage with a big piece of wood (like a baseball bat); juice emerged from the mixture. Layer after layer, we repeated the process until 100 or so cabbage heads were cut, salted, and pounded, forming a mixture of salty juice and mushy cabbage. We covered the mixture and let it ferment in a 30-gallon barrel for six weeks, after which time it was ready to eat. During the winter months and as we needed it, we took the preserved sauerkraut out of the barrel. We cooked it on the stove, sometimes adding pork, and enjoyed it with homegrown mashed potatoes.

The environment and animals not only supplied us with food but with warm blankets and clothes. We sheered our sheep, and grandma washed the raw wool several times, ridding it of its natural oil. This wool made the nicest, warmest quilts that were widely used by everyone in our family. Grandma also had a spinning wheel, and she spun the sheep wool into yarn, which served many purposes including knitted socks, mitts of all sizes, and supplies for darning clothes. Our pillows were made from chicken feathers, but only the breast feathers would do, because these feathers were nearest to the bird's body; thus, they were the softest. Every fall we made new straw mattresses for our beds, because after a year of sleeping on a straw mattress, the mattress would become thin and worn.

Health and Home Remedies

Although I cannot prove it, it is my recollection that during my younger years, children and adults did not seem to get sick to the extent that they do today.

Having stated such, occasionally, we did get sick, but I do not remember anyone in our family ever going to the doctor for an illness. Perhaps one of the reasons we did not visit the doctor was because he was too far away. Thirty miles was a long way for horse-and-buggy transportation. Luckily, we had a selection of home remedies to treat cuts, sores, and other ailments. For example, we applied axle grease to infections and covered the injured area with a cloth. The grease drew out the puss. From nearby swampy areas, we collected a special mud. We fashioned a poultice from this mud and used it to treat infections and cuts. We dabbed clove spice onto teeth and gums when someone had a toothache. One spring, my siblings and I had a bad bout of ringworm, which my mom doused with a type of liquid that caused a strong burning sensation. For heartburn, we drank a water-and-soda mixture; it would make you burp and feel better. During the time a woman was about to deliver a baby, the other family members of that house were sent to a neighbor's place. Specialized women within the community came to help the woman who was about to give birth. Then other women in the community would prepare and deliver food to the household of the new baby.

Some Time for Fun

Although we always had a lot of work to do, my siblings and I sometimes played games. We played a game we called Scrub, which was a ballgame for four or five people. One person was the pitcher, one the catcher, one the batter, and one or two people were fielders. The batter hit the ball, ran to an end line about 50 feet away, and ran back to the batter's original spot. If the batter ran to the line and back to his/her original spot before being touched by someone else, the batter would gain a point and could bat again. We loved to skip, too. We picked up the twine strings lying in the straw pile. We knotted one side of the strings together, braided them into a rope, and used the rope for skipping either by ourselves or as a group. The girls also played hopscotch by taking a stick and drawing a 10-squared diagram in the dirt. As a kid, I remember my delight in finding some thin cardboard and making a deck of cards from it. Oh, the fun we had with those cards! Also, I recall making a checkerboard from that cardboard and using buttons for the checkers. My brothers used to make dog harnesses braided from twine strings. They hooked up the dogs to a sleigh, which, of course, was also homemade. My brothers were also interested in music. One brother would take dad's accordion and try to play it, and eventually he became quite good at playing the instrument. Then my Dad got a banjo, and my other brother would take that and play it. It was great fun listening, singing, and dancing to the music they made by ear.

Entertainment also involved spending time with the people in our surrounding area. Sundays after Church, Dad sometimes took us to the neighbors, who lived about a mile and a half from our place. They had a gramophone, which is like a record player wound by hand. We would listen to that wonderful invention for hours, and then we would walk home again. The school picnics were also a fun occasion. We called these school picnics *Field Days*, and families from different schools throughout the larger area would come together for the day. There were ball games, races for kids, high jump, etc. The lucky children would win first, second, or third prize tickets valued at 5¢, 10¢, or 15¢, which they spent on ice cream, chocolate bars, and hard candy that were sold at a special booth set up for the event.

Ending Remarks

From these experiences, by the age of 11, I could and was expected to make bread, churn butter, milk cows, wash dishes, wash the cream separator, scrub floors, pick weeds in the garden, and cook, bake, and help prepare meals for my family. Also, during those busy times, my siblings and I walked to school located four miles away from our home. I only went to school until grade 7, and I missed a lot of school because of the work we were expected to do at home. Nonetheless, I learned to read, write, and do math even though we had few supplies at school and only the odd piece of paper and a couple of stumpy crayons at home. Although we had little money, we did not consider ourselves poor. Living in such generous natural surroundings, equipped with an ample supply of food and shelter, and blessed with the presence of family and friends, we were rich by the standards of our day.

Discussion: Mother Meets Dewey

In the initial version of this paper, I did not include a theoretical component, because adding such an academic dimension to the narrative, to me at first, seemed inconsistent with respecting my mother's story and the relevancy it held for her. My mother knows nothing about John Dewey and is confused as to why I would use another man's ideas to analyze her life. For my mother, holistic education is about practicality; thus, the philosophical aspects of this article are strange and foreign for her. In contrast, within colleges and universities, much value and credibility are given to writing that successfully utilizes theory to more fully describe a phenomenon. Accentuating this point, academic, Pierre Bourdieu (1988), reminds researchers, "Research without theory is blind" (pp. 774–775). As a middle ground

toward respecting both my mother's and academia's value systems, in what follows, I discuss the key features of my mother's holistic ways of knowing, while incorporating abridged explanations of Deweyan ideology.

Holistic Education: Practical, Concrete, and Continual

My mother's holistic education was not founded on formal academic schooling. Instead, whether it was survival skills (e.g., how to build a house, set a cluck, make sauerkraut, etc.) or entertainment (e.g., singing while berry picking, making a deck of cards, enjoying music with neighbors, etc.), my mother's holistic education was based on the connections with family and with social and natural surroundings. In such a manner, for her, holistic education was defined as constant, cooperative negotiations between herself, other people, and the natural environment. Dewey and his daughter, Evelyn Dewey, recognized the value of such holistic education when they explained that formal schooling is a minor aspect of a holistically educated person:

What is learned in school is at best only a small part of education, a relatively superficial part; and yet what is learned in school makes artificial distinctions in society and marks persons off from one another. Consequently, we exaggerate school learning compared with what is gained in the ordinary course of living. (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, pp. 1–2)

In the world of formal education, my mother has a grade 7 education, but, in her home community, she is a smart, wise, well-educated person.

For many reasons, educators often prioritize intellectual book knowledge over practical forms of learning. Influenced by the specific lifestyles of students, educators must strive to structure courses and arouse learner interest so that the content teacher present is *practical* for students. Dewey speaks to the importance of teachers designing student-focused lessons. He believes teachers need to align the learning experiences that students encounter in the classroom with the knowledge students need outside of school (Simpson, Jackson, & Aycocock, 2005). I believe my mother would agree with Dewey.

Not only did my mother's holistic education evolve from practical knowledge (e.g., fall is the time to hunt, the softest feathers are nearest to the bird's body, etc.), her education was her actual participation in concrete activities, as exemplified through growing a garden, milking a cow, and making straw-filled mattresses. Dewey states that concrete experience is authentic education; however, he also stipulates

that mainstream educational practices often promote student learning via artificial circumstances (Kliebard, 2006). Dewey claims that high levels of learning are enticed through the process of student engagement and that conventional subject matter (e.g., mathematics, history, literature, and science) is organized knowledge that has its genesis in concrete, ordinary personal experiences (Kliebard, 2006). Aligning this point with the realities of modern classrooms, educators need to promote hands-on learning, service-learning, and journey-person/trades opportunities in the class. Through these types of concrete learning experiences, there is great potential for students to work collaboratively, to offer services to their community, and to engage in active forms of citizenship (Thomson, 2006).

A third point stemming from my mother's holistic educational experience is that the knowledge she gained at a very young age is long term, and she uses it to help others. Likewise, Dewey refers to the importance of *continuity* and the *interaction* of an experience when saying, "We use our past experiences to construct new and better ones in the future. The very fact of experience thus includes the process by which it directs itself in its own better [and the better of others]" (Dewey, 1920, p. 95). Because of her holistic education, my mother is wise; she is the one I phone when I want to make strawberry jam, sauerkraut and dumplings, or dill pickles, for example. I seek her trusted advice when my son is sick or suffers from a high fever. Teachers invite her into their classrooms to speak to young children explaining how people survived without electricity or modern conveniences. Indeed, she uses her wisdom for the better of others.

Passing on the Knowledge

As articulated throughout my mother's narrative, she was grateful for the abundant resources that surrounded her, and, to this day, my mother lives frugally. She reuses every plastic container and bag she acquires, patches the family's clothes, sews quilts for family and friends, cooks the vast majority of her meals, and plays cards as a form of entertainment. She lives a humble lifestyle, personally consuming little but giving much to her family and friends. In direct and indirect ways, the continuity of mother's holistic education involves passing on these social and environmentally friendly values to her children. For example, as a young child and teenager alongside my mother and other family members, I milked cows, tended the garden, picked wild berries, canned fruits and vegetables, and butchered chickens. I value these experiences, because, I believe they are the fundamental reasons why, these

days, I still grow a vegetable garden, recycle as much as I can, and support environmental issues. Presently, I live in the countryside, and I appreciate natural foods and rural surroundings. In my home, I closely monitor our family water consumption, because I view water as a precious commodity. In essence, my mother's influence is a small voice in my mind that constantly reminds me: *waste not, want not*.

Because I was raised in a household where education was viewed as far more than just schooling, my philosophy of education has been influenced. I value many forms of knowledge; however my fundamental belief about education is that it needs to envelop holistic attributes. More specifically, I believe:

Education is not about a pass or fail, and it cannot be rationally represented through some number. Education is not a process that can be measured through a particular test or instrument. Education is not solely portrayed through academic intelligence. Education is not something that can be filtered through an outsider's judgment. In most simple and accurate terms, education is the journey of life. During the process of education, we, as teachers, sometimes lose sight of that statement. As teachers, it is our responsibility to acknowledge the spirit of the student and draw out his/her inner potential. To bless someone with a thirst for knowledge is as important as being able to spell your first name. (Preston, 2010, p. 4)

I end this article by directing the reader to a point I made at the beginning of the document. My initial hope was that the information threaded herein might resonate with the reader. I now ask the reader: What person inspires you? What holistic educational or dominant life lessons does this person carry? How does this person's holistic education make the world a better place to live? How does this person affect the way in which you view education? I implore you to reflect about these questions, pondering upon how the wisdom and influence of this person, in some small or large way, is embodied in you and, in turn, positively affect the people around you.

Appendix A

Example of My Mother's Handwritten Responses

One again I remember on Sunday after noon^{we} were aloud to go to neighbors that were Reagonharts they lived about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from our place they had a gramophone (which is a record player, but this gramophone had to be wound up by hand. we'd listen to that for hours, then walk home again.

Dad took us kids to church alot.

Our first few years in Goodwill winter were very cold, walk to school not very warm clothes. legs would bite from the cold. only a few miles down the road.

Picking berries I loved picking berries it was being with our own (five of us) and we girls use to sing alot together

9/ what kind of food did we eat? Years ago at home in the summer lots of veg from garden such as lettuce radishes early turnips and later cauliflower Cabbage had alot of that. Coming home from school went to the garden got carrot, turnip sometime just a Hubbard stalk without sugar. In the winter lots of wild meat such as moose & Deer. in the fall lots of prairie chickens at that time it was all good. The meat hated food I must say rabbit and I hate it yet to-day when we had rabbit I ate my dry potatoes. In the winter we also ate alot of Veg turnip soup, and lots of soukhead

Notes

1. Even though the American Psychological Association (2010) indicates that the past tense should be used “when discussing another researcher’s work” (p. 78), within this article, I break that rule for two reasons. I use the present tense for the sake of consistency (i.e., my mother’s history is told in the present tense) and to reinforce an important thread of the article, which is that past knowledge is relevant today.
2. See Appendix A for an example of my mother’s written responses. (Note that, on the original paper, other than a small top margin, she made use of the entire page. Also, every sheet of paper she returned had writing on both sides.)

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Volunteerism as an Agent of Transformation

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ABSTRACT

I once believed that everything I knew about learning and teaching was the result of being a student and a teacher in schools and universities. But that was learning and teaching for a specific purpose and audience, structured for the here and now, in formal, familiar, comfortable settings with people who shared common experiences and interests. Since 2003 I have been volunteering and working with youth and educators in developing and post-conflict countries including Palestine, Nigeria, and Kenya. However, it is only within the last few years that I have come to realize that my volunteerism has provided me with informal learning opportunities that have led me to better understand who I am as a person, educator, and learner.

Introduction

“The central problem of an education based on experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experience.” (Dewey, 1938, pp. 27–28)

We tend to think of volunteering as a noble act that involves giving one’s time and abilities for the betterment of those less fortunate. It is not intended to be about one’s self. Still, after a decade of volunteering with youth media non-government organizations (NGOs) in Palestine, Nigeria, and South Africa as well as teacher training in Kenya, I now recognize the intense, informal learning that comes from volunteering. Most of all I have come to understand that my volunteerism is in essence about transformational moments in my life.

To illustrate the impact volunteerism had on me as an educator and as a person, I have chosen the following accounts of “my adventures” taken from my journals in the Middle East and Africa between 2003 and 2010.

Each of these accounts demonstrates that teacher volunteerism offers countless opportunities for informal learning. In essence what follows are excerpts of professional development that can only be provided outside of formal educational settings. Each account is an excellent example of Freire’s (1970) insistence that an educational activity is in the lived experience of participants.

The Dialogue

Some may think that to affirm dialogue—the encounter of women and men in the world in order to transform the world—is naively and subjectively idealistic. There is nothing, however, more real or concrete than people in the world and with the world, than humans with other humans. (Freire, 1970, p. 129)

Paulo Freire’s (1970) work as it applies to informal learning has particular significance for the purpose of this paper. My first “adventure” illustrates Freire’s notion that the conversation of the informal educator is dialogical in nature, is a two-way conversation in which both parties are on the same level of respect, and is an attempt to seek understanding.

From August to September 2003, I was a curriculum framework and learning outcome consultant at the Ministry of Education in Amman, Jordan. During my tenure in Jordan I was invited by a Palestinian friend to meet with a group of fifteen teens and young adults who all belonged to a youth group of which my friend was the director. The aim of the group was to create a dialogue with its Israeli counterparts.

Some of the youth had completed their secondary schooling a few months before; others were university students, and still others were unemployed. What they all had in common, aside from being Palestinian, was that they were all male and were children, teens or born during the first Intifada and witnesses or participants in the second uprising. Many were members of Arafat’s Fatah Movement. Some had participated in violent confrontations with the Israeli military. Almost all of them had stories about relatives and/or friends who had been or were imprisoned. All of them were disenfranchised, angry, and understandably depressed. In fact, the situation at the time of my visit was extremely tense. The morning I left Jordan for Ramallah the

United Nations building in Iraq had been bombed. As well, there had been a suicide bombing in Israel and a retaliatory assassination of a Hamas leader. As a response to the violence, Israeli tanks had moved into Ramallah earlier in the day and then stationed themselves on the outskirts not long after I arrived.

I must admit that upon hearing of the confrontations, I questioned whether I should continue with my plans to go to Ramallah that morning. Before I could change my mind, I quickly hopped onto the bus to the border checkpoint. As it turned out, my decision to attend the meeting was in itself what I believe my first ever transformation from a teacher and consultant to someone who wanted to learn about the lives of young people in a place and time that was outside of my comfort zone (i.e., in the safety of a classroom). Indeed, I believe that my decision to attend the meeting and what followed was a crucial point in sparking many questions about who I was as a teacher, a learner, and a person.

The meeting took place after the sun went down. Whether this was intended as a security measure or just practical I did not know. Still, as I sat in the room surrounded by the youth, the darkness of the night seemed to me as if I was involved in some sort of clandestine operation and only added to my apprehension as well as to the tense mood that resulted from the violent incidents that day. The description here is important since it was my first experience in such an unstable setting and, as such, contributed to my transformation.

Indeed, it was easily apparent that the youth at the meeting were on edge. The dialogue between the youth and I started slowly with the expected polite introductions, followed by an overview of the “situation” in the region, and how it had affected them personally. In fact, for the first half hour the youth seemed unexpectedly subdued. I started to worry that the meeting was beginning to resemble the first day of one of my university classes back home where the students refrain from being animated as they cautiously check me out. However, the atmosphere in the room changed when I asked: “So, what do you think about how the conflict is reported in the Western media?” Suddenly, several hands went up all at once. Others spoke openly, not patient enough to wait for someone to call upon them to speak. Not unexpectedly, their response was:

The media lie. It’s always from the Israeli point of view; they make us all look like terrorists. The news media don’t make a distinction between “terrorists” and Palestinians. When an Israeli is killed it’s a tragedy. But when a Palestinian is killed it’s retribution.

In other words, they saw the Western news media as supportive of the United States' pro-Israel lobby. I was not surprised by their response, but I was surprised by the passion in their eyes and the heated discussion that stemmed from my question. But what I found most interesting was not so much how they spoke but rather that the discussion was not directed at me but at each other; after all as a "visiting scholar," I was supposed to be the focus of attention. My understanding of the Arabic language is limited to functional literacy, so I relied on one of the group organizers to translate bits and pieces of the discussions that were happening all around me. In any event, I was content at this point to be the observer. I began to get the impression that the Western media's construct of the "Palestinian situation" was a topic they had either not spoken of at length before or at the very least had not discussed in an open forum.

I was so caught up in my observations of the youth that I was taken off guard when they asked me what Canadians thought of Palestinians. I explained that I could not speak for all Canadians, only for myself. Still, I admitted that the images in television news media indeed presented a negative image of male, rock-throwing Palestinian youth. I also pointed out that such images of teenagers throwing rocks at armed Israeli soldiers seemed to me like a David versus Goliath confrontation. I explained that I was not angry at the teens themselves but rather with those Palestinian adults who encouraged them. As the dialogue continued, I realized that they were not so much looking to get me to side with the Palestinian cause, but rather were anxious to dispel stereotypes I may have acquired through the Western media about the conflict and about the image of Palestinians in particular.

In retrospect, I am not sure what I really expected to gain from meeting with the youth, but the opportunity served to prepare me for more such experiences. What I am sure of is that the experience of meeting the Palestinian youth had a transformational effect on me. Mezirow's theory of "transformative learning" (1990) suggests that reflection is often generated when encountering a "disorienting dilemma," which is an apt description of my encounter with the Palestinian youth. Indeed, immediately following the experience I felt a sense of disorientation, which while uncomfortable even today, has made me more inclined to reflect on my experiential learning, an activity I am confident I would not have previously realized. From a professional perspective, the experience led me to revisit my role as an educator, in particular the need to situate my teaching in a real-world, authentic context that problematizes the status quo.

Samuel and Me

To paraphrase Freire (1970), the sum of our experience determines the people we become. He contended that it is not enough for people to come together in dialogue in order to gain knowledge of their social reality. They must act together in order to critically reflect upon their reality and transform it through further action and critical reflection. His idea of praxis suggests that there is a dialectical interplay between the way in which history and culture help shape people.

I first met Samuel Mbogo in July 2009 at the Utimishi Boys Secondary School in Gigil, Kenya, a small town about two hours from Nairobi. I was in Gigil as one of eight Canadians and two Americans, all members of a nonprofit volunteer organization called *Education Beyond Borders* (EBB). Our reason for being there was to provide professional development sessions to more than sixty Kenyan educators. Samuel was one of several Kenyan teachers chosen as facilitators whose role was to develop professional development workshops, along with EBB members, for Kenyan educators who were set to arrive in the coming week.

For the next week Samuel and I worked together planning the presentations. It was during this time that our friendship grew. We talked about a variety of topics related to our teaching as well as more personal things like family. It's a cliché but we immediately felt as if we had known each other for a long time.

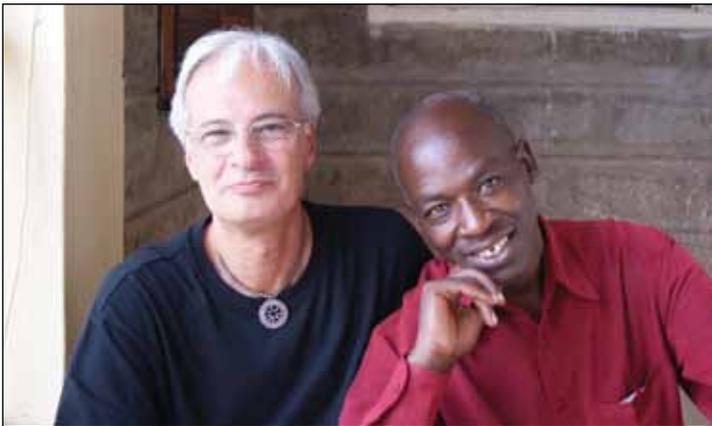


Fig. 1: The author and Samuel

A true relationship is built on a mutual understanding of each other's beliefs, values, hopes, and fears. These formed the basis for our dialogue concerning the state of education in our respective countries and in many ways our shared philosophy of education, which Samuel described in the following way:

Education is life itself. It adds value to life. When one is well educated he has the ability to change the world around him for the better. On a practical sense, education enables job opportunities and improves ability to reason. (Samuel Mbogo, personal communication, July 2009)

We both grumbled about the large numbers of students in our classroom, though thirty-six in my classroom does not compare to the hundred in Samuel's class. Educators in Quebec fear what many see as increases in students' disrespect for teachers and major discipline problems such as bullying. While issues of discipline exist in Samuel's school, considering the large class numbers, there are fewer instances of serious behavior problems. The more resources I have for my students, the more I want. Samuel is content just having basics such as pencils and books for each student. I lament over the lack of parent involvement and support. While parent participation in Samuel's school is very limited, most parents wish for the opportunity to be more involved. However, in many instances providing for fundamental daily wants is in itself a struggle. Parents of my students often complain about the lack of homework or that their child has too much homework. Most parents of children in Samuel's school do not have the literacy levels that enable them to assist with homework. It is difficult to motivate my students. Some of Samuel's primary and secondary students walk several kilometers to school each day. Moreover, the vast majority desperately wants to be in school, even if they must wear a school uniform, often paid for by parents without complaint, though poverty is their lifestyle. While the wearing of uniforms is always a topic of heated discussion in the schools in which I have taught, in my thirty-five years not one student has had to wear a uniform.

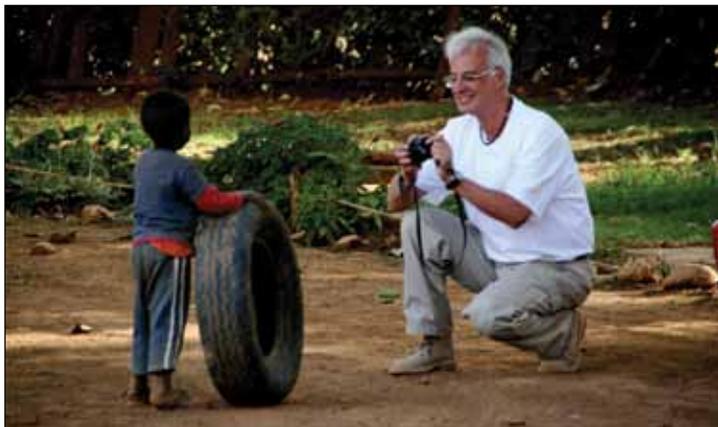


Fig. 2: Michael, a boy I befriended at the Nanyuki Orphanage in Kenya

The Ceremony

Often accounts of friendship between a volunteer and an individual in the host country follow a typical narrative plot line, i.e., a beginning, middle, and end. As will become apparent in the following excerpt of Samuel and I, the story continues.

Samuel and I have kept in constant communication through email. In one of our earlier correspondences, we reminisced about our time together. Samuel's email suggested that we be "spiritually joined as brothers through a ritual of unification" (Samuel Mbogo, personal communication, July 2009). That is, I would be welcomed into Samuel's tribe, the Kikuyu. The ceremony was set for August 2010 when I returned to Kenya.

At 9:00 a.m. on the day of the ceremony (August 12, 2010) I was driven to Samuel's home, located high in the mountain village of Eburru. The hour drive seemed much longer since the road was really a series of trenches. We were met at the entrance road to Samuel's house by the beautiful and melodic sound of women singing and clapping. They led us to our seats in front of Samuel's home. As is the tradition, the men sit and talk while the women cook.

After this, we ate and listened to the senior elder speak of Eburru's history. Speaking through an interpreter, he recounted the colonial days when the "white" British controlled the Kikuyu land and people. Following his presentation I was led into Samuel's home where three of the elders "interviewed" me to ensure that I was worthy of being accepted as a village member and Kikuyu tribesman.

Following the interview I was led down a hill to a place under the trees for a ritual ceremony in which meat was shared among us. I was then led back up the hill back to Samuel's home. Over the next few hours we ate, sang, prayed, and danced. The final activity involved the placing of a thin ring of goatskin around my neck and a small piece served as a ring on my index finger. Prayers were said and I later learned that the ceremony represented my rebirth. I was given the name Chege Mwangi. The ceremony concluded with more singing and dancing. As a result of the honor bestowed on me by the villagers of Eburru I have come to understand that, regardless of culture and distance or our personal stories, we are interconnected. I also gained an appreciation for the different ways we each learn how our lives are shaped.

Dialogue, defined by Freire (1970), is encounter mediated by the world, in order to name the world. The bond I had with Samuel transformed me into an authentic global citizen. Professionally, I am aware that as a member of a global learning

community I must ensure that both my students and my colleagues take on the assignment of challenging hegemonic assumptions, in particular those related to destiny, power, and diversity.

Nigeria, the Cost of Transformation

For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Freire, 1970, p. 72)

In March 2006 I was invited by two nonprofit Nigerian NGOs (Youth for Technology and Teen World) to work on media literacy projects with children and teens in several urban and rural schools in Nigeria. Of all the locations I have visited overseas, Nigeria has had the most lasting impact. My experience in the most populated and poverty-stricken country in Africa made me reflect on what we in the West recognize as a school and teaching. I do not believe that my colleagues back home would recognize the environments I worked in as a school. To understand schooling in Nigeria, it is important to have a sense of the larger setting in which the schools are situated.

Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa. It is also one of the poorest. Most people live on less than \$2 a day. I visited at least half a dozen schools, some in large cities such as Lagos and others in small villages like Owerri. Driving from one location to another, sometimes on the same day, took literally hours through streets that were either paved and potholed or hardened red mud. Vehicles of all sorts, from large trucks to whole families seated on one scooter, clogged the streets. Observance of traffic regulations are for the most part ignored.

On one eight-hour drive to a school, traffic was not the only stumbling block as we were stopped numerous times by several policemen in black uniforms, each carrying a large baton and an AK-47 weapon. While I had similar experiences in Palestine, the image of the policeman and the crude roadblocks, which was really nothing more than scrap metal and wood arranged like a small maze, made for a more ominous experience. Being in a hurry to get to the next school before dark, which we did not accomplish, my traveling companions decided that they would not stop at each roadblock but rather merely slow down, wave their identity cards at the policemen and step on the accelerator. Of course I had no such card. At each roadblock policemen yelled at us to stop, often raising their batons and sometimes their guns. Sitting in the back seat I could not help but feel frightened. But somehow we made it to the next school without any real incident.

Each of the schools I was taken to was really not much more than large rough stone blocks covered by tin roofs. Literally hundreds of children sat huddled three to a desk, made in most cases from scrap wooden boards. Few of the children had paper or pencils. For the most part the only light came from the glassless openings in the wall, which served as “windows.” Dust poured in through the windows.

Instruction was nothing more than “chalk and talk,” repetition, and rote learning, what Freire (1970) called “banking education,” in which the teacher is the depositor and the students are the depositories.

The schools I visited in Nigeria were similar to many of the schools I have seen in other parts of Africa but none seemed to impress upon me a more perfect example of what Freire (1970) wrote about in his seminal book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, concerning the state of a society in which one class of people remains embedded in poverty while another class of people benefit from the efforts of the lower class.

Informal discussions with Nigerian teachers and other educators demonstrated their dedication and their belief in the value of youth and education. But I could not help think that they also expressed feelings of being overwhelmed. Perhaps I am being too harsh but I cannot help but think of Nigerian schools as places of struggle.

Although I was only in Nigeria for a month, it seemed much longer. By the end of my stay in Nigeria, I found myself both emotionally and physically exhausted and felt a sense of relief when I boarded the plane home. In fact, during my first week home I declined to describe or speak of my experiences in Nigeria, even to family.

I learned a lot about myself in Nigeria. I learned that I was naive. I was naive in that I felt my previous experiences in Palestine and other parts of the Middle East had prepared me for what I would encounter in Nigeria. I had yet to learn that I was not as experienced as I assumed. Nigeria taught me that not only was I naive, but also that if I continue to work in places of extreme poverty and despair, I will have to find ways of controlling the emotional impact these places have on me.

In my teaching I constantly focus on my students’ outcomes while ignoring my own personal accountability. I learned in Nigeria that my personal and professional transformation comes at a cost: if I continue to volunteer in settings dominated by inequality and despair, I will have to dig deep to summon the resiliency to adapt.

Nigeria made me aware of the fact that my volunteerism can be both exciting and exhausting.

Volunteerism and Pedagogy of Teacher Education

I am convinced that my non-formal volunteer learning experiences described in this essay, and many more like them, either triggered or at the very least reinforced my belief in a pedagogy of teacher education which has as its primary tenet the notion that without experience, real learning or understanding of issues, ideas, concepts, or situations cannot occur. Kolb's experiential learning model (1984) provides a framework from which to contemplate volunteerism as an agent of transformation.

First, as a result of each volunteer experience, I as a learner was involved in a "concrete" exploration of issues related to gender, multiculturalism, literacy, vocational training, special needs, technological innovation, and delivery of instruction. I have long believed that my students and their peers have little exposure and therefore lack knowledge regarding not only global issues but also regarding these very issues on a local level. Volunteering in developing and post-conflict countries awakened me to the existence of these issues and the crucial need to involve my students in the study of these topics in the context of a safe learning environment.

Second, through the act of reflection, of which this essay is but one exercise, I have the opportunity to publicly share and analyze the experiences which leads me to not only process and conceptualize each experience but more importantly to: 1) question what I expected with what actually happened; 2) consider what was the most difficult and easiest part of the experiences; 3) speculate as to what were the most important aspects; 4) compare and contrast one experience with another. Finally, how through reflection and retrospection can I set aside past experiences so that with each new project I can begin again? These are all questions I constantly ask my students as they participate in their own experiences in school, the workplace, with their teachers, peers, and family.

Third, through conceptualizing the experiences I am better prepared to ask, "What did I learn about myself as a consequence of the experiences?" Have I had similar experiences? How could I have changed negative incidents that occurred so that such events do not recur in the future? How can I incorporate what I learned into the North American educational system? I must admit that confronting such uncertainties can be an uncomfortable exercise. Still, by addressing these concerns I can empathize with my students when requiring them to ponder their own futures.

Conclusion

From the discussion presented in this essay, it is clear that volunteerism as informal learning has value for formal education. My lived experiences as a volunteer fulfilled a personal and professional need that have shaped who I am professionally and personally. I had to travel thousands of miles to many different locations around the world to understand it is the wholeness of a person's life experiences that are important rather than fragmented events. Still, there is another unexpected side that has been informed by my travelling to many developing and post-conflict countries. There are times when I am uncertain where I truly belong and yet cannot wait to get there.

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How Disorienting Experiences in Informal Learning Contexts Promote Cross-Cultural Awareness in Preservice Teachers: Findings From a Study Abroad Program

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ABSTRACT

In this study we discuss how disorienting experiences in informal learning contexts promote cross-cultural awareness in preservice teachers during a study abroad program to Honduras. We used interpretive phenomenology via semi-structured interviews to examine how nine preservice teachers made sense of their experiences studying abroad. We found that immersing preservice teachers in informal learning contexts and diverse cultural settings other than their own fosters new socio-cultural insights in relation to their roles as future educators.

Introduction

In recent years, providing multicultural education that promotes preservice teacher cross-cultural awareness has become one of the core principles of teacher education programs in colleges and universities in the United States (Colón-Muñiz, SooHoo, & Brignoni, 2010). This is evident in the increasing number of teacher education programs that have infused cross-cultural international field experiences into their curricula through study abroad programs (Cushner, 2007). International field experiences include formal learning through traditional coursework and

classroom observations in international K-12 settings. Informal learning refers to cultural immersion activities such as residence with host family, interacting with the host community outside school settings, free community schools, and cultural sightseeing (Tang & Choi, 2004). Scholars report that international field experiences in flexible and diverse contexts offer opportunities for engaging in race, class, and gender issues that have consequences for preservice teachers' understandings of cultural difference in the classroom (Malewski & Phillion, 2009; Talburt & Stewart, 1999). More specifically, scholars note that disorienting study abroad experiences prompt critical reflection on racial, socio-political, and cultural identities of participants, and is a necessary component for preparing teachers for diverse contexts (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011).

Building upon the work of Trilokekar and Kukar (2011), we report on how disorienting experiences through informal learning contexts promote cross-cultural awareness in preservice teachers during a study abroad program to Honduras. For the purpose of this paper, disorienting experience is defined as a challenging cultural encounter which makes study abroad participants uncomfortable (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011), and provokes critical reflection on how participants view themselves and others. Trilokekar and Kukar (2011) point out that physical appearance, cultural representation, and language differences are factors that can be a source of disorienting experiences for participants who have gone on a study abroad program to countries different from their own. By cross-cultural awareness we mean the ability to recognize cultural difference and worldviews different from one's own (Dolby, 2004). We will provide a brief literature review of research on study abroad in teacher education, the conceptual framework that scaffolds the study, the study abroad program to Honduras, the research design, findings from the study, and conclude with the implications of disorienting experiences in informal learning contexts for preparing preservice teachers to be sensitive to cultural diversity.

Literature Review

Study abroad research indicates that international field experiences promote personal and professional development of preservice teachers by enhancing their cross-cultural awareness and prompting reflection on their own beliefs and practices (Walters, Garii, & Walters, 2009). For instance, Cushner (2007) notes study abroad among teacher education students shows a heightened sense of empathy for diverse learners, increases self-confidence and efficacy, promotes intercultural sensitivity, and increases awareness of personal biases in and outside the classroom

(Keengwe, 2010). Research notes that study abroad promotes global citizenship (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002) as well as sensitivity to local cultures (Talbert & Stewart, 1999). Research also suggests that the context of study abroad (Jiang & DeVillar, 2011), the diverse contexts of cross-cultural interaction during study abroad (Marx & Moss, 2011), and full language immersion (Shondel, 2009), offer a diverse array of cross-cultural experiences to teacher education students that are not possible in traditional field experience settings (Malewski & Phillion, 2009).

Many scholars emphasize study abroad as a rich context for engaging preservice teachers in racial difference, outsider status experience, risk-taking within the host culture, and reflection on social power dynamics (Colón-Muñiz, SooHoo, & Brignoni, 2010). A recent direction for research on study abroad programs for preservice teachers suggests that cultural dissonance, disorientation, and discomfort offer learning opportunities for preparing teachers who are sensitive to cultural and learning diversity in their home countries (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). Experiential dissonance caused by cultural, linguistic, and social identity differences impacts study abroad participants' perceptions and understandings of the world and influences understandings of the teacher-learner relationship (Shondel, 2009). In many cases, dissonance leads to critical examination of preservice teachers' identities, beliefs, attitudes, and practices, which are critical for the development of cross-cultural awareness as it pertains to teaching and learning. While the literature suggests that social identities might cause discomforting experiences during study abroad (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011), there is little research on how disorienting experiences of race, class, and gender in informal learning contexts promote preservice teachers' cross-cultural awareness. Therefore, this study seeks to address the absence in the study abroad literature regarding how disorienting experiences of race, class, and gender in informal learning contexts promote preservice teachers' cross-cultural awareness.

Conceptual Framework

Trilokekar and Kukar (2011) report that racial and cultural identities that preservice teachers bring into the host country play a central role in preservice teachers' disorienting experiences. Delineating four categories for examining disorienting experiences during study abroad, Trilokekar and Kukar (2011) suggest the first step in cross-cultural interaction is "experiencing racial dynamics" (p. 1144) or difference in race between self and others. The second is "experiencing outsider status" (p. 1145) or the experience of being a minority or an outsider. The next step is "engaging in

risk taking/experimenting with new identities” (p. 1146) that leads to engagement through cross-cultural interaction, in spite of outsider status. The fourth step is “recognizing privilege and global power relations” (p. 1146) or when participants reflect on power differentials, and their own beliefs and attitudes about themselves and others. Together, the four steps lead to critical reflection on how identities are constructed, prompting participants to examine their own cultural beliefs and develop attitudes that are more understanding of cultural difference. Trilokekar and Kukar (2011) note that critical reflection promotes a frame opening, rethinking previous ideas, adaptation of new ways, and eventually worldview alteration. Keeping the four categories in mind, this study specifically examines how preservice teachers interpret discomforting experiences based on race, class, and gender in informal learning contexts during study abroad, which offers opportunities for changing their perceptions of others and enhancing cross-cultural awareness.

Honduras Study Abroad Program

Developed by a faculty member at a Midwestern university in 2003, the Honduras study abroad program for preservice teachers is an annual short-term summer program. Preservice teachers attend pre-trip meetings on campus, spend three weeks in Honduras, and finish some assignments after the trip along with post-trip interviews. The program consists of formal coursework and observations in multiple educational settings, as well as informal learning contexts such as public rural schools, social events, and cultural tours.

Once preservice teachers are registered for the program, they attend three pre-trip on-campus meetings that give travel information, are shown a video of Honduran culture, and are given an outline of their coursework. As part of the program preservice teachers are enrolled in two courses, *Exploring Teaching as a Career and Multiculturalism and Education*. In the former course, preservice teachers explore their perceptions of what it means to be culturally different, the social, historical, and political nature of schools, and the overt and hidden objectives of schooling in US American society. The latter course, *Multiculturalism and Education*, aims at developing preservice teachers’ multicultural competencies by questioning their own beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives; examining how they view race, class, gender, and other differences; and critically reflecting on the implications of their perceptions for classroom practices.

Written assignments for the two courses include autobiographical reflections and journal entries in which students are encouraged to make connections between coursework, multicultural experiences in Honduras, and field observations in various school settings. An important component of coursework is field observations either in an elementary school in Zamorano or a secondary school in Tegucigalpa. In addition, preservice teachers visit three rural schools where they participate in project learning activities. By visiting multiple learning contexts preservice teachers experience cultural diversity and critically reflect on how inequity and privilege are enacted in formal and informal settings.

Research Methodology

The qualitative research method that we used in this study is interpretive phenomenology. We designed this research to understand how disorienting experiences influence the preservice teachers' informal learning to promote cross-cultural awareness during a study abroad program in Honduras. Therefore, phenomenology was used as a method since it allowed us to "make interpretive sense of situations and relations of living" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 2). According to Merriam (2009), the phenomenological method is underlined by five features: (1) focusing on the experience itself; (2) how the experience is transformed into consciousness; (3) using particular "tools" to interpret the importance of the experience; (4) involving in-depth interviewing; and (5) producing a "composite" description that gives the "essence" of the phenomenon. Keeping these features in mind, we chose to conduct a phenomenological study in order to be able to focus on preservice teachers' disorienting experiences during study abroad and how the experience promotes cross-cultural awareness in the preservice teachers. The questions we explore are:

1. How do disorienting experiences in relation to race, class, and gender promote cross-cultural awareness in preservice teachers?
2. How do informal learning contexts during study abroad promote cross-cultural awareness?
3. What are the implications of disorienting experiences for preparing preservice teachers for culturally diverse classrooms?

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of nine preservice teachers from elementary or secondary education majors enrolled in the 2011 Study Abroad Honduras Program. The following chart provides demographic details as identified by the participants.

Table 1
2011 Honduras Study Abroad Participant Demographics

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Language Other Than English	Previous International Travel
Sandy	Asian	female	Korean	Asia, Europe
Sara	white (Middle Eastern)	female	Arabic (oral comprehension)	Middle East, Europe
Kim	white	female	none	Canada
Amanda	white	female	none	Canada
Justin	white	male	none	none
Kelly	white	female	none	none
Ashley	white	female	basic Spanish	El Salvador
Kathy	white	female	none	none
Graham	white	male	none	none

Data Collection

The study abroad program was designed to promote reflection through journal writing, discussions, course assignments, and structured interviews, which constituted most of the data. Data were collected in three phases. In the pre-trip phase a demographic chart was drawn for each year's participants, listing names, subject major, international travel, age, race, class, gender, and languages spoken. During this phase, in hour-long pre-trip interviews, all the participants were asked about their perceptions of Honduran culture and schooling, cross-cultural challenges they anticipate, and what study abroad in Honduras might offer them in terms of personal and professional growth.

In the next phase of the data collection, on-site individual and focus interviews were held. The on-site focus interviews were held weekly and for one hour

each, aimed at letting participants share experiences, and discuss their unique perspectives. The individual interviews focused on how each participant's study abroad experiences of race, class, and gender, disorienting experiences if any, how the participants were negotiating disorienting experiences, and their changing perceptions of self and other. During the post-trip phase, all the preservice teachers were asked about the impact of their experiences studying abroad both in formal and informal learning contexts. Other forms of data consisted of participants' course assignments and reflective journals, and researchers' observations of participants' and field notes. Interviews were digitally recorded, professionally transcribed, and stored in a data base.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the data to search for the themes that come from preservice teachers' disorienting experiences of race, class, and gender with a focus on informal learning contexts. Data were analyzed by making links to previous literature, the conceptual framework, as well as in keeping with process phenomenological research as described by Creswell (2007).

1. Building significant statements from data collection methods.
2. Developing clusters of meaning.
3. Writing textural and structural descriptions.
4. Composing an essential description that focuses on common experiences of participants.

We use three vignettes from informal learning contexts to examine preservice teachers' disorienting experiences of race, class, and gender, respectively.

Vignette one: Sara's engagement with race.

Sara is a female preservice teacher of Middle Eastern background with light skin, grew up in the US Midwest, identifies as white, upper-middle class, US American, and has travelled to Europe and the Middle East. In this vignette taken from a post-trip interview, Sara speaks of disorienting experiences she experienced when interacting with local Hondurans in relation to her race/ethnic identity and how the experience prompted reflection on her racial identity in the US.

Interviewer: Having a Middle Eastern background, did that influence your experience with your peers in any way?

Sara: I don't think so. Because, I'm still American like they are. I grew up here (US) and I still have the same ideas that they do...

Interviewer: So how was it with people in Honduras?

Sara: They (Hondurans) thought I was Honduran. So they tried to speak Spanish to me a lot. And I had no idea what they were saying. So that was a problem...

Because I have dark hair like they do. And I have a tan, so I had the same color skin. I mean even people here in America think that I'm Hispanic. And, they (US Americans) try to speak Spanish to me as if they don't understand English. So in Honduras if somebody was trying to communicate with our group they would pick me first to try and talk to. And I'm just like no. I'm not the one you want to try and talk to (laughs)... It's not a good decision.

Born and raised in the US Midwest, Sara perceives herself an “American,” “just another” one of her white peers. As the literature suggests, social interaction in informal settings in Honduras outside the comfort zone of her home country provided her a context in which to question racial similarities and confront differences that set her apart not only from other Hondurans but also her US American peers. Revealing a previous sense of color blindness towards the construction of her own identity, Sara realizes that others view her as non-white because of her skin color. As Trilokekar and Kukar (2011) suggest, at first, Sara encounters experiencing racial dynamics when Hondurans speak to her in Spanish and identify with her skin color. She in turn tries to distance herself from Hondurans, emphasizing that she is different from them because of not knowing Spanish. Her “experiencing outsider status” leads to “experimenting with new identities” by recognizing that her previous affiliation with White “Americanness” was questionable. Further, she reflects on the complex social construction of identity to recognize “privilege and global power relations” when she realizes her middle-class status had kept her color-blind to racial difference. For Sara, recognizing the construction of race promotes new meaning and disrupted her previously assumed similarities with peers, in turn heightening her cross-cultural awareness in terms of the nuances of racial power and privilege.

Vignette two: Kim's engagement with social class.

Kim is a white female preservice teacher self-identified as upper middle class. During her experiences in Honduras she observed the vast differences in wealth within Honduras and compared to the US. In this vignette, taken from a post-trip interview, Kim recalls her visit to the orphanage in contrast to her brother's cruise trip to the Honduran coast.

Actually my brother and his friends were in Honduras at the same time as I was, but they were on a cruise, and they stopped at one of the beaches. We returned home at the same time, so we were doing our slide shows for the family. Here were his pictures, ocean, beaches, trees, drinking and everything. Here are my pictures with little kids, the orphanage. It was weird... from the same home and gone to the same country but having completely different experiences. He and his friends always say that Honduras is one of their favorite places because they only saw the beaches, but for me, I learned about the kids in the orphanage and their lives...

While Kim's experiences gave her a glimpse of economic stratification within Honduras, she emphasized how Honduras was represented in distinctive ways to her and her brother. This gave her a deeper understanding of how representations of people and places influence the meanings that become attached to them. It was of great interest to Kim as to how the process of meaning making occurred. Kim's analysis of poverty was understood in the context of economic realities in Honduras. Her disorienting experience came from comparing her visit to the orphanage with the artificially constructed reality of her brother's experience that camouflaged the poverty of people in Honduras. Overall, the discomfort in realizing how her brother was isolated from the parts of Honduras she experienced raised some awareness of how perceptions are socially constructed and the need to analyze the nature of poverty and social class.

Vignette three: Amanda's engagement with gender issues.

The racialized "other" and realities of poverty accentuate gendered relations for contexts unfamiliar to US preservice teachers. Awareness of gender roles is heightened, but seldom critically connects back to a participant's home context. Amanda is a female preservice teacher, self-identified as white middle class, raised in a "traditional" nuclear family in the US Midwest. This vignette is taken from a focus interview in which Amanda recounts her interaction with a male tour guide at a waterfall during a cultural tour of Copan that provoked Amanda to confront gender issues that she had never experienced or acknowledged.

Here is the picture of the waterfall that we went to and four of us went behind the waterfall and jumped off...which was really fun. And that was the only time that I saw discrimination between female and male. There was a male that...got to jump off a rock that was a foot higher than where I was allowed to jump off. I thought it was really interesting just because...like I was stepping on the rock and going to jump off but then the guy [tour guide] objected saying, "no, no you need to be on the ground."

This was a disorienting experience for Amanda as she felt discriminated against because of her gendered identity. During the discussion, other students like Sara noted that male teachers garnered more respect from students at the school in Honduras. Honduras provided the context for Amanda to question gendered norms in Honduras and the US. Amanda signaled discomfort at social norms, making her realize that gender as a construct is different in different parts of the world, and that the US is not the universal norm. At the same time, while Amanda comments on gender roles in Honduras, she uncritically assumes US social norms without truly questioning gender in her home country. While she experiences some form of cross-cultural awareness, there is scope for further critical engagement with the power dynamics of gender.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of our study was to examine how disorienting experiences in informal learning contexts promote cross-cultural awareness in preservice teachers during a study abroad program to Honduras. What we found is that informal learning contexts offered opportunities to preservice teachers for experiencing life in social, cultural, and economic contexts which were, in some cases, far removed from their lived realities in the US. Consistent with study abroad in teacher education literature about preservice teachers' cross-cultural experiences related to their identity(ies), all the participants in our study expressed the initial desire to study abroad to experience "something different" within a culture other their own, which suggests they were hoping to experience difference. In encountering social class, preservice teachers consistently expressed feeling driven to "do something" about the poverty, and acknowledging positions of privilege coming from the United States. Many preservice teachers expressed revelatory experiences throughout their time abroad as contributing to changes in how they view poverty in the US, at one end of a revelation-spectrum, and developing a more nuanced educational worldview at the other end.

After studying abroad, most preservice teachers were motivated to work with culturally diverse students; however, one of the participants, Graham, was the exception. While Graham admitted that his experiences during study abroad have given him a deeper understanding of his own identity and helped him to figure out his professional interests, he felt that he was not suited to developing teaching as a career. He added that his experiences in Honduras provided insights into the role of teachers in the classroom, teachers' ability to work with culturally diverse students,

and that he needed more exposure and training in attending to the linguistic, social, cultural, and academic needs of students. Graham found the prospect of teaching in culturally diverse classrooms challenging and changed his academic major to explore another profession, besides teacher education. Study abroad offers participants opportunities for self-reflection, exploring their own identities vis-à-vis cultural difference, and developing multicultural competencies; at the same time, Graham evidences unintended consequences of study abroad (Phillion, Malewski, Rodriguez, Shirley, Kulago, & Bulington, 2008). On the one hand, his decision to leave teacher education is a loss for the program, on the other, as Graham noted, his study abroad experiences have made him aware of the challenges of working in culturally diverse environments, an insight that will continue to benefit him in his personal and professional life.

All the preservice teachers, including Graham, claimed that their study abroad experience led them to question assumptions they made about what they called “poor countries” and people living in them. Their “revelations” or increased cross-cultural awareness focused on structural issues in Honduras regarding poverty and includes an opaque understanding of what it means to be a teacher within that context and how that meaning transfers to teachers in the US teaching students who come from different race, socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds than their own. More importantly, preservice teachers recognized their own assumptions about race, class, and gender in the US, how their own identities are socially constructed, and the impact of teachers’ identities in classroom practice.

Beyond the literature, we found that immersing preservice teachers in cultural contexts different from their own fosters new socio-cultural insights in relation to their roles as future educators and professionals. All the participants in this study came from a relative position of privilege within the United States; their perspectives were challenged by their disorienting experiences, leading them to analyze how race, class, and gender impact teachers and students. Eight of the preservice teachers expressed a desire to “work” with “underprivileged” children and students in the US through organizations such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters or as summer camp counselors for “underprivileged” children, with a focus on activities outside formal educational structures. All eight indicated that their disorienting experiences informed their philosophy of teaching, and all nine participants were motivated to being less materialistic in their lifestyles, and to live with greater appreciation for their social situations.

In conclusion we posit the following:

- Study abroad programs offer new cultural insights to preservice teachers and enhance their cross-cultural awareness.
- Study abroad programs infused with informal learning experiences in diverse out of classroom contexts offer opportunities that promote cross-cultural awareness by engaging preservice teachers with issues of race, class, and gender within the US.
- Extensive and varied disorienting experiences may better provoke preservice teachers to challenge their assumptions about race, class, and gender differences in the US.
- Study abroad programs infused with disorienting experiences in informal learning contexts have implications for preparing teachers who are sensitive to cultural and academic diversity in and outside the classroom.

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A Working Model of Mentors' Contributions to Youth Mentoring Relationship Quality: Insights From Research on Psychotherapy

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring is a flexible approach to youth development that can promote positive outcomes through informal learning. Not all mentoring relationships are beneficial, however, as lower quality mentoring relationships tend to have little effect. A mentor's overall approach to the relationship has been found to influence relationship quality. But what does it take to engage a young person in such a relationship and sustain it over time? In this paper, I draw from the research on psychotherapy and other related literatures to briefly sketch out a working model for the determinants of mentoring relationship quality and then focus in detail on one of these—the contributions of the mentor.

Mentoring has become a popular approach to promoting positive developmental outcomes for youth and mentoring programs have enjoyed exponential growth in recent decades. It is generally believed that mentoring delivered in many different formats and settings can be beneficial to youth of varying ages and evidence for the broad-based effectiveness of mentoring is indeed mounting. Most notably, a recent meta-analysis of evaluations of mentoring programs in the United States found that mentored youth demonstrated positive gains in a wide range of social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes whereas non-mentored youth exhibited declines. Mentoring was also found to be effective across settings and with both children and adolescents (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). These findings support the commonly

accepted wisdom that mentoring provides meaningful connections with adults that promote growth in multiple developmental domains. Such connections can create a particular kind of context that is conducive to a variety of forms of informal learning.

Another commonly held belief about mentoring is that virtually anyone can be a mentor. It is often presented as being easy, simply requiring that you be yourself and “share what you know.” This sentiment, conveyed through public service campaigns and mentoring program advertisements aimed at recruiting volunteer mentors, is evident in claims such as “you don’t need special skills to be a mentor,” “just a willingness to listen, offer encouragement and share what you’ve learned about life” (Harvard Mentoring Project, 2005). Yet, research on mentoring has shown that not all mentoring relationships are beneficial and in fact poor mentoring may contribute to declines in youth functioning (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Herrera et al., 2007; Karcher, 2005). The factors distinguishing more and less effective or even harmful mentoring largely hinge on the nature and quality of the relationships mentors form with their youth protégés. Specifically, the length and strength of the relationship are critical, with longer lasting relationships in which the young person feels close to or connected with the mentor getting better results (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Parra, DuBois, Neville, & Pugh-Lilly, 2002). One factor contributing to the development of higher quality relationships is the mentor’s overall approach to the relationship. Mentors who invest in relationship building, especially early on, and focus on the youth’s needs and interests tend to be more successful than those who are more prescriptive and prioritize the attainment of their own goals for their protégés (Morrow & Styles, 1995). Such evidence begs the question—are there, in fact, “special skills” that are needed to be an effective mentor?

Rhodes (2002; Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006), in her influential model of youth mentoring, posits that mentoring is at its core a relationship-based intervention. Therefore, a relationship characterized by mutuality, trust, and empathy must form between the mentor and youth for positive change to occur. Such a relationship is thought to benefit youth through three interrelated processes: (a) enhancing social and emotional well-being, (b) promoting cognitive development through meaningful conversations, and (c) promoting identity development through role modeling and advocacy. But how does such a relationship develop and what helps to sustain it over time? This is not yet well understood.

We do, however, know quite a bit about how other types of growth-promoting relationships develop and work. As has been argued elsewhere, the psychotherapy literature, which has examined extensively the nature and quality of therapeutic

relationships, has much to offer the field of youth mentoring (Spencer & Rhodes, 2005; Spencer, 2004). Although there are significant differences between mentoring and psychotherapy, there are some important similarities. At the center of both is a relationship, the explicit goal of which is to foster the positive development of one of the partners. It stands to reason that some of the core elements of effective psychotherapy may be at work in effective mentoring relationships as well.

The nature and quality of psychotherapy relationships are thought to be determined by three sets of factors: (a) therapist factors, (b) client factors, and (c) the contexts surrounding and supporting the therapy relationships (Duncan, Miller, Wampold, & Hubble, 2010). Research on these domains of influence has deepened our understanding of how different relational processes yield different outcomes. In this paper, I apply this three-domain model to mentoring and sketch out a general working model for the determinants of more and less effective relationships. I then discuss in greater detail just one of these—the contributions of the mentor. In psychotherapy, as in mentoring, the relationship is considered to be the cornerstone of the change process, as the therapeutic alliance has been found to account for a significant portion of the change achieved through therapy (Hubble, Duncan, Miller, & Wampold, 2010; Norcross, 2010). It has even been asserted that the therapist is “the most robust predictor of outcome of any factor studied” (Hubble et al., 2010, p. 38). Simply put, some therapists are just better than others at forming an effective alliance with their clients. Likewise, I expect that some mentors are better than others at forging growth-promoting relationships with their youth protégés and that the approaches mentors take may make distinct and significant contributions to mentoring relationship quality. Identifying the qualities and practices of more effective mentors can help guide mentoring programs in the critical tasks of selecting appropriate mentors and providing effective training and support.

Determinants of Mentoring Relationship Quality: A Working Model

As noted above, relationship quality has been found to contribute significantly to the positive growth and change that can be achieved through mentoring. This is not surprising as strong, emotionally connected relationships with adults have been identified in the research on resilience and positive youth development as key contributors to psychological health and well-being in childhood and adolescence (e.g., Scales & Leffert, 1999). Such evidence has fueled the mentoring movement and

the exponential growth in mentoring programs. Although mentoring has generally been found to be effective, not all mentoring relationships are. Lower quality mentoring relationships have little effect and those that end prematurely may actually make matters worse for some youth (Parra et al., 2002; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Unfortunately, sustaining mentoring relationships can be challenging. In national studies of mentoring effectiveness, only about half of the relationships studied appear to have met the initial program expectations for relationship length (Bernstein, Dun Rappaport, Olsho, Hunt, & Levin, 2009; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Herrera et al., 2007). Mentoring relationships, like all interpersonal relationships, are complex and the duration and strength of these relationships are influenced by multiple factors. Interpersonal relationships are generally understood to be mutually constructed and therefore are shaped by what each individual brings to the relationship (Miller & Stiver, 1997; Tronick, 2001). Adapting models of relationship quality determinants from the study of psychotherapy and interpersonal relationships more broadly (Belsky, 1984; Duncan et al., 2010), I contend that the quality of the relationship formed between mentor and youth is likely influenced by the personal attributes and relational capacities the mentor and youth each brings to the relationship and the sources of support and stress in the contexts within which the relationship is embedded.

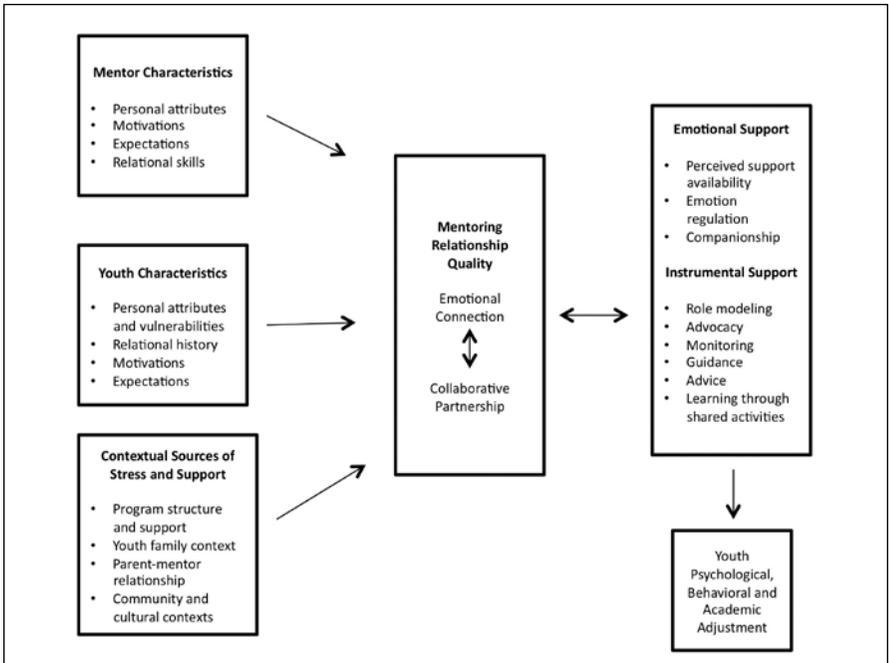


Fig. 1: Determinants of mentoring relationship quality

In this model, it is expected that a mentor's characteristics and relational capacities will influence how the mentoring relationship develops and whether it becomes close and is sustained over time. Forging a one-to-one relationship with a young person who starts off as a stranger can be quite challenging. Mentors must have the ability to engage their protégés from the start and withstand the challenges and uncertainties that often arise in the early stages of the relationship as well as the capacity to respond to the youth's changing needs and interests as the mentoring relationship continues to develop. So too, the young person's interpersonal style and psychological and behavioral functioning at the time of the match are likely to influence whether and how a meaningful relationship is established. Young people enter into mentoring relationships with varying needs, interests, stresses, and experiences in relationships with adults. Some research indicates that these factors do matter. The nature and severity of the risks youth are experiencing at the time of match, whether they have a history of physical or sexual abuse, and the strength of their existing relationships with parents, teachers, and peers, are all factors that have been associated with mentoring relationship length and effectiveness (DuBois et al., 2011; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Schwartz, Rhodes, Chan, & Herrera, 2011). The motivations of both the mentor and youth to participate in a mentoring relationship and their expectations for it at the start are also likely to influence how the relationship develops and whether it is sustained (Spencer, 2007b). Finally, the context within which the relationship is embedded is another influential contributor. This includes program factors such as the amount and type of structure, training and ongoing support provided by the mentoring program, how the mentoring matches are made, and whether and how the young person's family is involved in the mentoring process, all of which contribute to mentoring relationship quality (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; DuBois et al., 2011).

It is within the context of a connected and collaborative relationship that growth and learning through mentoring occurs. The everyday nature of mentoring relationships coupled with consistent and ongoing contact between mentor and youth can offer a virtually endless supply of opportunities for informal learning (Spencer, 2006, 2007a; Spencer & Liang, 2009). Engaging in shared and often fun activities with a trusted adult can enhance emotional well-being and experiencing the positive regard of a caring mentor may contribute to greater self-confidence and willingness on the part of the protégé to stretch and take risks. Mentors who come to know a good deal about the capacities and interests of the youth can intentionally structure informal activities in ways that promote learning and the development of new skills. Spending time together regularly can create openings for the mentors to provide a wide range of supports, from serving as a listening ear, to teaching a new

skill, to encouraging youth to push themselves to try new things and then celebrating with them when they succeed or offering solace when they fall short. These processes are likely to be mutually influencing. A positive emotional connection with a caring adult may enhance feelings of trust and result in greater openness on the part of the youth protégé to the mentor's influence, support, and guidance. Likewise, receiving effective support and guidance may deepen the youth's emotional connection and feelings of trust in the mentor.

In the next section, I expand on just one component of this model and consider in greater detail the mentor's contributions to the mentoring process. The discussion here is centered primarily on one-to-one mentoring relationships. However, some of the factors considered here are likely to apply to group mentoring relationships as well.

Mentors' Contributions: Personal Attributes and Relational Skills

Personal Attributes

Research on other forms of growth-promoting relationships, including psychotherapy relationships, would suggest that the personal attributes of the mentor likely influence the quality of the mentoring relationship. Psychotherapists who are characterized by clients as being "more understanding and accepting, empathic, warm and supportive" and who "engage in fewer negative behaviors such as blaming, ignoring, or rejecting" get better results (Lambert & Barley, 2002, p. 26). Other attributes of more effective therapists include dependability, benevolence, and responsiveness as well as the capacity to convey confidence in their ability to help (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003). Clients who experience their therapists as being invested in them also rate their relationships with their therapists more highly (Saunders, Howard, & Orlinsky, 1989). Research on parenting, another type of growth-promoting relationship, has consistently found that parents' interactional styles play a significant role in developmental outcomes. Parental warmth and responsiveness have been associated with greater social, emotional, and cognitive competence in children (Grimes, Klein, & Putallaz, 2004; Parke, McDowell, Kim, & Leidy, 2006). Research on attachment has also found that the attachment style or state of mind of parents influences how they engage in relationships with their children as well as with other adults (Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 2008; Zeifman & Hazan, 2008). Relatively secure adults are better able to regulate their own emotions, can more flexibly problem-solve and cope with

stress, and are more open to new experiences (Mikulincer, 1997; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008). Parents of more securely attached children tend to be more flexible, insightful, and sensitive to their children's cues (George & Solomon, 2008). Research on attachment in adulthood has also found that adults with more secure attachment styles are better able to engage in what has been called reflective functioning, which is the capacity to consider both one's own mental states and those of others when interpreting the actions of others. Adults who are able to do this at higher levels have been found to be better able to form close and sustained relationships (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002).

Adults whose interpersonal styles are more conducive to the development of a close relationship are likely to be better able to form an effective mentoring relationship. Mentors who are warm and responsive may more readily engage their youth protégés in a trusting relationship. In a longitudinal study of community-based youth mentoring relationships, my colleagues and I (Spencer, Martin, Basualdo-Delmonico, Walsh, & Jeon, 2010) found that the protégés matched with mentors whose responses on a measure of attachment style indicated greater comfort with intimacy and less anxiety in interpersonal relationships tended to report having a stronger relationship with their mentors 6-months into the relationship. In addition, the protégés of mentors who were more empathic tended to report feeling more accepted and understood by their mentor at 6-months. Mentors' motivation to become a mentor also predicted later relationship quality with mentors who volunteered out of desire to enhance their understanding of youth having stronger relationships with their protégés than mentors who did not as highly endorse this reason for volunteering (Spencer et al., 2010). Other research on peer-mentoring has found that the mentors' general attitudes about young people matter as well, with more negative mentors having the potential to contribute to decrements in youth functioning (Karcher, Davidson, Rhodes, & Herrera, 2010) and those with higher levels of social interest and general caring for the welfare of others being more likely to persist in the mentoring relationship, even with more interpersonally challenging protégés (Karcher & Lindwall, 2003).

We know that in order for a mentoring relationship to be effective it must last a reasonable length of time, with some research indicating it takes a year or more for the benefits to accrue (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Herrera et al., 2007). However, many mentoring relationships end early, often because the mentor no longer wants to continue, and a small but significant portion of mentors abandon their mentees altogether, disappearing without saying goodbye or formally ending the relationship (Spencer, 2007b). A critical difference between mentoring and psychotherapy is that mentors are typically volunteers and do not have a professional imperative to

persist in the face of challenges. Most mentors appear to enter the relationship for similar reasons, typically out of a stated desire to “make a difference,” and have the expectation they will be able to do so through mentoring (Spencer et al., 2010). Once the relationship is underway, however, many mentors become disillusioned, either because the relationship is not going as expected or does not seem to be as meaningful to the child as they had hoped it would be (Spencer, 2007b). Some mentors persist, adjusting their expectations and focusing their efforts on getting to know their protégés and finding ways to engage them more on their terms (Spencer et al., 2010). Mentors with more secure attachment styles in relationships and who are less prone to personalizing conflicts and other forms of disconnections may better meet the challenges and conflicts that arise in the relationship with openness and flexibility, thereby avoiding creating or deepening a rift and instead promoting the development of the relationship.

In addition to persisting in the relationship over time, being dependable is also important. In one study (Karcher, 2005), declines in self-esteem were observed among youth matched with mentors whose attendance was more inconsistent, even when the relationship lasted the initially agreed upon amount of time. Mentors who show up sporadically are not likely to foster trust and confidence in the relationship. Youth, especially those who have experienced disruptions in their important relationships with adults, need to be able to count on their mentors to keep their promises. Building a personal relationship with a young person requires investing time in seeing them regularly in order to become and continue to be a meaningful person in their lives. Too often mentors underestimate the importance of the scheduled meetings to their protégés and the disappointment that missed meetings can engender.

Finally, given the central role that race, ethnicity, and culture play in developmental processes more generally (e.g., Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003), similarities and differences in the mentor’s and protégé’s racial and ethnic backgrounds likely have some influence on mentoring relationship quality. There can be significant differences in the economic, racial, and sociocultural backgrounds of the adult volunteers and youth protégés (MENTOR, 2006). Mentors’ openness and ability to understand culturally based experiences of youth whose backgrounds are different from their own and to connect across these differences may facilitate the formation of a closer and more enduring mentoring relationship. The capacity for self-reflection and openness to worldviews that are different from one’s own may be important, as unacknowledged prejudices can subtly affect interpersonal relationships (Cohen & Steele, 2002). Such qualities have been found among therapists receiving higher satisfaction ratings from their clients of color (Constantine, 2002). Training models have

been developed to foster the development of helping professionals' cultural competence, which includes cultural knowledge, skills, and personal awareness (Sue & Sue, 2003), and this type of training is associated with greater satisfaction with the treatment process among clients of color (Constantine, 2002). Sánchez and Colón (2005) have recommended that programs provide cultural competency training for mentors that includes instruction on how to provide feedback to ethnic minority protégées in ways that foster their trust and make them feel supported rather than judged.

Relational Skills

In addition to personal attributes, mentors' relational skills, or their abilities to form and sustain a growth-promoting relationship with a young person, are likely critical as well. Research on mentoring and other forms of adult-youth relationships, such as those formed in after-school settings, has indicated that the most effective adults are those that are emotionally engaged and provide a balance of appropriate structure, challenge, and support (Larose, Cyrenne, Garceau, Brodeur, & Tarabulsky, 2010; Larson, 2006; Langhout, Rhodes, & Osborne, 2004). The research on psychotherapy would suggest that mentors who are able to be empathic and authentic and convey unconditional positive regard to their protégés would be more likely to develop this kind of relationship. Therapists who engage their clients in these ways are better able to establish a treatment alliance, defined as the "quality and strength of the collaborative relationship between client and therapist" (Norcross, 2010, p. 120). The alliance comprises both the emotional bond and the agreement on the focus or goals of therapy between the therapist and client, achieved through a client-centered collaborative process (Horvath & Greenberg, 1994; Norcross, 2010). Therapists who form strong alliances make an early investment in relationship building and pay particular attention to nurturing the emotional bond in the initial phase of treatment. They are also open and empathic, employ effective communication skills, solicit their clients' goals, and do not engage in hostile interactions such as blaming, ignoring, or rejecting their clients (Norcross, 2010). Like effective therapists, effective mentors may be those who are able to form emotionally engaged and collaboratively constructed youth-focused relationships with their protégés.

Empathy, authenticity, and positive regard.

In Rhodes' (2002) model of mentoring, a trusting, empathic, and mutual relationship is considered necessary for mentoring to be effective. Extensive research on the psychotherapy relationship has found that therapists who are able to engage their clients in an empathic and authentic way and who convey a feeling of positive regard for their clients are more effective (Norcross, 2010). Empathy can be thought of most

simply as the ability and willingness to understand and relate to another's experience from his or her own point of view (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Norcross, 2010). Higher levels of perceived therapist empathy have been found to be associated with a greater likelihood of staying in treatment and the formation of a stronger treatment alliance (Bohart, Elliott, Greenberg, & Watson, 2002). It is also thought to be linked with better outcomes in therapy through facilitating feelings of safety, which encourages greater self-disclosure on the part of the client, promoting meaning-making, and activating the client's own self-healing capacities (Bohart et al., 2002). Authenticity, or the therapist's genuine presence in the relationship, facilitates the change process as well (Rogers, 1959). It is thought that when clients experience their therapist as being genuinely present and engaged, rather than putting up a façade or playing a role, they themselves are then less cautious and more honest in the relationship. Finally, positive regard is the therapist's warm acceptance of the client's experience without conditions (Norcross, 2010), which communicates that he or she is of worth and that his or her thoughts, feelings, opinions, and ideas matter. In addition to helping the client, positive regard helps the therapist to consider negative behaviors and feelings exhibited by the client within the larger context of the individual's experiences, which can make it easier to stay connected with the client during difficult moments in the psychotherapy process. Together, empathy, authenticity, and positive regard are thought to contribute to the formation of a positive bond by making the client feel listened to and understood (Rogers, 1959; Lambert & Barley, 2002).

Research on youth mentoring suggests that mentors who are capable of engaging with their protégés in these ways may be better able to form strong and lasting mentoring relationships. In a qualitative study of enduring relationships, authenticity, empathy, and positive regard were core features of the close relationships that had been established (Spencer, 2006). In contrast, some of the mentors in a qualitative study of relationships that ended early were quite judgmental of the young person and of his or her family and found it difficult to connect with their protégés' own understandings of their experiences (Spencer, 2007b). In studies of natural mentoring relationships among transitioning and former foster care youth, empathy, authenticity, and positive regard were all salient in the youth's descriptions of their positive mentoring experiences (Ahrens et al., 2011; Munson, Smalling, Spencer, Scott, & Tracy, 2010). Larose and colleagues (2010) found that even in a more structured program with a prescribed goal, in this case, retention of first-year university students in science and engineering majors, mentors who were perceived by their protégé as more highly emotionally engaged got better results.

Mentors with these relational capacities may also be better able to respond to challenges that arise. Miscommunications and misunderstandings are inevitable in any interpersonal relationship and mentoring relationships are no exception. When left unaddressed, even relatively minor disruptions can contribute to the erosion of the relationship over time. Mentors who are able to step out of their own emotional experiences and consider these situations from their mentees' perspective would be better able to identify and work to repair these disconnections. Such mentors may also view these occurrences as opportunities to increase their knowledge and understanding of their protégé and further strengthen the relationship.

Collaboration.

More effective mentors are also likely those who are able to engage their protégés in the collaborative construction of their relationship, termed "authorship" by Karcher and Nakkula (2010). When mentors and youth jointly negotiate the focus, purpose, and activities of the relationship, the relationship is more apt to become developmental in nature. Research has indicated that mentors who are more prescriptive in their approach and who allow their own goals for the youth to dominate the relationship are not as effective (Morrow & Styles, 1995). Joining with youth in collaboratively shaping the relationship offers them the opportunity to experience appropriate levels of power and control in the mentoring relationship and may contribute to their well-being by fostering feelings of efficacy and competence (Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Peirson, 2001). Although mentors inherently bear greater responsibility for setting the frame for and maintaining the relationship (Rhodes, Liang, & Spencer, 2009), there are many ways in which they can appropriately foster collaborative partnerships that are beneficial to the youth. Even when the goals are prescribed by the program, the mentor and youth can jointly determine how these goals are to be achieved (Karcher & Nakkula, 2010).

In addition, researchers studying the development of cognitive abilities (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990) have emphasized the centrality of mutual engagement in everyday interactions with more skilled partners in children's learning. Collaborative mentoring relationships offer a multitude of opportunities for this type of joint engagement and collaborative learning. More successful mentors, like more successful psychotherapists, may be those who are able to appropriately loosen the reins on the relationship and create an environment in which they are working together with their protégés toward mutually determined goals and purposes. Further, mentors whose focus is on the promotion of the youth's development, rather than on changing or "fixing" the young person, may be better able to engage youth in collaborative relationships that are also more productive. Such mentors would recognize

and build on the protégé's strengths and seek out opportunities to capitalize on these strengths and nurture the youth's development. Larson (2006) has suggested that a youth-driven approach to positive development requires engaging the young person's intrinsic motivation to grow and encouraging its activation and sustainment in pro-social directions in various domains of development. To be truly growth-promoting, in this view, mentors would not just support young people towards their self-identified goals, but at times also push them to stretch and guide them towards paths that will lead to healthier and more productive futures.

Summary.

Although the personal qualities and relational skills of mentors have been discussed separately here, they likely work together and build on one another. Mentors who are more empathic would be more apt to identify accurately the needs of their mentees and thus the support they offer would prove more useful. In addition, youth who experience their mentors as empathic, authentic, and who feel that their mentors regard them in a positive light may be more likely to begin to share their vulnerabilities with their mentors. They may also be more open to assistance that is offered and perhaps also more likely to seek out or ask for assistance from their mentors. Youth who have a history of conflicted relationships with adults, and who may have given up hope that adult assistance can be of value to them, may become more willing to accept such assistance when provided in the context of a trusting, caring, and collaborative relationship. For others, a trusted adult who has engaged in activities of interest to the youth may in turn be able to encourage the youth's development in areas that the mentor recognizes as important but in which the youth may be less interested at first. Research does indicate that mentoring relationships that tend to be centered exclusively on either the emotional connection or on more goal-directed activities are less likely to promote positive outcomes for the protégés (LaRose et al., 2010; Langhout et al., 2004). An emotionally engaged relationship appears to contribute to the potency of the instrumental, goal-focused activities and perhaps youth are more open to engaging in goal-focused activities with adults they trust and whom they believe know them and view them favorably.

Conclusion

Given the rapid and continuing proliferation of mentoring programs, and the evidence that mentoring may sometimes cause harm to already vulnerable youth, it is imperative that we further our understanding of the determinants of effective

mentoring relationships. The perhaps long list of qualities and skills delineated here may be disheartening to programs that already face significant challenges recruiting enough adult volunteers to serve as mentors. However, selecting mentors who are willing and able to go the distance with their youth protégés is critical for program success. We know that mentors who have experience working with young people in some capacity tend to do better (DuBois et al., 2002; Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012). This may be partly attributable to their natural skills, but the training and support these adults may have received could also play a role. Some of the interactional styles described here may be teachable. In addition to screening mentors, training mentors in how to engage youth effectively in growth-promoting relationships could serve to enhance program effectiveness. That said, unlike the sentiment expressed in many efforts to promote youth mentoring, it is unlikely that every adult is well suited to be a mentor and programs should err on the side of being more rather than less selective.

In so doing, it is also important to take into account the great diversity in the structures and purposes of mentoring programs, as some program models require much more of mentors than others. Mentors in community-based mentoring programs, wherein mentors and youth set their own schedules and the activities of the relationship are carried out in the community, are largely on their own and the relationship hinges on the mentor's ability to forge an emotional bond with the youth. In many instances, community-based mentors are called on to persist when abrupt changes occur in their protégés' lives, such as an unplanned move or loss of telephone service, which can make it difficult to plan and carry out the expected meetings. In contrast, in school or other site-based mentoring programs mentors are relieved of the responsibility of determining where and when the mentoring will take place and are less affected by changes in the protégés' lives. However, they must still find ways to engage the young person in a one-to-one relationship, albeit under more controlled conditions. This is not to suggest that all mentoring relationships must become close personal bonds. Many programs offer quite structured and time-limited relationships and get good results (e.g., Elledge, Cavell, Ogle, & Newgent, 2010; Taussig & Culhane, 2010). However, the mentor must still be able to engage the youth in some way. Programs should seek to identify the key skills mentors need to implement their program model and recruit mentors whose qualities and skills match the demands of the program. It is also important to provide mentors with the training and ongoing support needed to ensure that they are well equipped to meet the demands of their roles and responsibilities.

As discussed at the beginning of the paper, the contributions of the mentor are clearly not the sole determinant of mentoring relationship quality. What mentors bring to the relationship is important but so are the contributions of the youth and the nature of the contextual supports and stresses, with mentoring programs playing a highly influential role. Considering the contributions of the mentor is just a start. Moreover, although the ideas presented here stand on the foundation of existing research on mentoring, further research is needed to determine whether they hold true. It will be important to determine whether mentor characteristics do in fact make a distinct contribution to mentoring relationship quality and, if so, to identify which qualities and relational skills make the most difference. Also, understanding whether mentor training directed towards enhancing the relational skills outlined here promotes the development of more effective relationships could provide important guidance for mentoring programs in their efforts to prepare and support mentors.

The rewards of mentoring can be great, but so too are the risks. Mentoring is proving to be a powerful and flexible tool in the promotion of positive development for youth (DuBois et al., 2011). These relationships can provide a multitude of opportunities for informal learning, as mentors can step in and both join and guide youth in the continuous process of further developing their social, emotional, behavioral, and academic skills and capacities. Such learning, however, appears to be dependent on the nature and quality of the relationship that forms between mentor and youth and thus relies heavily on the ability of mentors to meaningfully engage their protégés. Rapid expansions in the number and size of mentoring programs have contributed to programs feeling pressured to match as many youth as possible, often with a limited pool of available mentors. Fortunately, the tide is turning and more attention is being paid to the quality of mentoring relationships. Greater consideration of the mentor's contribution to relationship quality is needed to ensure that the mentoring relationships programs provide make a positive difference in the lives of the youth served.

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The Sense Project: An Innovative Model for Sexualities Education Partnerships Between Community-Based Educators and Schools

Lisa M. Trimble, Christina Foisy, Nikki MacMillan, Jos Porter, Channing Rodman, & Marlo Turner Ritchie

ABSTRACT

Significant changes in the way sexual health curricula would be imagined and taught occurred after the 2005 educational reforms were implemented in Quebec. Based on data collected over five years of program evaluations and interviews with community-based educators and teachers, we examine the innovative sexual health education model of the “Sense Project,” developed by Head & Hands / À Deux Mains in Montreal, and the overwhelmingly positive youth response to our program in schools and in other community youth organizations. Here we discuss some of the challenges, possibilities, and strategies involved with establishing partnerships between schools and community-based sexualities educators.

Situating “Normal”

The popular blog, *PostSecret*,¹ offers some intriguing insights into our collective human psyche. First published in 2005 by Frank Warren, *PostSecret* is described by its founder as a “community art project” for people to share their secrets, the things they wonder about, and their innermost hopes and fears on an anonymous postcard. It has become a social phenomenon, with hundreds of thousands of individuals sending in their secret thoughts and worries in hopes that it will be posted on the Internet, and with millions of people connecting with others across the world on the basis of their shared human experiences. Perhaps not surprisingly, most of these shared glimpses into the lives of others offer a little window of

insight into the ways the joys and tribulations of love, sexualities, relationships, and the body are experienced by the contributors. In just over seven years, the blog has garnered over a half billion hits (despite remaining free of advertising revenue), several books, and hundreds of consistently sold-out speaking tours during which *PostSecret* communities and forums meet and share their stories with one another. These micro-narratives resonate powerfully with us not only because they are common to the human condition, but also, we believe, because there are relatively few spheres to engage in meaningful conversation about what it means to be a sexual person in the bodies we live within and the social contexts we negotiate our experiences through. We are not afforded many opportunities to situate our sexual and romantic selves in relation to “normal.” Chances to engage in authentic dialogue around our fears, pleasures, and desires are often few and fleeting, which makes the images and text on the *PostSecret* blog have such profound meaning for so many.

For youth, there are even fewer spaces where their questions of identities and sexualities can be explored in ways that speak to their experiences and questions in real and relevant ways. Too often, conversations about youth sexual subjectivity are filtered through conflicting discourses competing for the same cultural spaces. It can be difficult to sort out messages of moralist perspectives framing sex in binary terms of right and wrong (Irvine, 2002), or representations of heteronormative power dynamics and the ways they regulate and construct social understandings of gender (Johansson, 2007). Surprisingly, despite advances in teaching and learning scholarship, many students today are still taught about sexual health in very instrumentalist ways that frame sex as being primarily a function of biology and anatomy (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Morris, 2005; Trimble, 2011). Taken individually, each of these narratives represents only a fragmented part of the possibilities of what meaningful conversations about sexualities could be and often has little to do with the experience and emotions of “real sex.” As Tisdale (1994) observed,

The sex that is presented to us in everyday culture feels strange to me; its images are fragments, lifeless, removed from normal experience. Real sex, the sex in our cells and in the space between our neurons, leaks out...and gets into things, and stains our vision and colours our lives. (p. 2)

Youth are afforded very few opportunities to frankly and holistically discuss their sexual experiences of pleasure, desire, worry, and fascination in the way Tisdale describes. Fortunately, those who are looking for sexual health information have some excellent online communities to turn to. Although many excellent Internet resources are available, there are some exceptional spaces where young people can access sexual and

relationship knowledge online. One of these is *Scarleteen: Sex education for the real world*.² Scarleteen offers youth an inclusive, progressive, and comprehensive space to ask for advice, access information, and engage in discussion. Another accessible and interesting site is *Sex Etc.*,³ a youth authored and edited online sex education magazine based in the United States. In Canada, the *Native Youth Sexual Health Network*⁴ is an activist group for and by indigenous youth who organize around issues of aboriginal sexual health, reproductive rights, and social justice. The site *Sexualityandu*⁵ is maintained by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) and offers a wealth of sexual and reproductive health information for both youth and sexualities educators. In addition, there are many dynamic, activist, youth empowerment organizations and programs which offer support for LGBTQ young people in Canada. A few of note (and by no means is this a comprehensive list) include: *Camp flyrefly*⁶ in Edmonton; the *519 Church Street Community Centre*⁷ and *SOY (Supporting Our Youth)*,⁸ both in Toronto; *Project 10*⁹ and *Head & Hands*¹⁰ in Montreal; and *Youth Project*¹¹ in Halifax.

Many non-formal youth-oriented spaces are places young people can go to for conversations of youth sexual subjectivity, risk, pleasure, emotions, and identities. These same discussions can be challenging ones for young people to initiate in formal learning situations, however. Without a space in their schooling to wonder through their questions and to position themselves in relation to the broad spectrum of what “normal” can mean, young people are often left to their own devices to negotiate meaning and understanding about sexualities. In schools, the sexual health curriculum is often sanitized of any trace of anything interesting or relevant to the lives of youth. The “real sex” Tisdale is referring to involves engaging with what Allen (2005) calls the “erotic discourses” which are usually too infused with cultural charge for many educators to feel comfortable talking about.

Sex Education After the Educational Reform in Quebec

Educational reforms implemented in Quebec schools in 2005 resulted in already diminished opportunities for youth to engage in dialogue around healthy sexualities in their schools becoming almost non-existent ones. In the new reform, teachers were told by the Ministry to infuse their pedagogy with references to sexualities, sexually transmitted diseases, and orientations. The Ministry noted that these conversations could take place across the curriculum, for example these discussions could be connected to English, mathematics, science, and ethics classes. Unfortunately, this was a *suggestion* to educators, not a mandate. Teachers were given neither resources nor instruction on ways to support teaching about sexual health across

the curriculum. Without sexual health pedagogy being assured in the formal curriculum, very few teachers had the necessary confidence in their own expertise in sexual and reproductive health to ensure it was included in their teaching. The implication for students was that sex education was effectively eliminated from the instruction given in most Quebec schools. Not surprisingly, the years following this decision saw a steady rise in most sexually transmitted infections in the province (PHAC, 2010), and was part of an ongoing and concerning trend of an emergent population of Canadian youth who seemingly know less about their own sexual health than students had in previous decades (Council of Education Ministers of Canada, 2003).

Staff and volunteers of Montreal non-profit youth organization Head & Hands / À Deux Mains¹² expressed alarm at this shift in educational priorities and deep concern about what the resulting implications would be for youth sexual health in the region. For more than forty years, our organization has been providing a wide range of social services for Montreal youth, offering a wide variety of ways to support and empower young people. Head & Hands is one of the only non-profits born of the free clinic movement of the 1970s to still be working with youth, and our founding principles remain essentially the same. We offer a diverse range of services to meet the needs of youth, from legal advising to counselling, food banks, employment services, medical clinics, and street support, as well as groups for young mothers and for youth new to Canada. Working with young people aged 12-25, Head & Hands is one of the most established and well-respected youth non-profit organizations in the province. We mobilized and conducted a needs assessment involving a series of focus groups to dialogue with local youth about their sexual health concerns and how we could best address them. From these conversations and research, the *Sense Project*, an inclusive and comprehensive sex education program, was born.

The Sense Project

The authors were involved in various capacities with the Sense Project, including: fund-raiser, health educators, program developer, a university researcher, and the Executive Director of the parent organization, Head & Hands. We will briefly contextualize here some of our processes and experiences with creating the Sense Project and discuss the findings of the data collecting during five years of program evaluations. The Sense Project was entirely conceptualized by youth, who created it with the guidance of staff. During every step of the process, youth have been involved in the research, design, illustration, and implementation of the program. After every workshop and training session, the feedback of youth involved as peer educators, workshop facilitators, and workshop participants has shaped the way the program

has evolved and grown. There have been similar sexual and relationship health projects created by youth for youth prior to the development of the Sense Project, most notably *The little black book for girlz: A book on healthy sexuality* (St. Stephen's Community House, 2006) and the follow-up publication, *The little black book for guys: Guys talk about sex* (St. Stephen's Community House, 2009). These are superb resources, and a testament to the incredible talent, imagination, and research capabilities youth can bring to a project in which they invest their passions and energies.

Program Evaluation

Typically, the program evaluation process with non-profit programs involves triangulation of data from several sources, including key stakeholders and the agency's own documentation. In the case of the Sense Project, the data included: (i) surveys from youth who participated in the workshops, (ii) surveys from youth who participated as peer educators, and (iii) weekly evaluations from the training sessions for workshop facilitators assessing the quality of their training and the issues covered. Surveys have a variety of questions to rate on a Likert scale, with possible responses ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," and are all anonymous. Several questions are left open-ended so that youth can express their responses in their own words. Surveys are compiled by volunteers and staff in the organization, coded for emerging themes, and the data is analyzed to consider the implications for the next year's program. The staff members at Head & Hands are deeply committed to ensuring the program is meeting the needs and expectations of youth in the region, and implement changes when youth collectively make suggestions about ways they could improve the Sense Project experience. Since the Sense Project came to life under the direction of youth advocacy organization Head & Hands in 2006, 3734 youth have taken part in the workshops and completed surveys to give feedback on the program. The youth workshop participants are typically between 13 and 16 years old, and represent a diversity of ethnicities, class backgrounds, genders, and sexual orientations.

Challenges

One of the challenges with the program's inception involved getting the workshops into schools. School boards were reluctant to introduce the program en masse, and the resources of the new program would have been stretched beyond the staff and volunteer capacity if they had. Several private schools signed on, as well as some alternative outreach schools for youth excluded from or disenfranchised with the mainstream system. These schools have continued to work with Sense throughout

the years. In addition, Sense also facilitates the workshops with several local youth organizations, to expand its reach beyond students currently enrolled in schools. As the program has continued to expand and be more visible in the media, teachers, school nurses, and guidance counsellors now contact Sense directly to request the workshops for their schools. Finding class time for the workshops is sometimes difficult for teachers; although the workshops only require three one-hour sessions, finding creative ways to move class instruction around is sometimes a challenge. An integral part of Sense workshops means creating a safe space for youth to openly discuss their ideas and questions, which means that we ask teachers to leave their classroom during the sessions. Teachers are very supportive of their students having access to sexual health information, but are sometimes concerned about leaving the room and some would prefer to be involved with the workshops. However, usually once we explain why we prefer to engage with the students in this way, they understand that their students may be uncomfortable with teachers being present when they discuss sexual behaviours and questions.

Successes

Although there are many factors that contribute to the success of any initiative, central to the way we imagine and bring programs to life are a few simple but powerful tenets that inform every step of our process. Five of these principles are explored here: (i) *staying true to the organization's mandate and values*; (ii) *listening to the voices of youth*; (iii) *involving youth in facilitating the program*; (iv) *making learning fun and relevant*; and (v) *generating community awareness and support*.

Tenet 1: Staying true to the organization's mandate and values.

Working with youth for more than four decades means that our organization has collectively developed some important insights into what works in our non-formal education practices with Montreal youth. Our approach is “preventative, inclusive, non-judgmental and holistic” (Head & Hands / À Deux Mains, 2011). One of our core values as an agency is to provide youth the information and resources they need to make informed, safe, and aware choices about their own lives. By doing so, we consider ensuring access to knowledge and resources a vital act of political and personal empowerment of youth, and all of our programs must stay true to these values.

In keeping with our critical youth empowerment model that promotes supporting the development of youth criticality and agency, the Sense Project utilizes a harm reduction model in its sexualities pedagogy. Harm-reductionist teaching, in the context of sexual health learning, seeks to create awareness of safer sex strategies

and relationship choices that are available to people to minimize physical or emotional harms that sexually active people potentially face. Typically, harm-reductionist approaches in sexual health education focus on STI prevention and identification, developing negotiation strategies (for example, teaching youth that it is their right to insist that a partner wear a condom or helping them to develop responses to a partner's unwelcomed coercive sexual behaviours, or to negotiate their own pleasures and desires in their sexual relationships). Harm reduction is a philosophy personified by (i) a non-judgmental and comprehensive approach to making sexual knowing available, (ii) meeting people "where they are" and "which aim to provide and/or enhance skills, knowledge, resources and support that people need to live safer, healthier lives" (Government and Public Awareness Task Group of NPNU Consortium, 2000, p. 5). Harm reduction attempts to build on strengths and increase the knowledge and confidence of the people involved, while validating their experiences and personhood.

Access to comprehensive information and local resources is central to the principles of harm-reduction, and is foundational to the mission and mandate of Head & Hands. The Sense Project was conceptualized as a partnership between community-based educators from Head & Hands and local schools. In addition to training volunteer facilitators on a wide variety of sexual health subjects (including such topics as: STIs, legal implications such as the age of consent, how youth can find and access local sexual health resources, and anti-oppressive pedagogical strategies), we also invited youth to become involved as peer educators. Youth responded with enthusiasm, and not only attended a series of workshops where they learned about a variety of topics and resources related to sexual and emotional health, but also extensively researched and co-authored and created all the graphics for a comprehensive 255-page *Peer Educator's Resource Manual*¹³ (Head & Hands / À Deux Mains, 2007) with the supervision of the Head & Hands health educator. Peer educators and volunteer workshop facilitators found their affiliation with the Sense Project so rewarding that many of them returned in following years to complete the training again and to be involved in this dynamic non-formal teaching experience. Schools who are interested in having the community-based educators teach their students contact Head & Hands, who send volunteer facilitators to teach three one-hour long workshops for a nominal fee. On average, between 700 and 900 Montreal youth per year have been involved as workshop participants since the program's inception. After focusing primarily on schools during their first year, the Sense Project staff and volunteers expanded their reach to offer their sexual health workshops to other youth-involved non-profit organizations.

Tenet 2: Listening to the voices of youth.

Data collected by Head & Hands in program evaluation reports clearly show that youth response to their workshops has been overwhelmingly positive, with 90-95% annually self-reporting in surveys that the information they learned in the workshops would be useful in their own lives and that the youth wanted considerably more sexualities education than they were currently receiving. Comments offered by youth participants describe a meaningful and comprehensive learning experience, with many wanting regular workshops to be offered in their schools focusing on topics of sexualities and relationships. Overwhelmingly, the message the youth sent was that they wanted considerably more access to sexual health education in their schools. Most importantly, they asked for a literal and discursive space where they could safely wonder through their own worries, questions, and concerns, without being judged.

I think you guys should do workshops all year, throughout the year...like every week or once or twice a month throughout the whole year. (Female student, grade 9)

Instead of just saying things, or telling us a basic overview of things they wanted to, they let us speak about what we were interested in. It was very good. (Male student, grade 10)

Some students also appreciated the freedom to explore personal issues with the relative anonymity offered by learning sexual health information from someone they didn't have a pre-existing relationship with.

I feel sex education is much easier with someone you don't know because they're not around to compare or say anything about you and there's more confidentiality. If it was a teacher, they would probably look at you different, like, 'this person does this...this person does that'. (Female student, grade 10)

Other scholarship has shown that both students and teachers echo their preference for sexual health curricula to be taught by an outside expert (Westwood & Mullan, 2007). Even if the relationship with teachers is one with strong elements of trust between students and teachers, the educators often feel that gaps exist in their knowing about sexual health issues and that they may lack the necessary expertise to navigate the many social, political, and cultural nuances involved in teaching about sexualities. This perception is not a surprising one, as a recent survey of all Canadian

universities offering teacher education programs found that at the time of press of this article, none of them offered a mandatory course to help new teachers develop the knowledge and skills to teach sexual health (Trimble, 2011), although some programs for teacher candidates may be in the developmental stages.¹⁴

All of the programs developed by Head & Hands, including the Sense Project, are framed from a critical, social justice perspective that takes into account the intersectionality of social and cultural contexts related to power, including (among others) considerations of race, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, age, and ability. True to the ethos and vision we work through, decisions about the program are made collaboratively by staff. Staff and volunteers engage in an ongoing “unlearning” process (Britzman, 1998; Kumashiro, 2000) and question and challenge their own assumptions about who youth are and what they need. Instead, and crucial to the success of this program, they listen to the voices of youth themselves. In this paradigm, youth define themselves, name their concerns and the organization listens to and tries to respond to youth-identified issues.

I think the most important thing to me is the idea that the youth know themselves best. They know their identities... Even if they're questioning themselves. They know that about themselves. You don't. I think the most important thing is to trust that they know themselves and their experiences and how they're feeling, what they're thinking about themselves and what they do and don't know, and to just let them set the pace. (R.M., Sense Project volunteer workshop facilitator)

You need to be pretty grounded in [what] youth's actual needs are, not assuming what their needs are, or addressing needs if they're not actually there, if that makes any sense. I think that's one of the really great things about Head & Hands that really equips us to do that. We have such holistic programming. The Sense Project fits into a holistic health centre, so for Sense it was a natural growth because we have a medical clinic for youth, we have a teen drop-in centre where there is basketball and recreational activities. We have so many places and spaces to get familiar with what their actual concerns are. I'm doing some work at the clinic right now, and it's invaluable to me to hear about why youth want to get tested and what their actual worries are. (Nikki, staff health educator)

Not only are youth consulted throughout the initial development and planning stages of the program, but the evaluation feedback from youth workshop

participants, volunteer facilitators, and peer educators is carefully reviewed by staff and external researchers at the end of the school year. The most recent evaluations (2011) show a 95% youth approval rate in almost all of the categories we asked youth to give us their feedback on. We are keenly aware, however, that these conversations about vision, action, and process need to be continually in dialogue with the ways youth relate to and interpret their experiences with the program. Revisions to the curricula, activities, or training process are made annually to refine the program based on the youth participants' recommendations and suggestions.

Tenet 3: Involving youth in facilitating the program.

In addition to consulting young people in the design of the Sense Project, we recruit youth themselves to be facilitators of the workshops because we believe that peer education is an important aspect of why this program works so well. All of the facilitators are under 26 years of age, and have completed training workshops prior to being partnered with one another and teaching the program in schools. We recognize that peer education is not uncontroversial in some academic circles, for example, Turner and Shepard (1998) called it "a method in search of a theory" and concluded that while some peer education programs could claim excellent results, the empirical evidence did not exist to unilaterally declare this method to be superior to non-peer directed learning. Neither are we making this claim; peer education is not necessarily empowering in and of itself. Youth are surrounded with the same racist, gendered, and classed cultural stories as the rest of the world, and youth-generated knowledge may reproduce the same oppressive themes. Helping youth to insert their own interpretations and experiences into these stories and generate new meanings and understandings, however, is crucial to establishing a program of critical, empowering peer education.

We contend that the *empowerment* aspect of youth peer education can be fully recognized when youth work together to be active producers of knowledge and learn how to negotiate with their own agency and ability to influence personal and social change. We work with young people to help develop their critical capacity to challenge disempowering or oppressive narratives and to imagine new and better ways of being. From our perspective, peer education that is supported with dialogic, critical, and reflective pedagogy can be a transformative teaching strategy. In other words, we suggest that when *any* educational method is not rooted in theory it will be ineffectual in the long term; without theory to think through how the aims of education are connected to the processes of teaching and learning, it is difficult to build bridges across praxis and meaning. Our peer education programs are grounded in critical, constructivist social theory (Kincheloe, 2008), developed within the principles

and paradigms of harm reduction philosophies (Government and Public Awareness Task Group of NPNU Consortium, 2000; Lenton & Single, 1998), and additionally theorized through the lenses of critical youth empowerment models (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger Messiah, & McLouglin, 2006).

Tenet 4: Making learning fun and relevant.

Many youth workers have developed an almost intuitive pedagogical expertise when it comes to recognizing the kinds of teaching strategies that work with youth, primarily because when young people are choosing to engage in non-formal education it must be interesting and motivating enough for them to continue to make the choice to do so. As a result, non-formal educators have developed some creative and highly effective pedagogical strategies in their youth programs, incorporating the ideas of progressive learner-centered theories (i.e., Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984) with a strong emphasis on the experiential. Experiential learning involves the whole person (senses, intellect, and emotion), and is shaped by the social and cultural contexts we live within (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993). In our own pedagogical praxis, we develop our learning activities with youth around those ideas, plus the other foundations of experiential learning, including: building on what the youth already know, reflecting on how some knowing connects to or contradicts other knowing, and that learning takes place through a series of short, defined learning events such as games, reflective activities, or role-playing (Andresen, Boud, & Cohen, 2000). One of the most popular games we play with youth during the workshops is “Sexual Health Jeopardy,” where participants compete to share their knowledge about sexual and reproductive health. In the “Alphabet Game,” we ask youth to go through the alphabet and come up with a reason for every letter why they might want to abstain from sexual activities, and then to do the same exercise listing all the reasons why they might choose to engage with them.

Our workshops are learner-centered, involving curricula meaningful and relevant to the lived experiences of young people. In our experience, youth respond most enthusiastically when active learning is coupled with plenty of opportunities for interaction. Whenever possible, we encourage tactile learning through handling of materials such as condoms and lubricant so that youth can demystify some of the experience of using them. We allow a lot of space for discussion, and answer all questions youth ask because we believe the process of learning is both dialogic and experiential. By encouraging young people to ask the questions that matter most to them, and have them answered in the most comprehensive and authentic ways we know how, we are helping them to engage with sexual health knowledge, manage their risk in informed and aware ways and develop a strong sense of their own agency.

Tenet 5: Generating community awareness and support.

We identified two priorities early in the development process of the Sense Project that would have a profound impact on how sustainable this program was over the long term. First, we needed to have ongoing connections with other non-profit youth organizations. Part of our ethos as a community youth organization means being involved in “deep citizenship,” which Clarke defined as “care of self, care of others and care of the world” (1996, p. 18). One of the ways we interpret contributing to community well-being as a non-profit group means sharing resources, strategies, and expertise with other organizations, and benefitting from their knowledge and experiences as well. Throughout the course of the program to date, we have partnered with three universities and several other local non-profit groups who brought specialized knowledge to the training sessions about topics such as anti-oppressive teaching, sexual assault, HIV and AIDS, and transgender communities, among others. Both the youth peer education training and the volunteer workshop facilitator training involved workshops offered by our community partners, as well as bringing awareness to the volunteers about additional resources they could refer youth to or engage with for their own purposes.

Our second priority to ensure sustainability of the Sense Project was to try and secure ongoing sources of funding from the community, so that the program is not entirely dependent on funds from federal, provincial, or foundational grants. As recent politically motivated events with women’s organizations such as Planned Parenthood in the United States have demonstrated,¹⁵ when funding is tied to organizations that do not necessarily share the same core values and philosophies, entire programs can be jeopardized when ideological or political shifts occur. The support from the community for the Sense Project has been exceptional, with funds being raised through diverse sources including (but not limited to): a monthly queer dance party, a summer volleyball tournament between local bars and clubs, various college and university fundraisers, and participation in sponsored walks such as the local HIV and AIDS awareness fundraising walk.

Discussions of youth sexualities are charged with cultural stories, conflicting moralist ideas, and political ideologies that can have profound implications for funding tied to external sources. Giroux (1998) observed that the bodies and sexualities of young people are often the primary sites of political representation and conflict in the culture wars, something we have seen play out in public discourses many times. As much as possible, we try to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Sense Project by having diversified funding sources with deep and varied webs of community support.

Rethinking the Formal/Non-formal Divide in Education

Non-formal education strategies have proven to be highly effective with youth, particularly within the educational contexts of some developing nations and adult learners. Ironically, it may be the fact that it is so successful with marginalized groups that continues the marginalization of non-formal education itself. Until educators can see the strategies of non-formal learning holistically, as a part of the whole spectrum of possibilities to support good teaching and learning, it may continue to be thought of as being outside of or subordinate to formal education. Brennan (1997) summarized this neatly when he suggested that there were essentially three ways of understanding non-formal education: (i) as a *complement* to achieve the goals that formal education may have failed in (such as high school drop-outs and alternative schools); (ii) as an *alternative* to formal education (i.e., types of aboriginal knowledge) and as a *supplement*, especially for developing nations (cited in Taylor, 2006, p. 294, italics original). We see these distinctions as being potential obstacles to students engaging some opportunities for rich, meaningful, and in-depth learning. We envision a future in schooling where the bridges between teaching strategies labelled as “non-formal” or “formal” become more blurred, and the emphasis is instead on the pedagogical processes and contexts that support and promote good learning. We are not the only ones with this vision; Torres (2001) makes the argument that there are important conceptual shifts currently taking place in how schooling is being imagined that are directly linked to teaching strategies usually associated with non-formal education. She contends that some of the defining features of non-formal education, including “flexibility, school-community linkages, openness and responsiveness to the needs and possibilities of the learners and to specific contexts and culture” are some of the tenets of good teaching in general, and should not only be relegated to the non-formal learning. Indeed, as she notes in the current climate of school reforms, “Acknowledging diversity, demands-driven, needs assessment, ownership, family and community participation, decentralization, school autonomy, accountability, and transparency have become mainstream thinking and attributes of good practice” (p. 5). We agree with this assessment, and have seen how remarkable the outcomes can be when community-based, non-formal educators and schools work together to provide a sexual health education that is comprehensive, student-centered, meaningful, and relevant.

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Notes

1. PostSecret can be found at www.postsecret.com.
2. See www.scarleteen.com.
3. See www.sexetc.org.
4. See www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com.
5. See www.sexualityandu.ca.
6. See www.fyrefly.ualberta.ca.
7. See www.the519.org.
8. See www.soytoronto.org.
9. See www.P10.qc.ca.
10. See www.Headandhands.ca.
11. See www.youthproject.ns.ca.
12. References to Head & Hands / À Deux Mains will be shortened to *Head & Hands* throughout this article.

13. We are proud of the great work the youth did with this manual, and are pleased to offer it as a free, downloadable PDF, which can be accessed here: <http://www.mediafire.com/?et1mxxgmz4g>. Print copies are available through Head & Hands for a donation.
14. Concordia University in Montreal, we are happy to report, is in the process of developing and implementing such a required course for their student teachers.
15. At the time of press, Planned Parenthood has been under attack by the conservative right in the U.S. with numerous attempts being made at both the federal and state levels to de-fund them entirely. Some lobbyists are pressuring philanthropist organizations to disqualify Planned Parenthood from being eligible to apply for grants.

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LINK TO:

<http://www.headandhands.ca>



Using Museums: A Guide's Guide

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ABSTRACT

Though most educators understand that museums can be a useful resource, many seem unsure how to incorporate a visit into their teaching practice. The author uses his years of experience to explain how museums are creating educational activities in order to attract class trips. Examples from two history museums in Montreal are cited to show the variety of pedagogic activities available. The author concludes with advice for teachers who want their visit to succeed.

think most educators implicitly understand the *idea* that museums can be a useful resource. And certainly some teachers love and use museums frequently. But I also know that quite a few do not. I suspect this is because some teachers simply do not know how to incorporate a visit into their daily teaching practice. It is a rather sad state of affairs, because in principle, I would contend that we are teammates doing much of the same work.

As a museum guide, I would like to try to resolve this accessibility problem in my own *vulgar* way. I use the word vulgarization in the positive sense: my job entails making information understandable to the public, to bridge the knowledge gap between experts and the uninitiated. Off the bat, I will state that I am not in a position to expand on the serious scholarship already written on learning in the museum setting.¹ However, I think that my personal reflections, after more than a decade working in Montreal's history museums, can help these institutions seem a bit more approachable in the eyes of teachers.

To be fair, the gulf between using museums in theory and in practice is partly our fault. Museums, like other cultural institutions, will often project an image they hope will afford it a certain cachet that attracts aficionados and donors. But the danger with such branding is that those who are not regular visitors may regard museums either like the good china, only to be used on special occasions, or worse, as elitist and uptight—not the sort of place that would welcome a class of children among its exhibits.

The truth is, though, that almost every museum I know is keen to come across as more inclusive and to bring in more visitors (Griffin, 2004). And when teachers abstain from using museums it is a particular shame: On one side, my teacher friends tell me they are constantly looking for resources, for ways of spicing up the classroom routine. On the other, we museums love welcoming school groups.

Why? Museums want to ensure they stay relevant. The best way for history museums, in particular, to make an impact on society is not simply to entertain tourists for an afternoon. It is to attract regular visits by local residents: those that stand to gain the most from learning about local or regional history, and are more likely to support the museum in the future. Students are keen to learn, they have the most to learn, and developing a good long-term relationship between a particular school and a museum is great evidence that the latter has become a valuable asset to the community.

In order to cater to the particular needs of teachers and students, most museums and historical sites boast an education department. At its head is someone usually with an education background and who is intimately familiar with local pedagogy. The interpretive guides, who are charged with giving tours and workshops, are often students studying teaching or a relevant subject matter, although quite a few full-time employees like me have more than one degree. Together, the department members develop pedagogic activities that shape the museum's subject matter—as explored in its exhibits and through its artefacts—into easily digestible forms, using the themes and concepts appearing in a school's curriculum.

As an example of how straightforward some museums will make this, here in Quebec, Grade 3 students need to examine the Iroquoian First Nations culture around 1500 C.E. (before European contact). When I worked at the Stewart Museum, a fellow guide developed a workshop for school groups called "Iroquoian Society Around 1500." It was a great activity and teachers knew exactly what to expect and how to fit it in into their teaching schedule.

Montreal has more than a dozen history museums and historical interpretation sites, and competition to attract schools results in a huge list of educational activities available to educators. You might think they all resemble each other, but since each museum has its own character, the pedagogical possibilities vary accordingly. To a large degree, standards are such that all these activities “work”: a teacher’s personal taste and teaching style are usually the deciding factors in choosing an activity and museum. But such choice can be overwhelming, so I would like to give some more concrete examples of the types of activities I’ve conducted and helped to put together.

For ten years I worked at the Stewart Museum on Saint Helen’s Island, Montreal. It is located in a 19th century British military depot in what is now a large park. It features an amazing collection of artefacts: maps and globes, books and scientific tools, domestic objects, and weapons. The primary objective of the museum is to showcase both this collection and the heritage of the island (Stewart Museum, n.d.).



Fig. 1: Located in an old British military depot, the Stewart Museum houses an impressive collection of artefacts

Given the artefacts on display there, it’s not surprising that the activities offered at the Stewart Museum are often object-centred. In the Iroquoian workshop mentioned above, for example, classes would be introduced to many accurate

reproductions of native material culture. Once I had explained each object I would then pass it around. The students could touch a beaver pelt, shake a rattle made of a turtle shell, and could smell tanned moose hide and dried tobacco.

Already with this one example I'm reminded of some of the intrinsic advantages museums have in helping students learn concepts. Teachers can describe an object or show a picture, perhaps even a video demonstrating its use. But to see an object in real life—and ideally to handle, smell, and in some cases, use it—seems to bring about a much more automatic and deeper understanding. I cannot count the number of times I would reveal a model canoe, for example and be met by a chorus of “Awws”—not simply out of enthusiasm or wonder, but because a connection was made in the audience's minds: “So *that's* what the book was talking about...”

Another successful activity on offer was the Recruiting Sergeant. For primary students learning about the history of New France, we'd have two costumed guides each recruit a class into either the French or British army. These “soldiers” would be given uniforms and wooden muskets. They would be trained on how to march as a unit, load their firearms, and fire volleys. The two armies would face off on a bluff near the museum, and some students would be assigned to act as casualties and fall during the battle.

Left at that, it would all be quite fun but lacking in academic weight. Throughout the training process, though, the guide would explain what life would have been like for soldiers hundreds of years ago and why the European powers would have been fighting over Montreal. At the end of the skirmish, all the children would be gathered together, partly to defuse any remaining animosity (some students really committed to their roles) but mostly to uncover what the students had noticed and learned. Because the students had gotten a chance to re-enact a slice of history, instead of just reading about it, their observations could be quite astute. Often the post-battle discussions would explore how terrifying such a battle would have been in real life and we would also reflect upon the outcome of such colonial wars in North America. Moreover, I have been told the activity is being reworked to cover an even broader swath of the province's curriculum requirements.



Fig. 2: The Centre d'histoire de Montréal is a city-run museum with a focus on socio-cultural and oral histories

For an alternate educational approach, I can draw upon my two years at the Centre d'histoire de Montréal. Museologically speaking, this city-run institution is not quite a museum, but rather an interpretation centre; we have very few objects on display or in our collection, and our focus is much more on telling the story of how the city of Montreal has changed over time. There is great emphasis on sharing the stories of the city's residents, often through unconventional or informal means, such as oral histories (Centre d'histoire de Montréal, n.d.).

With regard to our educational approach, we do not have access to many reproductions or the sprawling building complex available to the Stewart Museum. Instead we make use of a dense and flexible permanent exhibit that can be visited in a variety of ways depending on grade level and theme. There is also more emphasis in making our visits mesh with the work going on in the classroom. As a result, most visits include pre- and post-visit activities that teachers are encouraged to conduct

at school. And while the students are visiting the museum, they are asked to fill out short worksheets that we provide. I have noticed that giving them this task helps focus their energy and make sense of what the guide is sharing more effectively. The answers also provide information that the teacher can then use as the basis of post-visit activities, creating articles for a class newspaper, for example.

Perhaps the most ambitious of these projects, and therefore among my favourites, is “Young Citizens,” which explores municipal democracy. Before visiting the museum, students are divided into five groups and tasked with mounting an election campaign of sorts. Each group researches a former mayor of Montreal with help from information posted on our website.² They must put together posters and organize a press conference to convince their fellow students that their candidate did the most for the city. Only then do they visit the CHM, where we explore our main exhibit with an emphasis on the evolution of municipal democracy over time. We also review the accomplishments of the five mayors they studied in class, making sure all the while that they fill in answer sheets that will help them keep track of who-did-what.

By the time we finally get to the vote, the students are primed and eager to fill in their ballot. The vote mimics a real municipal election, with voting booth and ballot box and all. The count takes place at school and once the teachers send us the results we post them online so everyone involved can see trends in voting among all the classes we receive. Each of the former mayors of Montreal has been selected by at least once class, and it is always fascinating to hear the students’ arguments supporting their favourite candidates.

But the project does not end there. It includes a subsequent visit to City Hall. There, students can visit the city archives, where documents related to the mayors are kept, and get to meet with the President of the Municipal Council, who invites the students to sit in the Council Chambers and fields their questions on the mayoralty. And finally, one of our guides visits the class at its school to conduct a workshop on the municipal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities. To top it off, a governmental program allows some schools from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to participate in the project for free, with bussing included.

I mention all this because I want to make clear how much this contrasts with how some educators still seem to view museums: a place you visit at the end of term, where students can play around and hopefully learn something. Now, there is nothing wrong with using a museum for more limited or recreational means, especially for groups incapable of or uninterested in tackling more challenging activities. Quizzes,

crafts or, more spectacularly, lacrosse games, are less demanding academically but still have an educational core.

However, museums are increasingly trying to make available projects that require a lot of work—from our staff, from teachers, and from students themselves—but result in a more comprehensive, cohesive, and memorable learning experience, all while strengthening bonds between schools and cultural institutions. Personally, it delights me to see how much effort some classes have put into the Young Citizens program (some children have even gotten dressed up like their candidates). And with such a project, one does not feel as though one is simply checking off topics on a curriculum checklist. Sappy though it might be, I've actually been moved to tears when watching a motivated group applaud its own corruption-free campaign and realizing that to some degree, students are ending the process with a better understanding of their role as future voters and, as a result, have become better citizens. The dividends are well worth the extra effort.

For brevity's sake I will skip detailing how there are also an array of activities suitable for secondary students, for second-language and special needs classes, for adult education groups, and for nearly any conceivable hybrid. A little Internet searching will make clear what one's options are nearby. But I will conclude with some advice for educators who plan on making use of museums.

As a guide, I do not have the formal educator's pleasure of getting to know a group of children over the course of a year. I do, however, get to see thousands of students from different cities, neighbourhoods, schools, and classes. From my vantage point I can observe the difference that good, experienced teachers make. They tend to ask questions before booking a visit and they make clear their educational expectations and logistical requirements. They show up on time and make sure any preparatory work included in the activity design was carried through. During the visit they neither take over from the guide nor rest on their laurels. Instead they help keep things running calmly and on time and occasionally supplement the information provided by the guide. And once back at school, the best teachers take what was learned in the museum and build on it.

As for good museums, they tend to be able and willing to adapt their activities to particular needs. Their staff is well informed, welcoming, courteous, and calm. Their activities are both educational and entertaining and they are conducted on schedule. These museums seek out criticism and update their programs over time. Overall, they make it easy to incorporate a visit into one's teaching routine.

I feel there is much potential to strengthen the link between learning in and outside of the classroom. I hope that my thoughts have helped make this notion more tangible.

Notes

1. For example, please see:

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2. Many museum websites feature free virtual exhibits and even stand-alone pedagogical activities that the teacher can conduct in class.

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Tyler Wood has worked as a historical animator and interpretive guide since the age of sixteen. After 10 years at the Stewart Museum he now serves as a bilingual interpretive guide at the Centre d'histoire de Montréal. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in History from McGill University and a Master's in Urban and Regional Planning from Queen's University. In his spare time, Tyler furthers his love of history through military re-enactments.

LINK TO:

http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=8757,97305573&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

<http://www.stewart-museum.org/en/home-page-45.html>



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