


## 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 Rathzad, 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**

## References

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