

The Association for Constructivist Teaching

June 2012 Newsletter, v. 3., n. 2

From the President:

Dear ACT friends and colleagues,

Our first news is about the sadness we all feel about the recent loss of our dear friend and colleague, Rheta DeVries. Rheta has touched the lives of so many of us through her dedication to Piaget in work that helps educators draw on his theory in their teaching and research practices. Beyond her research, Rheta was a committed member of ACT, serving on the board for many, many years, and many of us have been touched by her humor and friendship. We will share memories of Rheta in future newsletters this year, on our blog, and at our October conference.

Work on the October conference has been the priority since January, as well as getting out blog underway. The conference news is great, lots of proposals being reviewed, and the blog is going well. Our timing is off with some blog posts and the focus on the blog has delayed the distribution of our newsletter, thus you will be receiving this issue and the January issue at the same time. We should be on track as the year progresses!

I am thrilled to host our annual conference in Tennessee for the second time. My colleagues and students are looking forward to this event.

- **Conference Dates: October 19 & 20**
 - Millennium Centre, across from East Tennessee State University
 - Johnson City, TN
- **Preconference: October 18**
 - Visit two early childhood classrooms where children are exploring ramps and pathways, hosted by member Rosemary Geiken, as well as a panel discussion among a couple or a few board members, TBA.
- **Pre-board meeting for committee work: October 18**
 - **beginning at 2:00 or 3:00 PM (to be confirmed)**
 - We would like all Board Members to attend our committee work session/
 - We invite any members wishing to be active with our organization to attend our committee work session.
- **Board Member dinner:**

2012 Conference Featured Speakers

Friday afternoon

Jennifer Bay-Williams, Professor at the University of Louisville and co-author of *Elementary and Middle School Mathematics: Teaching Developmentally, Developing Essential Understanding of Addition and Subtraction, and Math & Non-fiction: Grades 6-8.*

Jane Tingle Broderick
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- **Helping Students Learn Mathematics in the Era of the Common Core:** What connections can we make between constructivist learning theory and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Content and Mathematical Practices? We will explore this question across the grades, considering how we can best help students become mathematically proficient.

Saturday morning

Jacqueline Grennon Brooks, Associate Professor and Director of the Science Education Program at SUNY Stony Brook and co-author of *In Search of Understanding: The case for the constructivist classroom* and *Schooling for Life: Reclaiming the essence of learning* along with many publications exploring issues of curriculum, instruction and assessment.

- **Education and Learning in the 21st Century: A Simple Proposition:** Our national policy makers have made a serious miscalculation about what generates improved student learning. We must stop sacrificing the promise of real student learning for the illusion of student achievement. If we really are serious about reforming our nation's schools, it important that we, as educators together, place our emphasis on student learning, and explore the constructivist proposition and ways to put this proposition into practice.

President elect, Jim Pelech, is working closely with me now to transition into taking office in October. We are working on visioning and managing our committees, the roles of Board members, continuity with phone or virtual board meetings during the year, as well as ways to engage more members in the committee work.

- We encourage any members who are interested in being active in ACT to contact Jim or me and make a commitment to attend our **pre-board committee work meeting on Thursday, October 18.**
- See list of committees on page 12
- Jim Pelech: jpelech@ben.edu
- Jane Broderick: broderic@etsu.edu

Julie Dangel has received the first conference registration! Jim and I will begin the countdown reminders. Time to register for October!!!

Thanks to each of you for your support our organization.

Jane Tingle Broderick, ACT President

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If your colleagues have not received this newsletter, please encourage them to join ACT online at: www.constructivistassociation.org

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BOARD MEMBER INTERVIEW *with Linda Kroll*; , Professor of Education, Mills College, Mary and Richard Holland Chair; lindak@mills.edu

By Jane Tingle Broderick, ACT President

JTB: Can you share a bit about your background and what led you into your chosen profession?

LK: During my senior year in college I started working in a school with children who had emotional disturbances. This inspired me to go to UCLA, and then UC Berkeley to get a teaching credential. At that time in California, there weren't any teaching jobs, but, luckily for me, the town of Vallejo had just passed a local tax override that would allow schools to hire teachers.

Things happen serendipitously! The principal I worked with at Loma Vista School in Vallejo was interested in the British open classroom. He encouraged us to try mixed age grouping and open planning for teaching. I taught at this school for 6 years, all but the first year in mixed age groups. I taught third grade, 2-3, and K-3. It was very exciting. The Loma Vista School was a Title I school with mostly poor African American, Filipino, and White children integrated. The principal encouraged us to try things and brought in people to support us. I worked with a wonderful, collegial faculty. When I think back, I was very lucky to have my first position in this school.

Having a good leader was so important for my development as a teacher and teacher researcher. My teacher education had been very eclectic, since I transferred from UCLA to UCB in the middle of my program. I got to work with Madeleine Hunter while at UCLA—she of objectives in teaching notoriety, Gary Fenstermacher, Charlotte Crabtree. At Berkeley I worked with mostly adjunct faculty, all of who were great teachers and had an effect on my practice. I remember very fondly Mark Lucas who taught our arts curriculum class. I still have the pottery cat that I made in that class over 40 years ago.

My principal at Loma Vista School was a visionary. He introduced William Glasser and reality therapy to us. He brought Margaret Smart, an educational psychologist from USC to the Loma Vista School to demonstrate Piagetian tasks to our school faculty. While I had studied educational psychology as part of my credential program, I had never seen the tasks performed with children and I simply didn't believe what I was seeing! I had always been interested in what my students were thinking, but my interest in constructivist theory was sparked then.

Over the next 6 years I continued to investigate Piaget's ideas. One summer I participated in a seven-week course at UC Berkeley entitled *Piaget in the Classroom*. Another year, I spent time with a colleague identifying science curriculum that was appropriate for children at different levels of Piagetian development. I used a collection of homemade Piagetian

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conservation and logic tasks to assess my students at the beginning and end of every school year. Most of this activity was based on my own readings and ideas; I still had relatively little experience with the actual writings of either Piaget or Vygotsky. After teaching for six years, I took a sabbatical leave to return to graduate school at UC Berkeley where I determined I would study these ideas in a more systematic way. At the same time I was very interested in children's writing and was one of the first elementary teachers involved with Bay Area Writing Project, part of the National Writing Project, which fundamentally changed the teaching of writing in elementary school from "handwriting" to learning to write a variety of genres and which encouraged children and young people to discover their writer's voice. My dissertation was a neo-Piagetian analysis of children's story writing. My advisor was Paul Ammon. My strong interest in human development and literacy development dates from that period and is still a strong interest of mine. I remained a classroom teacher for another two years, experimenting with curriculum in writing and science based on what I was learning in graduate school.

While I was at UC Berkeley I was fortunate to work with Paul Ammon, the founder of the Developmental Teacher Education program, and to be privileged to assist in the development of this elementary teacher education program that based teacher learning in developmental theory. When I left classroom teaching I taught first as a graduate instructor and later as a lecturer in the School of Education at UC Berkeley from 1980-1988. My work with DTE was very important in framing my ideas about teacher education and the application of theory, particularly constructivist theory, both in my own teaching and in teacher learning.

JTB: In my doctoral course on constructivist inquiry I use your book, *Teaching with principled practice: Managing complexity for social justice*, that you wrote with your Mills College colleagues. Can you share how you came to develop and use the constructivist principles in this book?

Six principles for practice:

- *Teaching is a moral act based on an ethic of care*
- *Teaching is a collegial act*
- *Teaching is an act of inquiry and reflection.*
- *Learning is a constructivist and developmental process.*
- *The acquisition of content knowledge and subject matter is essential.*
- *Teaching is essentially a political act.*

LK: I came to Mills College in 1988. The faculty grew over a few years. Together we started developing what it is that we believed and practiced into a set of principles. We began with 4 "pillars"—constructivist developmental theory, reflective practice, teaching as a moral act based on an ethic of care, and collegiality—all under the umbrella of achieving social justice and excellent outcomes for all students. As our faculty grew and we worked

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together we refined and broadened our scope to include and make explicit first the political aspect of teaching and finally the importance of subject matter. In the mid 90's, we had the opportunity to write our own standards for the state to evaluate our program. We used the principles to develop our teacher education program. While this opportunity to write experimental standards lasted only five years and the many current changes in education surrounding state and national standards have forced our program to alter its stricter focus on these six principles, the essence of this program still forms the basis of what we do at Mills. We write our success by how many of our graduates stay in the field. We have an excellent record—a recent survey found about 95% of graduates in the last 15 years still in education.

JTB: Can you share about your research focus?

LK: I have several areas in which I do research. My dissertation was on children's writing development. I am still interested in this and in how we teach children to write. Currently I am working on a project that investigates how teachers starting with the youngest children (infants and toddlers) through elementary school think about the teaching of writing with regard to voice, content and conventions. Earlier, I examined children's writing development in how they learned to write in different genres and how they constructed their idea of different genres (**Kroll, L.** (1998). *Cognitive Principles Applied to the Development of Literacy*. In McCombs, B. & Lambert, N. (eds.), *How students learn: Reforming schools through learner-centered education*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association). This work focused on the use of Piagetian and constructivist theory in understanding children's writing development.

A second area of research interest for me is teacher learning and development. I first heard about the schools in Reggio Emilia at my first ACT conference in 1991 in Northampton, Massachusetts. *The Hundred Languages of Children* exhibit came to Mills College for 18 months, and then in 2000 I had my first opportunity to accompany other Mills faculty on a trip to Reggio Emilia, to the schools and research center. While there are many amazing things to learn from these schools, I was primarily interested in how they supported the teachers in their own development and their own research. The use of documentation and visual representation to reflect on one's own practice and learning for both children and teachers became a vital part of my own teaching and my own research. (**Kroll, L. R. & Breuer, F.** (2006, July and August). *Learning to Teach Reading: Preparing Teachers for Urban Contexts*. In L. M. Fitzgerald, M. L. Heston, D. L. Tidwell (eds.) *Collaboration and Community: Pushing Boundaries through Self-Study. Sixth International Conference on Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices*. Pp. 161-164.)

Related to teacher development and research, I also became involved in self-study (Self-study of Teacher Education Practices). I just completed a book about self-study practice, which focuses on different ways to help student teachers and teachers take a look at their practice.

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Everything I teach, even in my development class, is about looking at children to see how they understand what it is we are trying to teach them.

In my teaching and writing I was always interested in Early Childhood, then K-3, and I have now have gotten interested in the use of play in preschool to promote self-regulation. I am currently working with a colleague helping teachers work through the ways to help children with self-regulation. It is still focuses on how teachers think about these things.

JTB: Can you tell us about the ways you have been involved in service?

LK: I was the ACT President from 2001-2003. I was the President of the Special Interest Group (SIG) in the American Educational Research Association (AERA) for five years. I review articles for many journals. I was Dean at my college for two years and now I'm chair of the Early Childhood Program and will be Associate Dean in the upcoming academic year. These roles don't define me, but they are service, and each time I take on new roles I learn new perspectives. I work closely with the laboratory school at Mills College, serving as an advisor in a multiplicity of ways.

JTB: Anything else you would like to add?

LK: A new area of teaching and professional development that I have been exploring and presented on at ACT recently, is the integration of art into Teacher Education. That is, using art to help pre-service teachers become better teachers by using art in their classrooms and practice. This ties in with teaching visual literacy, arts, and education.

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- Kroll, L.R. (2004, April). Constructing constructivism: How student teachers construct ideas of development, knowledge, learning, and teaching. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 10 (2) pp. 199-221.
- Kroll, L.R. and Ammon, P.R. (2002) Constructivism and teacher education: A vision, an overview and seven dimensions. Rainer, J. (ed.) (2002). *Reframing teacher education: Dimensions of a constructivist approach*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt Publishers.
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- Bye, T., Kroll, L. et al (1991). *Planning Guide for English/Language Arts*. 2nd edition. Vallejo City Unified School District.
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JOURNAL UPDATE

Amy Malkus reports that our first issue of the Constructivist to be published since 2009 will be ready in July. Her vision for the journal is to try and move to publishing twice a year; once in July and once in December. July will promote the conference and December will follow up from the conference. WE had Spanish translators from East Tennessee State University and from Julie Dangel's connections at GSU to help us with the intensive translations needed to get this July issue out. We have 4 pieces already accepted for a December issue. After this year's issues are out, we can concentrate on improving our editing and reviewing system, as well as our system for soliciting articles, so that we can become a first-rate journal.

- Any members who would like to serve as reviewers can please contact Amy so that their names can be added to our list of reviewers: malkus@etsu.edu
- We ask our members to please submit articles and encourage colleagues to submit! Our goal is to build to publishing bi-annually, and build from there.
- Contact Amy with a proposal or submission advice: malkus@etsu.edu

NEW PUBLICATIONS *by ACT Members:*

Kamii, C., & Russell, K. A. (2012). Elapsed time: Why is it so difficult to teach? *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 43(3), 296-315.

Castle, K. (2012). *Early childhood teacher research: From questions to results*. New York: Routledge.

Description: Accessible and interactive, this book touches upon the important issues every early childhood teacher should know—the uniqueness of early childhood teacher research, reasons for doing it, and how to do it. In this comprehensive guide, Kathryn Castle explores each stage of teacher research, from conceptualization, generating research questions, identifying data sources, gathering and analyzing data, interpreting results, sharing results, to taking action based on results. *Special features included in each chapter:*

- Teacher Researcher Journal prompts for the reader to record ideas for research questions and to develop a plan for doing research.
- From the Field provides rich examples of real life early childhood teacher researchers and their perspectives on doing teacher research.
- Reflections ask readers to pause and think deeply about relating content to their own situations.
- Exploration of additional content, websites, resources, and activities are located in each chapter to help the reader go further in constructing their knowledge of teacher research.

Reviews: "Castle has given the early childhood field a much needed resource on the practice and the value of teacher research. Her clear guidelines and engaging examples bring early childhood teacher research to life for new and continuing educators working with children from birth through age eight. Drawing on her deep knowledge of early childhood practice, Castle shows us how to do exemplary teacher research from start to finish, and tells us why it is so essential to high quality teaching and learning." Susan L. Recchia, Associate Professor and Coordinator, Integrated Early Childhood Program, Teachers College, Columbia University

"Castle heralds the message that context is crucial in the realm of teacher research—and that early childhood education provides a compelling and significant landscape for doing this type of work. This richly grounded and comprehensive guide is a much needed contribution to the field. It will be welcomed by aspiring and seasoned teacher researchers alike." Patricia A. Crawford, Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education, University of Pittsburgh

Send info on your current publications as soon as they are in print to: broderic@etsu.edu 8

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FROM THE FIELD: *Introducing ideas and activities from ACT Members in the field*

Contributed by: Frank Pickus, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Gloversville Enlarged School District, NY.

Tech Yes!

The Gloversville Enlarged school District is a high poverty district on the edge of the Southern Adirondack Mountain Park in upstate New York. The district is comprised of four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The average size of each class is 225.

In the spring of 2011 we were fortunate enough to furnish each of our students and teachers in seventh grade with hand-held mobile learning devices. Before the highly anticipated date of deployment, teachers were provided with professional development in both the logistic use of the devices, and what little pedagogy exists for the optimal use of mobile learning devices in seventh grade. The multiyear plan was to grow the availability of the technology into eighth grade in 2011-2012, and be integrated into the high school's grade nine by 2012-2013.

Teachers spent a large amount of time reaching consensus determining a learning platform to deliver lessons and assignments. The underlying belief was that teachers could use existing lessons which could easily be modified to enhance delivery using the mobile technology. The ultimate goal was, and remains to be, expanding opportunities for classrooms to be student centered; for more students to take greater responsibility for their individual goal setting and learning.

The deployment of the devices was successful in that it created a great deal of buzz around both the school and community, and all stakeholders seemed interested, excited, and engaged. Students successfully prepared and delivered a presentation to the Board of Education, which added to the sense of excitement. Local media was on board, and helped create more positive buzz.

Initially, teachers on the two seventh grade teams relied on the technology for much of their content delivery. Materials and lessons that already existed in electronic form were easily adaptable, and student engagement appeared to increase. Teachers and students hunted for applications related to content, and discovered numerous products that greatly enhanced the experience. In a very short period of time it became apparent though, that individual teachers had individual belief systems about the technology and how best to incorporate them into their curricula. By the end of the year, some teachers had fully embraced the idea of incorporating the devices into their classrooms, while others retreated, instead relying more and more on traditional lesson delivery methods. The district was faced with the question of how best to proceed with grade eight, if at all. Administration was challenged with where to find any available research pointing toward best practices in the uses of mobile technology in classrooms. Very little exists. While articles about mobile technology flood the literature, studies of the pedagogy are scarce. With the technology changing rapidly, it appears that researchers are challenged with providing timely information.

Seventh grade social studies teacher Robert Garren serves as advisor to a middle school student technology club, Tech Yes. A group of Tech Yes students attended the Institute for Learner Centered Education's Constructivist Design Conference in the summer of 2011. Using student knowledge to inform technology needs is nothing new in the field. However, the notion of using seventh and eighth grade students to provide this service seems to be

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unique. These students eagerly worked on an action plan that could be used to advise eighth grade teachers when school resumed in the fall.

The teachers in grade eight were at an even greater disadvantage than the teachers in grade seven. They had incoming students arriving with expectations about the inclusion of mobile learning, but they had not been part of any of the decision making processes. The district's challenge was to determine the types and methods of professional development that would be tolerated, helpful, sustainable, and ultimately embraced. The largest issues still faced by the district seem to be the lack of research-based best practices, and the idea that this type of technology needs to be embedded, as opposed to just another tool to pull out of the cupboard from time to time. Watching students with their personal cell phones not only shows the ubiquity of the technology, but how fully integrated into their daily experience it has become. Students have greater facility with the devices, greater knowledge of the applications available, and greater interest and *reliance*, on the available technology. Teachers are at a distinct disadvantage.

With district prodding, Rob Garren, guided his Tech Yes students to create a professional development series for their eighth grade teachers. They surveyed teachers about their familiarity, interest, motivation, perceptions, and pedagogical beliefs and needs related to hand-held learning technology. The findings have led them to provide training for teachers both individually, as needs arise, and in groups when they sense that their instructions are floundering with delivery. The student led professional development is centered on a set of beliefs which they feel are largely universal for their grade level. The technology:

- Saves time in classrooms which can be recycled to delve deeper into content
- Forces more student-centered learning
- Creates contextual connections that may not have been evident before
- Increase student motivation
- Provide more learning 'fun'
- Empower students by having the world's search engines at their fingertips.

Teachers have recognized the power and potential that exists in allowing their students to provide this type of information. This current age group is indeed comprised of digital natives, with skill sets related to technology that the adults in their lives just do not possess. The students and their teachers are all acutely aware of this. I credit the teachers for having the wisdom and tolerance to actively learn from their students.

While it is too early for us to realize any trends in achievement as a result of this initiative, the anecdotal information we have points in the right direction. The district has learned that while trying to keep up with the advances in technology is daunting, we should not overlook our students as ready and willing resources in our learning environments.

From the Field editor: Rosemary Geiken, Assistant Professor, East Tennessee State University

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COMMITTEE REPORT

Conference Committee

Conference Chair Jane Tingle Broderick – Our venue is set for fall 2012. Krista Murphy from Conference Direct has been very helpful and is working with the committee for the 2013 Conference, when we *hope* to have our meeting in NYC. News on this in our next newsletter & in our Blog Updates: <http://constructivistblog.wordpress.com/>

Conference Program Committee

- Teresa Harris and Holly Pence
- Proposals announcements have gone out. Reviewers are lined up. We have set an earlier due date for May 15, which seems to be moving many toward an earlier time frame! The call for proposals is available on our website . www.constructivistassociation.org

Webinar Committee: Organize and host a minimum of three online webinars per year; manage online survey.

- **Chair:** Ariel Ashe
- **Members:** Dewey Dryksta; Alice Wakefield, Halcyon Learned
- We held our first Webinar in December 2011. The turnout was bleak, only a few people attending. Still, we learned a lot and the committee is regrouping to plan for next steps. Report on next steps will come soon.

Communications Committee

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- **From the Field editor:** Rosemary Geiken; geiken@etsu.edu
 - **Blog editors and managers:** Kate Chechak & Mike Garrett; kate.chechak@gmail.com and zmdg11@goldmail.etsu.edu
- **Bloggers:** Jennifer Thompson, Jackie Grennon-Brooks, Mike Garrett, Kate Chechak; and Jane Broderick posting the ACT Board Member Interviews and ACT Updates; and Rosemary Geiken posting the From the Field articles.
- **Website manager:** Mike Garrett
- *The Newsletter:*
 - Publishes in PDF format the ACT Board Member Interviews, From the Field articles, and updates on ACT committees and other business
 - Is sent to members, as well as being posted in an archive on our website's members' only page.
- *The Blog publishes the ACT Board Member Interviews, From the Field articles, President Updates; and three blogs on technology in education, elementary science, and science.*
- *Only members can be blog authors; blog content will be reviewed by our blog editors:* kate.chechak@gmail.com and zmdg11@goldmail.etsu.edu

Membership Committee

- **Chair:** Jim Pelech; Pelech@ben.edu
- New members continue to register! We currently have # members.
- Our Pay Pal system is working very well and we now have a system for monthly renewal reminders.
- Please encourage your friends to join our group online: www.constructivistassociation.org

Thank you all for your support in the work of ACT ~ the ACT Board

The Association for Constructivist Teaching

June 2012 Newsletter, v. 3., n. 2

Our Mission: is to enhance the growth of all educators and students through identification and dissemination of effective constructivist practices in both the professional cultures of teachers and the learning environments of children. It is also to advance educators' understanding of Piaget's constructivism as a scientific theory that explains how human beings construct knowledge and moral values.

Membership: is open to anyone who is interested in the field of education. ACT Members are classroom teachers, administrators, supervisors, consultants, college and university personnel, students, parents and retired educators. They live all over the USA and in Mexico, Japan, Australia, Canada, Brazil, and China.

Benefits of Membership...

THE ACT QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER ... interviews, articles on practice, and book reviews
THE CONSTRUCTIVIST...An educational e-journal and journal archive.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE...discounted registration fee and early notice of call for presenters

AFFILIATION...with an association committed to supporting you. To join, please fill out the [membership form](#) on the membership page of our website: www.constructivistassociation.org

WEBINARS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ... *started in 2011 – dates to be announced in our newsletters and online.* We plan on three per year, free to members and for a fee to non-members

Follow our Blog: <http://constructivistblog.wordpress.com/>

Find us on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/48559805714/>

Visit our Website: www.constructivistassociation.org

2012 Annual Conference will be hosted at the Millennium Centre, across from East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN. Download the Call for Proposals and Registration forms at: www.constructivistassociation.org

Our Journal: *The Constructivist*

As we continue our reviews for the next edition of *The Constructivist*, we encourage you to consider sharing your experiences and inquiries with us. Whether in the area of practice or research, we welcome your submissions.

- Contact our editor, Amy Malkus, at malkus@etsu.edu for more information.

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Rosemary Geiken, ACT Newsletter copy editor: geiken@esu.edu