From the President:

Welcome to the Association for Constructivist Teaching (ACT) 2016! I am very excited for this year!! I so appreciate your commitment to ACT!!

Thank you to Jane Broderick and Andrew Stremmel, Co-Newsletter Editors for providing us with this first Newsletter Volume 6! Our past officers and leaders deserve our gratitude. Thanks to Jim Pelech, Past President, who moved our organization forward in all ways! Thanks to Andrew Stremmel, Sonja De Groot Kim, Jim and their teams for a great 2015 Conference in Union City, New Jersey at the lovely Keane University! It was a notable experience!!

Please make plans now to attend the 2016 ACT Conference in Houston, October 6-8! Our Conference Planning Committee has been hard at work since last September. We will have hotel rooms at the lovely University of Houston Hilton and hold sessions there Friday. Saturday, we will hold sessions at the College of Education. Please set aside this time and bring a friend!

Highlights of October 2015 Board Meeting and follow-up:
Officers:
President Carolyn Black
President Elect – Meir Muller
Secretary - Kelly Kent
Treasurer – Seong Bock Hong and Treasurer Elect Sonja de Groot Kim
Membership Chair – Kate Chechak
The Constructivist Journal Editors - Carolyn Hildebrandt and Meir Muller (Annual conference proceedings publication, with unsolicited manuscripts)
Newsletter Editors – Jane Broderick and Andrew Stremmel
Board Member terms (3 years) Selection Process Task Force – Jennifer Thompson
Membership rate increases: $50/individual, $100/Institutional (group of 10)

We share a commitment to ACT, making it a force in education. I believe we have a work to do, and we walk in great footsteps. Please share ideas with me.
cfblack@uh.edu

Enjoy reading the March Newsletter!
Carolyn Black

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Dear ACT Friends & Colleagues,

In this issue you will find photos documenting the excitement of attending our 2015 conference at Kean University in Newark, NJ. Also, you can read about the background and educational career of Andrew Stremmel, who is also serving now as a co-editor of the ACT Newsletter.

Our From the Field story in this issue presents a rich collaboration that reaches beyond the borders of the classroom.

We are always seeking new stories from the field and are often in need of stories from the middle and high school years. If you are willing to share a story with us, please contact us to work out an arrangement. Stories related to research projects at all levels are always welcome!

Sincerely,
Jane & Andy

Preconference visit to the Voyager’s Community School in Eatontown, NJ

Find us on Facebook:  http://www.facebook.com/groups/48559805714/
Visit our Website:  www.constructivistassociation.org
Follow our Blog:  http://constructivistblog.wordpress.com/
COMMITTEE REPORTS

Conference Committee
• Conference Chair Carolyn Black – cfblack@uh.edu
Please make plans now to attend the 2016 ACT Conference in Houston, October 6-8! Our Conference Planning Committee is hard at work. We will have hotel rooms at the lovely University of Houston Hilton and hold sessions there Friday. Saturday, we will hold sessions at the College of Education. Please set aside this time and bring a friend!
• News on this in our next newsletter & on our website: www.constructivistassociation.org

Conference Program Committee
Program Chair Holly McCartney: cfblack@uh.edu
• General Session Speakers Chair Brenda Fyfe: fyfebv@webster.edu
• This year’s conference theme: Educating in a Diverse World

Newsletter Co-Editors: Jane Broderick, broderic@etsu.edu & Andy Stremmel, andrew.stremmel@sdstate.edu
• Published three times annually, sent to members, and housed on ACT the members’ only page.
  o Send us your “From the Field” stories to share with our members.
  o Submit news of publications, presentations and creative activities to share with our members.
Website Design and Manager: Christian Schmid; ckschmid@gmail.com

Membership Committee
• Chair: Kate Chechak; kate.chechak@gmail.com
• New members continue to register!
• Pay for membership online and encourage your friends to join our group: www.constructivistassociation.org

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

A Message from the President

Member Support: At an ACT 2015 general session, several members who are isolated from other constructivists voiced the need for additional support during the year. ACT is moving forward on this request. Suggestions for the format include conference call or SKYPE/facetime, or a Facebook Group. Please email ideas or interest in joining or leading a small group so we can initiate this effort in May. Thank you!

If you would like to join or lead an ACT Book Club please email me. We have exciting titles recommended by Board Members:
• Creating & Sustaining the Constructivist Classroom
• To Understand is to Invent
• Conversations with Jean Piaget
• The Constructivist Leader
• Creative Schools: Grass Roots Revolution That’s Transforming Education

Please share the ACT Newsletter with likeminded people …
MEMBER NEWS & PUBLICATIONS

Kathryn Castle just coauthored an article, Reclaiming Play in Schools, in *Childhood Education*. The link to access this article is below.


http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/cpqx6tiNTqt6zpJGykJZmu/full

Meir Muller just had a chapter published in the following book. In the same book there is a chapter featuring his work as principal.


**JOURNAL UPDATE: Conference Proceedings Journal**

Carolyn Hildebrandt and Meir Muller, Co-Editors

As many of you know, we have decided to try something new this year. Instead of publishing another online version of *The Constructivist*, we will be launching an annual conference proceedings journal. We feel that this new journal will showcase the great learning that occurred at the conference and will add to our field. The ACT 2015 Conference Proceedings Journal will contain transcripts of the two keynote addresses, articles based on conference workshops and presentations, and additional articles on constructivist theory, research, and practice.

We would like to thank the authors for submitting their articles to the journal and the reviewers for providing expert feedback on them. We are currently in the process of sharing the reviewers’ feedback with the authors. Our goal is to have the journal online on our website early this summer. Once published please feel free to share widely as we hope the journal will spark further interest for our upcoming conference. If you have questions about the journal or would like to submit an article to it, please contact Carolyn Hildebrandt at Carolyn.Hildebrandt@uni.edu or Meir Muller at meirmuller@sc.rr.com.
BOARD MEMBER INTERVIEW with Andrew Stremmel

By Jane Tingle Broderick, Board Member and Co-Editor of the ACT Newsletter

Andrew Stremmel is the Head of the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership at South Dakota State University, in Brookings, South Dakota.

JB: Can you share a bit about your background and what brought you into the Early Childhood profession?

AS: During my undergraduate studies in psychology at Penn State I leaned toward child psychology. My mentor was Dale Harris who is well known for his work in extending Florence Goodenough’s Draw-a-Man test. His teaching was conversational and rigorous in terms of what you learned. We would meet in his home to read and discuss children’s literature, science fiction, anthropology, history, and art and works from outside the field to develop insights into child development from a variety of perspectives. The reading of outside works has stayed with me as an essential practice in facilitating learning.

Another person who had a strong influence on me was Vladimir de Lissovoy, who served as my advisor on an honor’s thesis on imaginary companions. This was a subject that many people wouldn’t research at the time because it was steeped in psychoanalytic theory and difficult to measure. My work on imaginary companions brought me into contact with the likes of Carl Jung, Freud, and Bruno Bettelheim and their understanding of children’s fantasy. All this shaped my thinking about children in a more holistic sense.

After graduation from college I worked at a Head Start program out of York, Pennsylvania. As a middle-class white male, this was my first real introduction to experiences and factors like SES, drug and domestic abuse, and marginalization that affected the learning and development of ethnic and racial minorities. I soon returned to graduate school at Purdue University where I studied with Gary Ladd in the area of peer relations and prosocial behaviors. Children’s selective use of peer informants based on their age, gender, and knowledge of certain skills was the focus of my thesis. Upon completing my master’s degree in child development I worked at the lab school at Purdue as a head teacher. Over my six years as an instructor and head teacher at the lab school I moved from being a proponent of social cognitive theory toward greater interest and curiosity in the educational applications of Piagetian theory. I especially liked the work of George Forman and David Kushner that centered on cognitive conflict in the child’s construction of knowledge. Irv Sigel’s distancing theory also had a strong influence on my thinking of how children constructed more accurate and complex understandings of their experiences and encounters. Both Forman and Sigel emphasized the importance of cognitive dissonance and discomfort in the construction of new knowledge and enhanced cognitive development. This time of teaching and deep reflection as a head teacher at the lab school was unquestionably the greatest time in my life, being close to the children and their thinking and perspectives and learning to respect and value all who work with children. I was able to teach, conduct research, learn from children, parents, and students and disseminate my work through presentations and publications.
When Purdue began to develop a Ph.D. program in Early Childhood Education and hired Doug Powell and Susan Kontos to lead this effort, I decided to stay at Purdue to earn my doctorate in Early Childhood Education. Doug served as my major professor and dissertation advisor. I also was influenced by Alan Fogel, who developed a course in dynamic systems theory, and it was in this course that I became enamored with Vygotsky. I had felt that as a teacher I was more closely aligned with Vygotsky’s notions of the zone of proximal development, Bruner’s notion of scaffolding, and Trevarthen’s idea of intersubjectivity, all of which would shape my early work at Virginia Tech.

After receiving my doctorate in 1989 I became an Assistant Professor in Early Childhood Education at Virginia Tech. My early research focused on job satisfaction and job commitment among teachers and the implications of Vygotsky’s theory for early childhood education. I think there is a strong connection between Vygotsky’s ideas about children’s potential and Dewey’s idea that the child is always in transition. I have always reminded students that when we look at the child we must view the child in three ways: what was, what is, what could be.

JB: Can you talk about your teaching; how it is unique to you, informs your research, and aligns with current trends in education and constructivist pedagogy?

AS: I taught an undergraduate curriculum course and a graduate course on child development at Virginia Tech. I also taught a course with Vickie Fu on perspectives on multiculturalism.

Teaching these courses and my continually evolving understanding of curriculum as addressing the question of what knowledge is of most worth furthered my exploration of Vygotsky. This, in turn, led to an interest in the Reggio Emilia Approach in the early 90s when an article in Newsweek named the schools of Reggio Emilia among the 10 best in the world. I was excited to discover this city in Italy where educators constructed ideas and understandings from the best of our developmental theories and progressive ideology -- Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, Gardner, Dewey and more -- to create a positive, thoughtful and culturally responsive philosophical approach to teaching and learning. I also was thrilled to learn that George Forman, whose work I valued so much, was also being influenced by the Reggio educators. In the midst of this new influence I became the lab school director at Virginia Tech where I hired Lynn Hill as a curriculum director. Lynn had been to Reggio Emilia and encouraged me to study the principles and concepts of this approach.

From 1995 to 2005 my research and teaching focus was on the Reggio Emilia Approach and teaching as an inquiry stance. My friend, mentor, and colleague, Vickie Fu, embraced, supported and shaped my ideas and for nearly 10 years we were great collaborators and co-authors with Lynn. Many of our students, some of whom have become excellent and award winning teachers, inspired our work. We owe them a great deal.

In 2004 I came to South Dakota State University to be closer to my wife’s family and accepted a position as Department Head of Human Development. In 2010, after the merging of the Colleges of Education and Family and Consumer Sciences, I became the head of Teaching, Learning and Leadership, a large PK-12 teacher education department. In this role it has been my vision to focus more holistically on education and development and not simply schooling or educator preparation.

I came to know Gail Perry and Barbara Henderson, who championed the idea of teachers as researchers. We presented together on this topic in 2004 at the NAEYC Professional Development Institute, and that was the beginning of a long friendship and collaboration focused on promoting the role of teachers as researchers of their own practice in the classroom. Gail became editor of Voices of Practitioners: Teacher Research in Early
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Childhood Education, NAEYC’s peer-reviewed, professional online journal. Its main purpose is to provide a vehicle for publishing the research of early childhood teachers, who are often underrepresented as authors in the educational research arena. Currently I am an Executive Director of Voices of Practitioners. Barbara took over as the editor, with Gail’s passing. Frances Rust, Ben Mardell, and Amos Hatch also are or have been on the editorial board of this journal. I gain so much from participating with small groups in organizational work, like that of the Voices journal, and with my work on the board of the Association of Constructivist Teaching. In these settings I find that people seriously desire to come together for meaningful dialogue about important issues and ideas.

Can you share about your service?

I have been Past President of the National Organization for Child Development Lab Schools; Chair, and Program Chair, of the Early Education and Child Development SIG of the American Educational Research Association; President of the South Dakota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education; and Executive Board member of the Midwest Region of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. Currently I sit on the board of the Association for Constructivist Teaching and was last year’s program co-chair.

Can you share about your research?

I was prepared as a quantitative researcher while at Purdue, particularly in the areas of survey and observational research. It was in Virginia that I became more interested in classroom process and the perceptions and lived experience of teachers. I was always interested in why people teach and the perspective of the teacher because I have always had a great respect for the teacher, as do scholars like Carlina Rinaldi. I came to realize that teaching and research cannot be separated. In Russian the same word, obuchenie, refers to teaching and learning. The noun is associated with obuchit’ (to teach or instruct) and obuchit’cya (to learn). My interest in teacher research stems in part from the idea that in teaching we must pay close attention to questions (our own and the children’s), questions that demonstrate curiosity, wonder, and the desire to know and to take children to that next step in their own learning processes. Teacher researchers can provide localized knowledge of classrooms and teaching that is sorely missing from our knowledge base on teaching and teacher education.

My recent work is focused on concerns about the hegemonic discourse driving teacher education today. My co-authors and I employ a dialogic process of coming together to explore and critically examine what it means to teach in order to transcend an essentialized form of teacher education and create the most hopeful possibility of embracing the kind of teacher education that is more authentically and primarily about full human development.

See citations of Andrew Stremmel’s publications on the next page.

On the bus and train in New Jersey!
Citations of some of the core work by Andrew Stremmel

**Refereed Journal Articles:**


**Books:**


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ACT Newsletter editors: Jane T. Broderick, broderic@etsu.edu & Andrew Stremmel, andrew.stremmel@sdstate.edu
FROM THE FIELD: Introducing ideas and activities from ACT Members in the field

Contributed by: Angela McKillip, Assistant Professor in Interior Design, Kay Cutler, Professor and Director of Fishback Center for ECE at South Dakota State University, and Chris Hume, Kodo Kids, Founder & Managing Partner

Rich Normality: Designing in Collaboration, SDSU Interior Design Program, the Fishback Center for ECE, and Kodo Kids, an Industry Partner

This narrative involves an interior design program, an early childhood program, and an industry partner. The Interior Design program at South Dakota State University is a CIDA Accredited program that encourages students to investigate and analyze occupants’ needs, enhance spaces to maximize quality of life, and create expressive spaces that reflect the needs, values, personalities, roles and potential of their occupants. The mission of the program is to provide a variety of transformative learning opportunities to shape creative, rational, socially and environmentally responsible design professionals. This is rooted in its vision that interior designers enrich users’ experience of the built environment by creating place that is purposeful, compelling and socially and environmentally responsive.

The Fishback Center for ECE, South Dakota State University’s laboratory school, is an NAEYC Accredited program. It has been part of the land grant university since 1928. It has an inquiry-based, constructivist philosophy and is Reggio-inspired. Its mission is to be a place for education, research and service. It has had a focus of teacher research since 2004.

Kodo Kids is a young company that began 8 years ago, in 2008. It is located in Broomfield, CO and has as its mission, enriching the lives of children. This is their mission, their livelihood and most of all, their passion! It is a small family-owned business with a constructivist framework underlying its philosophy.

In the spring of 2015, Angela McKillip, an Interior Design faculty member, and Kay Cutler, an Early Childhood Education professor and Director of the Fishback Center for ECE; SDSU’s laboratory school, met to discuss the Interior Design Program’s third year studio. As the instructor of the studio, Angela wanted to create an opportunity for her undergraduate students to design and build something, initially thinking about cardboard structures. As the conversation continued; the question, ‘Why not build in wood?’ arose. Then Kay suggested having a conversation with Chris Hume, the Founder of Kodo Kids, a company that builds open-ended materials for young children. Kay and Chris had had several conversations at Children’s Museum and Early Childhood conferences about the quality of early childhood materials and creating collaborations between early childhood companies and university laboratory schools, specifically the Fishback Center. They thought that this would have a lot of potential. A second discussion between Angela, Chris, and Kay occurred via video conferencing and they thought through a design/build project that included ongoing dialogue with clients, children, early childhood laboratory school teachers; and an industry partner. The students explored the design and built prototypes for a classroom ‘stool’, to be used by teachers at the Fishback Center. Students considered both the needs and desires set forth by the children and teachers alongside sustainability and the aesthetic dimensions.

Because both Angela and Kay value the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) as a tool to improve teaching, they created an underlying SoTL study to examine the studio design. Their research questions had three aspects, to explore how aesthetic dimensions of design in furniture impacts the experiences in early childhood classrooms, to
explore the benefits and impacts of industry partnerships, and to explore experiential, inquiry-based learning in design. The SoTL study is underway. Using the Reggio Emilia Approach as a catalyst for theoretical frameworks, students explored the idea of ‘rich normality’ as an essence to describe the physical, social, emotional and cognitive counterparts in an inquiry-based early childhood learning environment. All too often, interacting with furniture is perceived as an ordinary occurrence. Students were challenged to consider how this experience could enlighten and enhance the learning process.

This was an eight-week intensive study embedded in a third year Interior Design studio. The students worked collaboratively in pairs utilizing the following process. They first received guest lectures from the collaborative experts, conducted research to familiarize themselves with the framework, furniture fabrication and the Reggio Emilia Approach to early childhood education. Students then interviewed teachers at the Fishback Center to gain empathy and explore anthropometrics, ergonomics, function and desired attributes. They asked questions such as: ‘How can this device better help you engage with the children? How do you envision the children interacting with the object? What features should this object have? What heights are preferred? What timeframe will this object be in use? What is the associated comfort level? Any safety concerns?

Then, the students engaged in rapid prototyping with the teachers to explore initial ideas and gain feedback. Some design tools that characterize the Reggio Emilia Approach are relational form, light, color and microclimate. Each discussed and explored. After the charrette, the class gathered to construct a knowledge base. As a group, they discussed the interview process and outcomes, and their initial interactions with the children in the classroom. Results were compiled and cross-referenced to determine commonalities. Short-term use, integrated storage, mobility, simplicity, natural materials, and expressed construction emerged as the program for future iterations.

Next, students developed schematic concept alternatives. The models and accompanying presentations needed to clearly express the design idea (what) and the design strategy (how). Anthropometrics and product inclusiveness were considered. Each chair readily allowed use by adults and children. For example, handle sizes and overall weights were considered. Rounded edges made the objects safe for children and easy for the teachers to rotate. Material textures were studied to add variety, enhance
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The tactile encounters and encourage exploration by the children. Once again, teachers from the Fishback Center and our Industry Partner engaged with the students to provide insights and critique the designs. The ongoing dialogue also helped to build another layer of perspective, the understanding for the children and teachers, and challenges for the students then worked to build structurally sound full-scale cardboard mock-ups to be used by the teachers and children in the classrooms. Students were able to see their work in use through the observation booths at the lab school. Students returned to the interview questions posed at the beginning of the project to see how their solutions were indeed responding. ‘How can this device better help you engage with the children? How do you envision the children interacting with the object? What features should this object have? What height is preferred? What timeframe will this object be in use? What is the associated comfort level? Any safety concerns?

“Rich Normality is defined as a whole made up of different parts, in harmony, balanced. Interaction of different elements (objects and situations) that produce a tranquil result: a symphony of the individual parts” (Reggio Children & Domus Academy Research Center, 1998, p. 26). Students drafted details, explored construction methods, material capabilities before constructing final prototypes. In a typical project, the ‘classroom’ consists of the studio, and maybe the university print lab, to print out designs. In this studio project, the ‘classroom’ include the Fishback Center and their education environments, the woodshop, mechanical engineering workshop, a local hardware store, lazer and print lab, KODO Kids virtual classroom, university student other places holding tools and resources that the students gathered, and the design/build process. None of the students had exposure to furniture manufacturing at the beginning of the project. Safety workshops and exploratory detailing sessions at the wood shop were critical to closing the gap between design idea and final construction.

The full-scale chair constructions were then presented in an open house reception where individuals from across the university were invited.
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. Members stem from the USA, Mexico, Japan, Australia, Canada, Brazil, & China. Kate Chechak chair, kate.chechak@gmail.com

Benefits of Membership...
The ACT NEWSLETTER … interviews, articles on practice, and book reviews three times per year
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

Find us on Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/groups/48559805714/
Visit our Website: www.constructivistassociation.org

2016 Annual Conference will be hosted at the University of Houston. Check our website for updates and call for proposals

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 editors, Carolyn Hildebrandt at Carolyn.Hildebrandt@uni.edu or Meir Muller at meirmuller@sc.rr.com for more information.