From the President:

Greetings. Writing this letter is a very exciting experience as ACT continues with the tradition of providing leadership in Constructivist education. This edition of our Newsletter will provide unique perspectives into the Constructivist philosophy. I want to recognize our editor, Jane Broderick, and her assistant editor, Meir Muller for their efforts in producing a newsletter which can bring value to your teaching practice. We are soliciting contributions to this newsletter, so feel free to contact us about the possibility of sharing your experiences with our membership.

I know that this newsletter will activate your enthusiasm and I hope you can build on that enthusiasm by attending our annual conference to be held October 16th and 17th. It will be held at Kean University in Union, Jersey (outside of Newark). For more information, please go to our website at: http://www.constructivistassociation.org/

If you wish, you can also contact me at jpelech@ben.edu

This is my last newsletter as president, as I am stepping down after three years in that office. I want to thank everyone for their support, and more importantly their “Constructivist spirit.” It has been a privilege and an honor to be part of this community.

Sincerely,
Jim Pelech, EdD
President
Association for Constructivist Teaching

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

Please share the ACT Newsletter with likeminded people …
Dear ACT Friends & Colleagues,

We are pleased to provide a second of three newsletters planned for 2015. This publication date arrives just prior to our Annual Conference. In our final newsletter of the year we’ll share updates from the conference.

We know you will enjoy reading about the history of Cal Schlick, a long time member of our illustrious group.

You will also enjoy the story of second graders’ in their process of constructing an understanding of the Bill of Rights. This story is shared by Mr. Peterson, teacher at the Cutler Jewish Day School in Columbia, South Carolina.

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 & Meir

Seong Bock & Jane in Charleston

Find us on Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/groups/48559805714/
Visit our Website: www.constructivistassociation.org
Follow our Blog: http://constructivistblog.wordpress.com/
COMMITTEE REPORT – We are seeking a new Conference Committee Chair and Conference Program Chair for 2016. We also seek assistants for each committee. If you are interested please contact Carolyn Black who will take over Presidency in Mid-October 2015. cfblack@uh.edu

Conference Committee
Conference Chair Sonja DeGroot Kim – News on this in our next newsletter & in our Blog Updates: http://constructivistblog.wordpress.com/

Conference Program Committee
- Andy Stremmel, andrew.stremmel@sdstate.edu
- The 2015 conference will be on October 16th and 17th. It will be held at Kean University in Union, Jersey (outside of Newark).
  This year’s conference theme, Our Future Lies in the Past: Looking Back at 100 Years of Constructivism, is highlighted by two keynote speakers, Eleanor Duckworth, Professor Emerita of Harvard Graduate School of Education, and Frances Rust, Senior Fellow and Director of the Teacher Education Program in the Graduate School of Education at University of Pennsylvania. The conference also features 33 breakout sessions featuring the work of educators from across the country.

Communications Committee
- Newsletter / Blog Editors: Jane Broderick, broderic@etsu.edu & Meir Muller, meirmuller@sc.rr.com
- Website Design and Manager: Christian Schmid; ckschmid@gmail.com
  - 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 blogs on technology in education, elementary science, and science.
  - Only members can be blog authors; blog content will be reviewed by our blog editors.

Membership Committee
- Chair: Ryan Nivens; nivens@etsu.edu
- New members continue to register! We have 67 current members whose memberships are not expired. This includes the 10 people with lifetime memberships. 20 people’s memberships are due for renewal at the time of the conference or the month after
- 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

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ACT Newsletter copy editor:
Cathy Landy, clcl11@aol.com
Meir with Connie Kamii
Charleston 2015
MEMBER NEWS & PUBLICATIONS

News from Jane Tingle Broderick


News from Jim Pelech
An article Jim Pelech co-authored with Dr. Susan Hibbard was accepted for publication by The International Journal of Learning in Higher Education. The title of the article is: Flipping the Classroom: A Paradigm for Blending the Affective and Cognitive Domains.

Jim is President of the school Board that in Spring 2015 received one of the Outstanding Board Awards. BRAVO JIM!!

JOURNAL UPDATE: Proposal for an ACT CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS JOURNAL

Carolyn Hildebrandt and Meir Muller have proposed a new journal on constructivist teaching: The ACT Conference Proceedings Journal to replace our regular online journal, The Constructivist. The proceedings journal would be published once a year and include both of the keynote addresses, the best of each year's workshops and panel discussions, and additional articles of interest to constructivist teachers and researchers. Carolyn and Meir would serve as co-editors. If their proposal is approved by the ACT Board of Directors, Carolyn and Meir will be inviting all presenters at the 2015 Annual Conference to submit manuscripts to this new online, peer-reviewed journal. Stay tuned for more information! If you have questions or comments, please send them to <Carolyn.Hildebrandt@uni.edu> or <meirmuller@sc.rr.com>.
BOARD MEMBER INTERVIEW with Founding Member Cal Schlick

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

Cal Schlick is a founding member of the Association for Constructivist Teaching (ACT). He recently shared his history as a student, teacher and school leader and how he came to be engaged with constructivist educators.

JB: Tell me about your experiences as a learner.
CS: I grew up in Baltimore, Maryland. In the summer prior to entering the third grade, I became ill and was confined to my bed for the entire school year. In those days schools did not provide educational support outside of the classroom setting. I was a forgotten child as far as my elementary school was concerned. No one from the school ever called or expressed any concern for my educational development. Books from the public library, radio programs and art materials became the tools I used for my continuing education. During that year I explored the world and made sense of things in my own way, and, above all, became responsible for my own learning.

Upon returning to school, I found the classroom to be sorely lacking in the tools I needed to continue to learn. My teachers taught by the imposition of content and processes; therefore, I had to continue my quest to construct knowledge on my own. Throughout junior high school and high school, I continued to suffer through the transmission model of education.

JB: Did you have any teachers whose practices influenced you as a learner?
CS: In elementary school I had one really great teacher, Miss Schmuck. She was an engaging teacher who conveyed that she liked me. Because many of her students were poor, she would collect quarters and take us by streetcar to a series of Baltimore Symphony Orchestra concerts on Saturday mornings. She introduced us to music because there was no music (nor art or physical education) in the Baltimore schools at that time.

JB: What happened after you graduated from high school?
CS: I graduated from high school, enlisted in the Army and was sent overseas. We were shipped to Korea to prepare for the invasion of Japan but the war ended and there was no invasion. I was in the first occupation troops to go through Hiroshima after the bombing. I was in the Infantry and then became a medic, maybe because I was one of the few soldiers who had a high school education. I spent about two years in the army and then came back and applied to Johns Hopkins where I received a BA in History and a Master’s degree in Education.
It was at Hopkins that I came to life as a learner again. I had several inspirational professors who shared their passion and knowledge for the social sciences. I later received a doctorate in Administration and Curriculum from Teachers College Columbia University.

Upon graduation someone recommended that I go to the Baltimore City School District Office to apply for a teaching position. The personnel office offered me a choice between two teaching positions: an experimental core class and traditional English and social studies classes in a junior high school or geography classes in high school. I accepted the core position without knowing what core meant. I later learned that core meant teaching an integrated language arts and social studies class over a three-hour block of time. The average class size was 35-38 students. On occasion I had as many as 48 students. Core gave me an opportunity to teach creatively. I had the flexibility to use the discovery method of teaching along with a project approach, and incorporate the real-life experiences of my students into their academic work.

JB: Can you talk about your career change from teacher to school administrator?
CS: During my tenure as a Baltimore teacher, I became involved with teacher association activities and served as a teacher leader on the salary committee. In those days (the early 1950s) before teacher unionization, teachers had to go hat-in-hand in front of the Mayor and the Board of Estimates to “beg” for salary increases. In our comparison study of comparable city school districts nationwide (urban student populations of 100,000 or more), Baltimore ranked a low 39th out of 40 school districts on all indicators (e.g., class size, salaries, per pupil spending, etc.). The average class size in Baltimore at that time was 43 students in a class. Our activities directed to an increase in teacher salaries led the mayor at the time to label us as “Communists”.

After seven years of teaching, I left Baltimore to pursue a doctorate at Teachers College Columbia University and to seek school administrator positions. A superintendent from the Berkshires (MA) offered me a yearlong interim principalship at a Grade 5-12 school that I accepted. At this school there were teachers who loved teaching in the rural environment. I could have stayed there either as the principal or superintendent but I turned down a permanent position in that school district because I wanted a more challenging experience in a cosmopolitan environment.

I became a vice-principal at a high school in the very wealthy community of Millburn/Short Hills, NJ. At the end of two years the students dedicated the yearbook to me because I was the one who connected to them. I then accepted a principalship in Yorktown (NY) as my next administrative post. Shortly after I arrived, I realized that the job would be difficult because the teachers were older and very set in their ways. After three years in Yorktown, I moved on to Mamaroneck (NY) where I worked as an Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services. My responsibilities were with personnel, curriculum. In Mamaroneck, I found a place I loved and stayed for 28 years.

In this position I was given many opportunities to do things in all areas of teaching and learning. For example, every year we had two superintendent conference days focused on the world our children would grow up in and contend with. The conference activities were designed to support teachers’ intellectual development as well as teaching pedagogy. Even today, more than twenty years later, retired teachers and administrators frequently reminisce about the excitement, inspiration and value of the conference day workshop activities. Workshops led by external experts in their fields were an ongoing part of professional development in the Mamaroneck school district making it an intellectually stimulating place to work.

Please share the ACT Newsletter with likeminded people …
One person who had a very important impact on my thinking about constructivist practices was Patricia Carini, the leader of The Prospect School in Vermont. Pat believed in the importance of observing students’ learning through their work. This shifted our perspective on how we viewed teaching and learning, and how we should work with young children.

JB: What connected you to ACT?
CS: I read about Cathy Fosnot’s work with the teaching of mathematics. I sought her counsel and brought her to Mamaroneck to conduct teacher workshops and provide us guidance regarding our elementary math program. Subsequently, Cathy invited me to join with her, George Forman, and Barry Wadsworth on Saturday mornings in the cafeteria of the downtown campus of the University of Hartford to discuss constructivist practices. We decided to form the Association for Constructivist Teaching (ACT) to support teachers and school leaders who believed in a constructivist approach to education. Our first annual conferences were held at hotel in Northampton, Massachusetts. It was intimate setting and we got to know each other as we discussed constructivist practices. Luke Vanier from California was one of our first attendees (and still attends ACT Conferences). After a few years we joined forces with the constructivist educators on the west coast (California) and in the Midwest (St. Louis, MO), and our annual conferences began to be held nationally.

JB: Why do you stay connected to ACT?
CS: I am proud to be a lifelong member of ACT because of its philosophical underpinnings of constructivist teaching. During this period of high stakes accountability and dependence on standards and testing to measure student learning, ACT has been an important venue for constructivist educators to support one another and continue to learn and grow as professionals. ACT has provided a forum for like-minded educators to encourage others to share our educational beliefs.

JB: Can you talk about your career as a fencer and fencing coach, and its relationship to lifelong learning?
CS: During my years as a Hopkins student and later a teacher in Baltimore, I embarked on a fencing career as a competitor and a coach. I have been a fencing coach at the high school and college-level since 1946. I coached at Johns Hopkins and at the US Naval Academy. I have also coached the Mamaroneck high school boys and girls teams for the past 44 years. Fencing has provided me with an opportunity to touch the lives of many young people. The intellectual aspects and discipline of the sport prepare fencers for daily living and work endeavors throughout their lives. For me fencing has been a lifelong constructivist experience.
FROM THE FIELD: Introducing ideas and activities from ACT Members in the field

Contributed by: Meir Muller, ACT Board Member and Co-Editor of the ACT Newsletter

Second Grader’s Constructing an Understanding of Civil Rights

Mindsets and Approaches

Learning at the Cutler Jewish Day occurs through constructivist pedagogy. The school’s philosophy statement includes, “We believe that young children construct knowledge by experimenting and exploring with materials, reflecting, asking questions, and sharing ideas. Our teachers plan explorations that incorporate standards, assess each child, and strive to create students who are critical thinkers.” The second grade is lead by Mr. Brent Petersen. Mr. Petersen has nine years teaching experience and considers himself a constructivist inquiry based teacher. Melding Piagetian pedagogy with Reggio inspired practice he creates provocations to facilitate his second grader’s construction of knowledge.

In a staff meeting the school’s administration asked teachers to reflect on issues of equity. With the police killings of African Americans in Ferguson, New York, Atlanta and other communities, teachers reflected on how children could construct knowledge about the larger issues of equity and civil rights. Mr. Petersen decided to use simulations, literacy and conversations to explore the topic of race and civil rights.

Preparation

The second grade class had spent the school year working on projects. These included building a utility vehicle for a classmate with a disability. Using math and science skills children built a cart with an air mattress for a classmate who uses a wheelchair. The classmate was having surgery and could not sit, so the class created this vehicle to wheel her from room to room and allow her to always be in a lying position. The children compared different types of wheels and materials that affected the turning ability along with other variables. Finally using power tools the vehicle was created and tested. The children wrote about this and met many standards from their grade and beyond. The class also worked on a large unit that including designing homes. This constructivist unit also included math, science and literacy. Mr. Petersen decided that this exploration of race and civil rights was perfect to encourage construction of social studies knowledge.

Mr. Petersen first created his own web to help define areas that the children might explore. Next he looked for a provocation to start the unit. He read about the famous “Blues Eyes-Brown Eyes” experiments of the late 1960’s. He
also carefully read the criticism of this experiment, which was initially done with third graders. Mr. Petersen planned a simulation, which modified the “Blues Eyes-Brown Eyes” experiment to make it more suitable for young children.

Simulation

Friday morning began like many other Fridays in the second grade classroom at the Cutler Jewish Day School. The children came into the room and placed their things in the appropriate locations as they always did and then went to the “First Thought Board” where they would find their morning assignment. That morning’s “First Thought” was to continue working on their Writer’s Workshop pieces that they had begun the day’s prior. Everything proceeded normally until Mr. Petersen invited all the children except two, to the carpet for Morning Meeting.

Mr. Petersen explained that today was Blond Day and that those with blond hair will have more time to work on their writing. He explained that it was just a decision he made. He also explained to a young boy who proclaimed he also had blond hair, that his hair just wasn’t blond enough. “It is more of a dirty blond or darker blond,” said Mr. Petersen. He went on to say that it wasn’t a big deal; they just got two extra minutes to work.

Understanding the need for children to be active and the connection between brain and body, Mr. Petersen often does energizing movement activities in class to increase learning potential. That morning’s energizer was Plank Count. The students assumed the plank position and skip counted while tapping their hands on the ground. Mr. Petersen gave the two blond girls the option to join in or not.

Immediately after the energizer the second grade moved into Math Workshop. They had been investigating blue prints and working on creating scale drawings in preparation for a house building project. Today the students were going to explore a part of the school. Using rulers and tape measurers the students were to measure and draw the school area with a scale of one foot equals one box on the graph paper. Mr. Petersen asked the students to grab their math journals and head to the door. He casually invited the blond children to the front of the line. This was such a shock since there was no previous attention paid to line order in second grade. Children had many questions and concerns.

Student Reaction

Mr. Petersen had spent many hours developing a classroom community of respect and equity. He strived to allow each student a sense of value and confidence. Through discussion, mutual respect, risk taking, and allowing students to have a voice, the second grade had developed a strong community. Needless to say the idea that two students were getting treated differently because of their hair color did not go unnoticed. Immediately there were questions and rumblings. When the two girls were given a chance to write, the students commented; “Why do they get to work on
their stories?” “That’s not fair.” “But I’m not done with my story.” The uneasiness that was palpable. As the morning progressed students said, “No way!” “That’s so not fair.” “This isn’t right.”

After allowing the blond students to be line leaders students shouted, “This is not fair!” “You’re being mean to us.” “What makes them so special? They just have different hair. It’s not my fault I don’t have blond hair!” The emotions were running high. Mr. Petersen minimized the importance of each individual event with comments like “It is just a spot in line, it doesn’t matter where you are” and “We are all going to the same place. What does it matter if they are first?” One student in line said, “I don’t want to be treated differently. I don’t want to be part of the group that is not blond!” It was really beginning to resonate with the students what it felt like to be treated differently for something as natural as hair color. Mr. Petersen noted at this point the student feelings of injustice were turning to anger. Students commented that they did not want to come back tomorrow, another student stood away from the group in protest and said “I refuse to do this anymore. I will not!” Recognizing that the students might begin to feel true distress Mr. Petersen ended the simulation.

Debriefing

The second grade had been transformed into a segregated class with feelings of injustice and anger. Mr. Petersen began with a simple question; “How do you feel?” The students emphatically stated, “Horrible. I feel horrible.” “I would rather be run over with a trash truck than to be treated like that!” “I don’t want to come back to school ever again.” “You can’t treat us like that because we look different. It’s not fair. You’re mean!” These comments were answered with questions from Mr. Petersen. “Tell me more about treating someone differently because they look different than you?” Mr. Petersen inquired. “Do you think it is right that some people get privileges because they were born a certain way?” He continued. “Can you imagine what it would be like to be treated that way for a whole day? For a week? For your life?”

Mr. Petersen asked the children to reflect on what they knew about African Americans during segregation and even in present times. Children had some knowledge about historical times that black people were not allowed common rights and separated from white people. The class discussed the Jim Crow laws, Segregation, and Martin Luther King’s fight for Civil Rights. The class carefully broke down the reactions to this morning’s simulation and compared them to those that occurred to non-white people and especially African Americans.

They children mostly talked about anger. Many students agreed that they were mad that they did not get to do what the others got to do. They were mostly angry with Mr. Petersen for making the rules, but some were angry with the blond haired girls for being able to do things others weren’t because of their blonde hair. They voiced that Mr. Petersen was not treating them kindly by making those rules and one student said that the two blondes should have refused to do it. The children discussed both their emotions and actions they wanted to take.

The blonde haired students spoke about how the simulation made them feel. At first they were happy and excited. They felt empowered at the privileges they were receiving. Slowly those feelings turned to sadness as they felt bad for the others and felt like the others were mad at them. They did not want the attention anymore but just didn’t say anything. They reported almost feeling responsible for the pain and anger caused to the other students. Mr. Petersen highlighted the word privilege and encouraged the children to share more about this concept.

This conversation lead into a discussion of what some of the students did as a result of the simulation. Some students talked to friends and said negative things quietly. Others said what they felt out loud. They were bold and used their words to express their feelings to Mr. Petersen. They said things like “You shouldn’t treat us this way!”
This conversation led into a discussion of what some of the students did as a result of the simulation. Some students talked to friends and said negative things quietly. Others said what they felt out loud. They were bold and used their words to express their feelings to Mr. Petersen. They said things like “You shouldn’t treat us this way!” And “Nobody likes to be left out.” Mr. Petersen reminded the class of one child’s actions during the simulation. He stood and refused to participate. The class discussed what people who felt they were not being treated equally every day might do. The class discussed different historical outcomes of oppression and how they compared to the reaction of the class.

Connections to Literature and Math

Over the next several days the second grade dove into books like As Good as Anybody, Child of the Civil Rights Movement, Through my Eyes, and The Other Side, and continued to compare their simulation experience with the experience of those characters in the books making text to world connections. It was amazing how the students drew parallels to the situations and began to really uncover some painful truths about our countries history and current practices. The strongest connections were to the children in history. Through My Eyes, written by Ruby Bridges was an excellent blend of narrative told by Ruby Bridges herself, primary sources, letters and interviews from people in that time period, and real pictures. The students asked questions in awe as the facts unrolled about the way Ruby was treated. “Why would someone threaten to poison her?” “Why did she need protection when she went to school?” “Why didn’t the other kids like her?”

The questions did not stop. The more they read the more they learned and the more they felt. Their civil rights illustrations were just a glimpse of their understanding. One picture showed smashed tomatoes on the wall behind Ruby on the way to school. Another had Rosa Parks sad faced on the bus prior to the Bus Boycott. A third had a powerful scene of marchers alongside Martin Luther King. After reading about and discussing the march to from Selma, Mr. Petersen used math workshop to invite students to calculate the distance from Selma to Montgomery. The children figured that the trip was 54 miles. The class went outside and calculated how long it took them to march one mile around the school. They then calculated the total time it would have taken them to march from Selma to Montgomery using their time of 28 minutes for a one mile hike. They were astonished to think of walking for 25.2 hours! It was hard enough for the one mile! Children realized the importance of rights that would cause people to march for a full day.

From Thought to Actions

Conversations of protest lead to class discussions about what changes the children would like to see at school. The children offered many ideas. Before long, signs had been created and a protest march began. Up and down the halls of the school second graders quietly marched to make a point. Students protested for things such as privileges for the younger children to go into the woods at recess (an activity to that point that was reserved for third through fifth
The Association for Constructivist Teaching
September Newsletter, v. 5, n. 2

graders), a class pet, more art and PE time, and more time on computers. Children recognized that they could make a statement through peaceful means. After protests and conversations the younger children were allowed to explore the woods. They also reflected how some “rights” were gained while other requests were denied.

The discussions went further as the children discussed why someone would want to be so mean to another person and resolved ways that they could act to counter this type of behavior.

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 NEWSLETTER … interviews, articles on practice, and book reviews Jan, May, Sept
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

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

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

Visit our Website: www.constructivistassociation.org

2015 Annual Conference will be hosted in the NJ / NYC area. 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 editor, Carolyn Hildebrandt, at carolyn.hildebrandt@uni.edu for more information.