

The Association for Constructivist Teaching

Spring 2017 Newsletter, v. 7. n. 1

From the President:

Dear ACT Members,

Happy 2017! We have a great ACT year going!

We have been working on updating our ACT communications. Thanks to our Technology Coordinator Kate Chechak, our Technology Consultant Christian Schmidt, President Elect Meir Muller for planning and setting up this work. We look forward to implementing these steps this spring! This team has expertise that moves ACT forward. Look forward to these announcements!

We look forward to a great conference in Fullerton, California October 19—21! Thanks to Tom Chiaromonte, Chris Lozon, Seun Chun Burbank and Elizabeth Echternach for their meetings and work to plan a great conference! Please see Tom's notes in this newsletter, and start making plans to attend ACT 2017!

Please propose conference presentations! We had amazing sessions last year.

Thanks to Jane Broderick for all her work on these newsletters over the years.

Enjoy this newsletter!

Carolyn Black

President

ACT Mission

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.

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

Visit our Website: www.constructivistassociation.org

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Association for Constructivist Teaching 34th Annual Conference
October 20 & 21, 2017
Fullerton College, Fullerton, CA



Conference Theme – Constructing Ideas in the Natural World

Fullerton College is conveniently located less than 20 miles from the John Wayne Airport (SNA) with rental car, shuttle van, taxi, Uber, and Lift services available, and less than a mile from the Fullerton Amtrak Station (FUL). This beautiful campus is in walking distance of trendy shopping, an array of wonderful restaurants and just a few minutes drive from all the attractions in Anaheim.

<http://www.visitheoc.com/things-to-do/attractions-and-activities/>

Conference Hotel:

<http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/laxfl-fullerton-marriott-at-california-state-university/>

This gathering is geared for teacher educators, classroom teachers, school administrators, education consultants, pre-service teachers, and all those who educate children. We seek presentations on research, theory, and practice of the constructivist approach to learning in all subject areas and for diverse populations. These may be in the form of workshops, paper presentations, or interactive panel discussions. We also welcome documentation boards, slide shows, or streaming videos demonstrating quality constructivist teaching and learning, which will be set up separately from the breakout sessions in the exhibit areas. A book concession table will be available for author/presenters who wish to sell their books.

This year, all presenters will be given the option to submit their work for peer-review to be considered for publication in a journal of conference proceedings.



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The Association for Constructivist Teaching invites proposals for breakout sessions of 75 minutes in length for the 2017 conference.

The ACT 2017 Proposal Deadline is June 1.

Click this link to access the Proposal Form.

<https://goo.gl/forms/Y35kv9pBRyRfEiKv2>

We look forward to receiving your Proposal. The Program Team will review your Proposal, and Program Chair Meir Muller will contact you. We appreciate your interest in ACT and look forward to seeing you in Fullerton!!

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- *Published three times annually, sent to members, and housed on ACT the members' only page.*
 - *Send us your "From the Field" stories to share with our members.*
 - *Submit news of publications, presentations and creative activities to share with our members.*

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.

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

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BOARD MEMBER INTERVIEW *with President Elect, Meir Muller*

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

JB Can you share a bit about your background and what brought you into your profession?

MM: I am an ordained rabbi, and when in rabbinical college I went back and forth between young children and senior citizens, in my community service within that program. On graduating I was offered an opportunity in Columbia, South Carolina to open a preschool for the Jewish community. Initially, the growth of the school went well, yet I didn't understand enough about early childhood development and educational practices to successfully lead the curriculum, which early on varied from room to room. This led me to get a master's degree in early childhood at the University of South Carolina, followed by a doctorate in early childhood. My class was one of the last at the university to receive a PhD in early childhood prior to the degree changing over to teaching and learning.



I continued as the principal of the Cutler Jewish Day School when I also began to teach at the university as an adjunct. In 2012, I applied for a clinical position when one opened and have served in a clinical role at the university since, teaching and serving as an assistant to the Department Chair. Through this merger of the two groups, with students in the Day school and the students at the university, I engage in teaching and research with preservice teachers and young children within and across the two contexts.

My doctorate and lens for all these years was Piagetian constructivism. My advisor, Irma Vanscoy, knew DeVries and others who had studied with Piaget, so it was a natural fit. My dissertation research focused on using Piaget's three types of knowledge to determine children's understanding of historical time.

I started teaching preschool for children with high needs, typically funded through Title 1, or Head Start, or the State of Virginia Preschool Initiative programs. After about 6 years one of my former professors contacted me and asked me to come to JMU on a one year teaching contract as a teacher in residence. So I did that one year and loved it and decided not to go back to the preschool classroom and after 3 years I went on to get my PhD at UVA. I am now in my 17th year coordinating the program I started in, helping students in the same situation I was in, starting a second career.

JB: Can you share information about your teaching (ideas on how to share - what makes it unique to you, how does it inform your research, how does it align with current trends in education and constructivist pedagogy / principles)?

MM: My teaching is constructivist in nature. I use very few power points with an emphasis on hands-on experiences. In an early childhood (1st-3rd grade) Social Studies methods course I guide the college students in processes that help the young children construct an understanding of the monuments around the S.C. State House. The college students are learning about racism and segregationists tied to the men represented in these monuments, like Strom Thurmond and Ben Tillman. This is new information they were unaware of, that many of the monuments are of people who owned slaves or vowed to never have segregated schools or public facilities. As they develop

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questions to guide the learning of young children they are experiencing disequilibrium, assimilation, and accommodation, and are then able to observe these same processes among the children.

In my university it is somewhat unique to be so involved with young children. For two years students in my classes use clinical interviews, modeled after Piaget's methods. The college students use visual images with children in interviews to understand what the children construct about certain concepts.

Constructivism and culturally relevant pedagogy are the two theoretical models that frame my teaching. Using constructivism the goal is to provide learners with information, ask questions, and allow them to move from assimilation to accommodation. The culturally relevant critical race theory is a critical lens for preservice students to critique every book and teaching artifact to determine who is being celebrated and who is being left out. In my research, I am also look at that.

I am currently looking at standardized test as colonized practices. Colonialism referring to when in the process of one country conquering another it takes away the culture and language of the original people. Tests bring a whole new language to new teachers entering the field, in a forceful way that rewards them with money if they do well.

In another study stemming from the two theoretical frames of constructivism and critical race theory, I ask the question of what happens when preservice teachers are in an internship and they hear racist language? What do they experience? What occurs? This is a cross cultural study I am implementing with a colleague in Israel, where there are migrant workers and children from African countries. In the internships students have reported hearing poor language spoken in reference to these children and families by the mostly white, middle class teachers, which is similar to reports I receive from the mostly white middle class students in my classes who are interning in schools where the population of children is 45% African American.

Regarding recently completed research, I have a piece soon to be published in ACT's the Constructivist, and am rewriting another article for submission.

JB: So you have already told us about your research. Can you share about your service? (Same as above)

MM: I founded a student organization at the university two years ago. REACH stands for Race, Equity, Advocacy in Childhood. The students in the early childhood program at USC are 90% white, female, middle class, and as I stated earlier, the public school population is 45% African American. This organization was developed to improve the college student's ability to better serve children who are historically underserved in the school system. I expected the group would meet monthly but they are so engaged! We meet every other week, we often have thirty minute presentations from faculty, and we take field trips. For example, we just saw the film *Hidden Figures* together.

I serve as an editor for NAEYC's Young Children and books, I oversee graduate teaching assistants at the university, and I serve as the liaison for all adjunct faculty. In the latter role I send out weekly newsletters and help them with their teaching, or any issues they experience in the field.

MM Final Statement:

I am excited to be the President Elect for ACT and I look forward to our Fullerton, CA conference in October. ACT always hosts a great conference with inspiring presenters.

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Socrates Café – Using Socratic Dialogue as a Student-Centered Method of Teaching

From the Field Article:

Written by Randa Dunlap and Jane Broderick in collaboration with Katherine Cadwell

Introduction

Students at Harwood Union High School, located in Duxbury, Vermont, have been engaged in participating in a method of using Socratic dialogue to reach a deeper level of understanding. Teacher Katherine Cadwell uses the Socratic Method in her Introduction to Philosophy class, as well as the bi-monthly Socrates Café meetings where she and her students train their peers to be student facilitators. Student facilitators then conduct these Socratic discussions with their peers, teachers, and other community members. Cadwell is currently working with a small cadre of faculty and students to introduce this pedagogy at her school in a systematic way.

The Facilitator

At the 2016 ACT Conference in Houston, Cadwell was accompanied by two of her students: Kaia Coumier, junior, and Evan Beaulieu, senior. Together, they guided the audience to participate in a Socratic dialogue, where a specific question was selected, and participants sought to reach a critical, deep understanding of the material at hand. Cadwell, a teacher at Harwood Union High School since 1981, has been using this method of teaching in her classroom for over 30 years, and she believes it is necessary to find strategies to truly engage students, making them active participants in their own learning. She will be delivering an upcoming presentation at the New England Regional Council for the Social Studies on Tuesday, April 4th, 2017. Cadwell has also been awarded the Rowland Foundation Fellowship, for investigating the implementation of this important process with high school students.



What is Socratic Dialogue?

Socratic dialogue is a type of pedagogy that places students at the center of the educational process by fundamentally shifting the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship. Instead of the traditional teacher-directed style of teaching, the teacher serves as the “facilitator,” placing ownership and initiative for learning on the students. Typically, a discussion will be facilitated, followed by a debriefing process. This method of teaching and learning is transformative as students, instead of simply being told the correct answer to a question or problem, learn to delve deeply into a meaningful matter as they seek the answers through emerging conversations with peers and the facilitator. The Harwood Union High students who learn to become facilitators of Socratic Dialogue introduce this method of teaching and learning as they engage participants in Socratic dialogue within the school and the local community.

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Theoretical Framework

Of course, the inspiration for this method derived from the renowned philosopher Socrates, who believed that “education is the kindling of a flame, not the lighting of a vessel.” Thus, that is exactly what the teacher as the facilitator strives to do: to kindle a flame within the students, enabling them to reach a higher level of engagement with the material while enhancing and strengthening their critical thinking skills.

One could also connect this method to constructivism, where students are active participants in their own learning within a meaningful context supported by the teacher/facilitator. The type of questioning used during the facilitation process also correlates with the theory of constructivism: the teacher is helping the students to reach a higher level of metacognition, or helping them to think about their thinking.

The seating arrangement for Socratic Dialogue places participants in a circle—rather than the traditional rows of chairs and desks all facing toward the front of the room and the teacher. This structure positions individuals for more of a social learning experience, which is supported by Vygotsky’s theory that we learn through our conversations with others.

Hearing the Students’ Voices

In order to gain a clearer understanding of how the Socratic dialogue is implemented in the classroom, below are some of the students’ thoughts and reflections:

JB - What were your first impressions?

- K – I actually didn’t know what Socratic Dialogue was, but I walked into one of Kathy’s groups. I walked in, everyone was sitting in a circle, not very common, and they were discussing something...
- It was very scary at first, they didn’t raise hands...Everyone was sharing responses, and this was something *I hadn’t experienced before*.
- E – When I took Kathy’s course in 10th grade called “Three Democracies,” through that we found my interest for history / philosophy...and asked me to join her café with her current studies.

At the time, I was pretty shy...I stayed quiet, was really unsure what to think of it in a circle, with just one question, not in rows with the teacher in front and a piece of paper. We just delved deeply into one question which led me to deeper problem solving and more questions. *I was inspired*.

JB: How did you develop in your skill with the method that led you to become facilitators?

- K – The first time I just sat, listened, and tried to absorb...the conversation goes very quickly, and you have to absorb everything. I started to go every week. At first you can only take everything in because



Experiencing Socratic Dialogue as facilitated by Kathy Cadwell (far right) and her two high school students Evan (second from left) and Kaia (not pictured).

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it's so much. You take in the process and build on that in a short time. This went on for about a year...eventually we collaborated with another school to facilitate on all school dialogue. I got to use this on my own...really challenging myself by facilitating...

- E – I grew the skill of facilitator by throwing myself into it. It was kind of uncomfortable in the beginning, I just threw myself into it. Going through frequently adding into it, every once in a while of having my friends and mainly Kathy helped me increase my dialogue skill and monologue.

JB: What is it like to be a facilitator?

- K - is actually pretty different because you have to immerse but you can't contribute...actually, you have to participate very carefully and thoughtfully. Can't just be scrappy, off on a tangent, you have to set the example to guide others. At my last conversation I tracked the conversation as a diagram, on my notepad. When you develop skill, you can really guide by only entering two times. You have an outside perspective.
- E – For me, it's like I said...it's different in the beginning, but at the same time, I have a blast. Super fun, it excites me. To be able to sit with all these different people with different lives, to be able to delve deeper, with the different direction of all these minds is fun and exciting for me.

JB: What groups have you worked with to implement these dialogues? Share a few highlights from each.

- K – for me, two types of highlights. The raw happiness of being able to say something about something you really care about. It's a safe space where you can speak freely. Exciting to build on my experience and experiment.
- E – Favorite highlight that I love when it happens, when a conversation is really productive. When we can really delve into a question, I get to think on some level...

JB: How has the Socratic Dialogue impacted you personally, your academic experience? Your plans for your future?

- K – I think in the beginning, my experience with it, I wasn't very confident in myself. I was timid about expressing my opinion. I would really like to continue doing this in college and after. One senior from last year is now holding this kind of dialogue at her college. I want to do this...
- E – The effect that this has on me is you can take it and apply it to other classes, to ask other questions. The idea of being...you can really apply this concept of questioning and delving more deeply to academia or life with others personally.

Special thanks to doctoral student Randa Dunlap, from East Tennessee State University for her work with writing and editing for this ACT Newsletter.