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## Letter from the editor

In this edition you will find two articles that describe current practices in Constructivist education. You will also find interviews with three women whose influence on Constructivist education cannot be overstated.

The annual ACT conference will be in Birmingham, Alabama, on October 23-24, 2020. The focus of the conference is Constructing a View of the Future: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Advocacy. Attendees will share exciting ideas and activities from their own classrooms and will examine the roots of Constructivist education. These perspectives will help us push forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as advocates for children and for our profession.



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Aesthetic Education as a Bridge to Multicultural Counseling: A social  
constructivist approach

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### Abstract

This article focuses on the use of an aesthetic education approach integrated into masters degree coursework for counselor trainees as a way to develop an appreciation for the value of diverse perspectives and to build skills for working in multicultural schools.

**KEY WORDS:** Aesthetic education, multicultural competence, counselor education

### Introduction

The aesthetic education pond in which I have been swimming has been filled with teacher educators. Teacher educators relish the work, and their mission and motivation in the use of the arts is understandable. As a school counselor educator working in an urban setting, I have alternative motives for bringing a focus on aesthetic education into the counselor education curriculum. School counselors engage in different ways with teachers, parents, students and staff through direct counseling and consultation services. For counselors, their diverse, multicultural, multilingual clients are ultimately the works of art with whom they must engage and make meaning (Deveaux, 2011). My goal in using an aesthetic education approach is for my students, the school counselor (SC) trainees, to take the knowledge, awareness and skills of encountering unfamiliar, various works of art and to transfer and generalize this learning to encounters with diverse clients. Through integrating an aesthetic education approach into coursework, students will experientially have practice in how to approach learning without prior knowledge, to look

and notice what is to be noticed, to collaborate and develop knowledge by listening to others' points of views, and to live with the ambiguity of not knowing (Holzer, 2005).

This article presents the use of the arts and aesthetic education in graduate courses in counselor education, sharing examples of how imagination, creativity, diversity, inclusivity and culture are brought to educational experiences. The approach develops authentic educational experiences and meaning making through inquiry and collaboration to promote multicultural understanding and empathy into the practice of personal and family counseling and consultation. What follows is a social constructivist rationale for including experiential, arts based aesthetic education into the teaching of future urban school counselors. There is a description of the process in planning, preparing, introducing and providing these experiences to classes of SC trainees enrolled in a counselor education/school counseling masters degree program. Examples will be provided along with possible resources.

### SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST PEDAGOGY

From a sociocultural constructivist lens learning takes place within a context of cultural and social participation (Muller, Bucheister, & Boutte, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978). The learner is active and the interpreter of information. Cognitive development and affective, relational and cultural contexts accompany the activities in which people live (Muller, et al., 2017), and culture has a central part in cognitive and social emotional functioning (Gergen, 1985). According to Dewey (1934), education needs to be something that happens in the natural environment and sociocultural world, and students need to actually be a part of that experience. Learning is considered a social activity, and when people have experiences that support cooperative interaction, from a social constructivist perspective, the stage is set for learning to occur. In adopting this view the students themselves can be motivated to authentically engage in learning,

collaborate and develop an appreciation for multiple perspectives (Granger, 2006, Deveaux, 2007). As Muller et al. (2017) points out, it is the nature of the experience and the structure that informs the learning.

The aesthetic education experiences planned and designed around works of art can be considered a culturally organized, interactive activity influencing SC trainees' learning. Experiential education has been considered a vital aspect of educating those who are entering into service professions, including counseling (Ziff & Beamish, 2004). Self-reflection and creativity are complements to be included when preparing curriculum ((Provine & Lemberger, 2014; Warren, Steck, Douglas, & Lambert, 2010). Part of the demand on instructors is the necessity and value of integrating new information and knowledge in order for students to proceed to application outside of the classroom. Constructivist methods aim for students to transfer what they are learning by being able to relate to what will be real life experiences (Uhrmacher, Conrad, & Moyoye, 2013). It has been suggested that when in the actual role of counseling, trainees may relinquish empathy and creativity and try to find a correct answer (Guiffrida, 2005) or give advice. This is highly relevant for school counselors working in urban settings where students come from many different cultural backgrounds and building a relationship and expressing genuine empathy are fundamental theoretical underpinnings in establishing a counseling relationship (Raskin, Rogers, & Witty, 2008; Rogers, 1961). Being an effective multiculturally competent school counselor means viewing students in the context of their own histories and lived experiences and appreciating a variety of narratives that may be very different from one's own (Martinez, Dye, & Gonzalez, 2017). Social construction provides the framework for a counselor educator to create contexts that lead to the development of such competencies (Nelson, 2015). Related is a key instructional component to create experiences in

coursework that can build confidence in implementing what the expected learning outcomes are for the candidate, learning outcomes that include being able to work collaboratively, be non-judgmental and exhibit multicultural awareness (Rogers, 1961). Part of training future counselors is to develop their appreciation for engaging clients in the creative process of making meaning in their own lives (Hansen, 2002), and this includes being capable of appreciating multiple perspectives. The use of the arts (dance performances, visual arts, music, story telling, film) is an aspect of this experiential instructional strategy used to foster openness to closely observing without making judgments, to experience empathy, and to learn to appreciate, utilize and gain from the viewpoints of others. The arts are a “virtual” reality, and a place where mixed emotions can be experienced in a safe learning environment (Russell, 2017). There is increased demand on counselors to develop standardized programs while at the same time acknowledging the ever-growing cultural, linguistic and economic diversity in schools. Narrowing ways of knowing, learning and teaching can impact and limit inquiry, cultural sensitivity, imagination and educational practice. Taking a social constructivist viewpoint can redirect attention to “reclaiming an ethos of inquiry and possibility in the daily acts of seeing, hearing, becoming, belonging, and storying through which knowing and knowledge are enacted” (Vasudevan, p. 1155).

A constructivist pedagogical approach in counselor education equalizes the classroom dynamic between the faculty member and students and facilitates a collaborative model of education, where both SC trainees and counselor educators are active in the learning process (Hoffman, 2008). To include unfamiliar, arts-based experiences at a point in the semester, allows, as Friere (1993) advocates, for students and their faculty members to actively engage. It has been suggested that asking good questions can be as or more effective than providing good

answers (Griffith & Frieden, 2000). A guided aesthetic education approach involves questioning and promotes deep noticing. These experiences and the reflective thinking and collaborative participation both inside and outside of the classroom, create opportunities for trainees to experience empathy, analyze, and explore alternative points of view. The definition of constructivism in education generally relates to educational activities where students make personal sense of subject matter, where they construct meaning by drawing connections between their own experiences and the course content, and where the instructor's best efforts are summoned to invite the students to participate (Henderson, 2001). By valuing and validating the students' own lives and experiences, my goal as the instructor is to create and foster a course atmosphere meaningfully respectful of cultures and of differences.

#### The Aesthetic Education Approach and Counselor Education

Little has been published discussing the use of an aesthetic education approach as a pedagogical practice in the education of school counselors. Using the arts is a way to promote creative thinking as part of teaching, where students can analyze, ask questions and explore alternative points of view. Pedagogy is the interaction between teaching and learning, and critical pedagogy moves us to a deepening of our perspective on teaching and learning (Wink, 2000). Critical pedagogy asks that our classrooms and learning environments are places where we move ahead of being tolerant of differences or of what is unfamiliar. The learning environment is to become a place of acceptance, respect and celebration of diversity, and not just diversity of race, class, culture, and gender. It becomes a place where we learn about, accept, respect, and celebrate the diversity of thought (Wink, 2000).

The practice of integrating the arts into this approach of educating prospective school counselors draws on the philosophy of aesthetic education and is based on my work with Lincoln

Center Education (LCE), formerly Lincoln Center Institute, the educational arm of the prominent arts organization in New York City. The vision of LCE is that “the arts cultivate a unique skill that is indispensable for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: problem solving, collaboration, communication, imagination, and creativity” (Lincoln Center Education, n.d.). According to Maxine Greene (2001), who was the philosopher in residence at Lincoln Center, aesthetic education asks learners to move off of what is taken for granted. It requires new and various ways of knowing, seeing and feeling “in a conscious endeavor to impose different orders upon experiences ” (p.5).

Based on the writings of such educators as John Dewey and Maxine Greene, aesthetic education extends the tradition of progressive education into the world of the arts. It holds that works of art provide an inexhaustible resource for exploration and reflection, and an understanding based on the cultural context in which the artwork was created. Each individual – a child as well as adult – has the capacity to explore and respond to any given work of art in ways that challenge preconceived notions, stimulate fresh insights, and encourage deeper understandings (Lincoln Center Education, 2001). In this climate of a social constructivist environment for teaching and learning, the instructor and the students collaborate both inside and outside of the classroom in experiences that include art making and interaction with specific works of art. The goal is for all to strengthen their abilities for abstract and critical thinking, problem solving, developing empathy and benefitting from multiple perspectives, stimulating imagination, and promoting learning in other disciplines (Lincoln Center Education, 2019). Aesthetic education is not arts education. It is using imagination in seeing, understanding and appreciating works of art, whether music, dance, drama, visual, or film. Aesthetics is where one is “concerned about perception, sensation, imagination, and how they relate to knowing, understanding, and feeling about the world” (Greene, 2001, p. 5).

In the summer of 2009, I participated in what would be the first of many trainings at LCE. These trainings are offered to educators nationally and internationally and consist of putting educators through aesthetic education experiences similar to what we would be doing with our students. Unlike many of the teachers in attendance, I would not be returning to a K-12 school or to a teacher education classroom. In my case, I would be taking what I was learning back to my nationally accredited school counselor education program. I was reflecting on the relevance of aesthetic education in my discipline while I was participating in seminars with Maxine Greene, doing art making, engaging with works of art, and collaborating with teaching artists and colleagues. I experienced that bringing curiosity into the realm of the arts has the potential to advance learning under collaborative and non-judgmental conditions. Participants' thoughts and considerations are acknowledged and validated. The experiences are engaging and focus on what is "not known" and where knowledge is developed through active listening, observation, reflection, conversation, and questions. This resonated for me as a counselor educator. When working with clients, professional counselors need to be comfortable with the stance of "not knowing". The use of art has a history primarily as used in art therapy in the context of mental health counseling (Denny, 1969), and there is also advocacy for the healing powers of music, drawing, journaling, and dance and movement (Gladding, 2006, 2016), but little in the integration of aesthetic education in the training of school counselors. I realized that by working with the arts as part of counselor training experiences, prospective school counselors could see, experience and appreciate that their own perspective is not the *only* perspective.

Dewey (1938/2008), a believer in active learning, thought that instructors could not just stand aside if they wanted to promote learning in their students; they needed to participate. He saw instruction as not just providing information or looking to do assessments. I find that a level

of trust develops when the instructor authentically shares in the activity, when the instructor is also a learner. In educating SC trainees, many of whom have employment histories as teachers, I remind them that as teachers, they are content experts in their classrooms. As effective counselors, while they have mastery over many competencies, they must be comfortable to assume positions of learners. SC trainees frequently enter the masters program wanting to use their own experiences, histories, or cultures, to make assumptions and impose their own beliefs when entering relationships with their clients. Counseling itself is an active learning experience, and the counselor must be able to learn from their clients how to see and appreciate diverse perspectives and people coming from different cultures, each with different histories.

#### INTEGRATING AESTHETIC EDUCATION IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION

One way to appreciate all that goes on in school is to see schools as a significant place for preparing people who are ready and able to understand and participate fully in a democratic society (Michelli, 2005). The arts can have a profound impact on people, and students in schools have much to gain from experiences with the arts. We cannot ignore that in the past decade as a standardized test preparation and test-taking environment overtook the school calendars, allocation of time and resources for the arts diminished or even disappeared. The implications of this are that we have school counselors who themselves have not had experiences with the arts as a central aspect of their own education. It is important to relate one's own academic experiences in counselor education to one's own lived life. For SC trainees, however, the vacuum of any experiential arts based curriculum overlooks and limits potential opportunities for developing problem solving, critical thinking, empathy and meaning making.

In the counselor educational literature, there is the imperative that the school counselor must be multiculturally competent no matter what the intervention or presenting problem. This is

vital when the counselor wants to be helpful through consultation with teachers and needs to understand the perspectives of the teachers and the classroom situation as well as the various perspectives of others who may be involved in the issues at hand. While accrediting organizations such as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) and the Council on the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) require counselor educators and school counselors to be multiculturally competent, educational training programs frequently work at fitting in something related to diversity in an already crowded curriculum or course syllabi. Sometimes material related to diversity is distributed throughout the course of study, and while this may result in multiculturalism becoming more visible, it is not a meaty element in the curriculum or pedagogical design (Korn-Bursztyn, 2005). Banks (1996) proposed multicultural education as transformative, and Korn-Bursztyn (2005) sees an appreciation of cultural diversity as being allied with school reform, being student centered and creating a school climate of respect.

Educating prospective counselors is a thought-provoking undertaking that involves developing coursework and curricula that address and meet state and national standards. In order to meet objectives, courses are densely packed with readings, writing and on-line assignments as well as videotaping in order to practice and develop counseling knowledge and skills. The core standards of CACREP (2016) require that counselor education programs educate students about social and cultural diversity. The standards also require “experiential learning activities designed to foster students’ understanding of self and culturally diverse clients” (CACREP, 2009, pp. 9-10). It is in this age of standardized curriculum that I see the arts as a way to bring back imagination and creativity into the lives and learning of prospective school counselors. Experiential learning has a long history of being valued in the classroom, as has the reflection on

these experiences (Autry & Walker, 2011; Dewey, 1934; Magnuson & Norem, 2002). At the same time, it is incumbent upon educators to promote active engagement in educational discovery and critical thinking (Friere, 1993). While not routinely included, the study of and involvement with the arts can be a valuable vehicle to advance the understanding of diversity and social justice (Greene, 2005), and to engage counselor education candidates in active, experiential ways. As part of an aesthetic education component in counselor education, reflection along with art-making and direct experience with an art form can be brought into coursework in order to develop multicultural competence and the appreciation of multiple perspectives. When working with clients and helping them make meaning in their own lives, counselors are not to impose their own beliefs. The counselor is there to be able to see the world through the client's eyes and form an empathic relationship in order for help and healing to occur (Rogers, 1961). Just as clients need to feel safe with their counselors, the atmosphere for learning is also designed to be safe. Creating new avenues and opportunities for trainees to go out of their comfort zones and confront places and happenings that are new to them is similar to their future work engaging with a new client or being introduced to a parent or family members with whom the counselors are expected to connect yet about whom they know little. These new engagements can be challenging for the clients, the family members and the counselors and can inspire varying aspects of anticipation.

#### Aesthetic Education in a Museum

Using the arts in a social constructivist way, students are introduced into the work of artists through their own art making and reflections. I prepare for this by developing a pedagogical line of inquiry on how will the experiential and reflective activities associated with a specific work of art impact the development of SC trainees' multicultural knowledge, awareness

and skills, including developing their capacities for self reflection and valuing multiple perspectives. The quality of the interaction matters, and that is why the planning for an aesthetic education event is thoughtfully considered. In this example, as a class we were going to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Since we were going to visit the valued art of an unfamiliar culture, connecting to the SC trainees own cultures and communities became a step in preparing for the experience. My thoughts were that all of us have ancestors from away places and times. I wanted to allow for entering into the works of art of a people from far away (in this case it would be Papua, New Guinea), to entice and enable us to develop our empathic capacity and make connections across time and distance. Prior to the trip, we engaged in an art making activity. Everyone was provided with rectangular paper, crayons and markers and asked to symbolically draw aspects that they valued of their own cultural and background. We hung them about the room, and everyone walked around and noticed what each person had done. What symbols might have similarities and what differences do they see? How do color, shape and space lend meaning to their own works of art? There is no judging or analyzing of each other's productions. The SC trainees are advised to look, and notice by saying "*I see* in your art", not "your symbol means", learning to take responsibility and remain open to different ways of seeing. This was the approach that Nancy Rogers, the daughter of Carl Rogers, took when she developed the Person-Centered Expressive Therapy Institute, although her goal was on treatment, not training (Rogers, 1996). The students use the process of noticing without judging, of comparing and working together to share perspectives, and ask questions to discover and illuminate their understanding of the works of art. These are all skills that a multiculturally competent school counselor needs to develop in working with diverse populations in schools.

This is a collaborative endeavor; the trainees and I work together in exploring and learning. The power differential so common in graduate classrooms is diminished because the goal is developing knowledge and competence. Because of the emphasis on appreciating imagination and creativity, and how being non-judgmental enhances learning, students find this arts-infused aspect of the course motivating and satisfying.

In this example the visit was to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, specifically to the Oceana exhibit hall. This is an unfamiliar space, and entering definitely evokes a perceptual reaction. The space is very large, and along with several extremely tall, not generally recognizable sculptural pieces, there is a huge Kwomo ceiling replica in the center, and that is the work of art I chose for our first experience. The SC trainees are given no prior knowledge, since the point here is to see, to notice, to question, to be curious, to reflect and to collaborate. A goal is to be comfortable and safe in “not knowing” and being open to learning and discovery. One student jumped in to say it was African. It is not, however; it is from Papua New Guinea and a reflection of the culture there. This was a quick demonstration of how we easily can make assumptions and that slowing down and becoming a learner is a valued characteristic in a multiculturally competent counselor. In the initial stage, students are asked to focus on deeply noticing, on reflecting, suspending judgment and collaborating. All these activities relate to the educational goals and objectives in the course. Everyone had brought their own art work to the museum. Before seeing the Kwomo ceiling, we gathered in an educational space so everyone could reflect on their pieces and then put their “panels” together as a collective, similar to what they would be seeing in the gallery.

Pictured are a group of students gathered and looking at their drawings. Then they began to assemble them together.



The Oceana gallery and  
Kwoma Ceiling, New Guinea  
Metropolitan Museum Art



Students are observing the ceiling, full of many patterns, animals, and drawings representative of the culture of New Guinea. We would each choose one of the panels and draw it. Then in small groups we would come together and point out what each one saw, compare notes, notice how another member of the group would see something different and how that could be possible. After conversation, we then each looked again, opening our eyes to seeing new patterns and connections. What was striking was how much everyone could appreciate the perspectives of another, opening their eyes to seeing something they had not seen before. Just being under this

ceremonial community structure from New Guinea was evocative. From a social constructivist perspective, in conversation and interactive reflection there is a way to process different points of view (Cottone & Hayes, 2001). This was truly multiple perspective taking in action.

Next we moved to another gallery to view a mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century power figure from the Democratic Republic of the Congo made of wood, metal, paint, and resin (Nkisi N'Khoni: Mangaaka, Metropolitan Museum of Art). One exercise we conducted in front of this figure was for SC trainees to volunteer to physically assume the position of the power figure. What did it feel like? Did it change what we observed, i.e. bringing the physicality of the figure into even more focus? As a counselor, noting and sometimes assuming clients' body language is an important skill to further understanding and aid empathy. Here was a chance to experience what that felt like.



It is interesting to note that the power of a pose is addressed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by Amy Cuddy (2012, 2015). See her Ted Talk, *Your body language may shape who you are* at [https://www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_shapes\\_who\\_you\\_are?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=en). Note that the relevance of a pose and body posture and its impact on attitude, bearing, and behavior is a valuable tool in a counselor's ability to understand and make connections with the people with whom they are working. School counselors are taught that their observation skills include observing how clients carry themselves and what messages their physical appearances convey.

The final work of art we all visited was a smaller 19<sup>th</sup> century figure from the Congo. Again students were invited to look, observe, and assume the position of the figure. Most interesting was the revelation that this was the equivalent of a counselor in Africa. SC trainees are taught counseling skills that including a range of "attending behaviors", and these were demonstrated in the position of this 19<sup>th</sup> century African sculpture: good eye contact, thoughtful attention, a body position that appears calm and ready to engage in a helping relationship.



We concluded our museum visit by coming together as a group to debrief. What was a key idea that we came away with from the experience? How did noticing deeply, asking questions, sharing through conversation and making connections with the works of art enhance participants' appreciation of the value of community across cultures?

For this experience we visited a museum. Another way would be for a work of art to be brought into the classroom by accessing it through digital media or using a photograph or even a picture book or a film. . Similar aesthetic education experiences can be introduced to evoke in the students a way of learning that is based on collaboration, meaning making, observation, and appreciating multiple perspectives.

Another example: "Dramatic Escape" on campus

Rehabilitation Through The Arts (RTA) was founded by Katherine Vockins in 1996 in Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, New York and now operates in five men's and women's, maximum and medium security New York State prisons. The documentary, *Dramatic Escape*, was based on the work of this organization that brings the theater arts into the lives of those incarcerated. The night before the showing on campus, I discussed this film and dialogued with the students in my classes. Two of the actors to appear in the documentary were on campus. They discussed how emotional, cathartic, difficult and rewarding the experiences were for them, and then they stayed for questions and answers with students. One of them had been incarcerated for 35 years, and he spoke of the value and importance, as well as initial reluctance of participating in the theater arts project. I think the empathy that arises from this film, and the hope and advocacy for "second chances" is evident. The students' reaction to the documentary

and to the debriefing was immediate and powerful. Several talked about experiences in their families and the issues of hopefulness, prejudices, opportunities and the role of counselors in social justice advocacy and in the restorative justice movement. Here are some of the comments of the students.

#### TRANSFER TO REAL LIFE SITUATION

“Although as a school counseling candidate I believe I already have a lot of empathy for others, seeing the documentary and hearing some of the individuals talk at the event further instilled in me that you never know anyone’s story, and even those in similar positions have very different stories...I think [this experience] will impact me going forward in my education, work and even everyday life.” (K. 2018)

#### NOTICING, REFLECTION AND TAKING ACTION

“What was powerful to me was when one speaker said in the panel that everyone needs a second chance and not a ‘do-over’...We need to find a way to give second chances so that people can learn to do something differently [rather] than repeat the same act.

Sometimes working with youth, we can quickly label students the “bad” kid...After hearing it so often, students begin to internalize it and think that it is true. Since the presentation, I pledged to really give students second chances...I know I have made mistakes in my past but now am more empathic...and seek to know more about students inside and outside of the classroom before quickly judging.” J.B. (2018)

#### EMPATHY

“This experience and the information given from the documentary increased my empathy to understand the experiences of others emotionally as well as intellectually. The energy in the room was so powerful. It was full of admiration, inspiration, acceptance and love. (A. 2018)

“...This presentation gave me a new dimension to the definition of empathy...I am now more empathic and understanding to an individual’s ability to grow and change...Educator’s and other school stakeholders give up too easily on difficult children or children that have specialized needs. By doing so, a road towards failure has been paved for them.” (P. 2018)

#### CONCLUSION

What is presented here is an innovative approach for the integration of aesthetic education experiences in a counselor education curriculum. This is a way for a social

constructivist counselor educator to enhance and enrich their teaching and create a participatory learning environment with school counselor trainees. My enthusiasm and connection to aesthetic education through training and experiences with Lincoln Center Education and with my students continues to resonate. I saw and felt the connection between experiencing valued works of art from every culture in the world and the experience of valuing people from every culture in the world. Aesthetic education provided those transferable learning opportunities to the real world experiences of working in diverse schools. A thoughtful plan to create lived experiences with students through interaction with works of art can be a way to connect to multicultural knowledge, awareness and skills.

## NOTES

### LINCOLN CENTER EDUCATION RESOURCES:

Lincoln Center Education in New York City provides arts and education programs to New York area public schools. Lincoln Center Education works with students and educators nationally and internationally. For more information:

[https://lincolncentereducation.org/?\\_ga=2.109827525.1333998646.1570463670-1648128090.1570463670](https://lincolncentereducation.org/?_ga=2.109827525.1333998646.1570463670-1648128090.1570463670)

Meet the artist school series:

“Curated especially for students, these one-hour performances offer your class the opportunity to see innovative theater, dance, and music. Following the performances, your students will have the chance to ask artists questions in an interactive talk back. Bring Lincoln Center into the classroom with FREE teacher resource guides created by Lincoln Center Education (LCE), acclaimed for its inquiry-based teaching methods to help make the most of a

class field trip before, during and after your visit. Tickets are \$10 per person, with 1 complimentary ticket per 18 paid tickets.” <http://www.aboutlincolncenter.org/education-community/lincoln-center-education/meet-the-artist/meet-the-artist>

Lincoln Center Education Performance Schedule 2019-2020:

[https://lincolncentereducation.org/performance-season?\\_ga=2.120641992.1333998646.1570463670-1648128090.1570463670#start](https://lincolncentereducation.org/performance-season?_ga=2.120641992.1333998646.1570463670-1648128090.1570463670#start)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON WORKS OF ART REFERENCED:

1. For more information on bark paintings in New Guinea, see Bowden, R. (2006). *Creative spirits: Bark painting in the Washkuk Hill of North New Guinea*. Melbourne, Australia:

Oceanic Art Pty Ltd.

2. For more information on mid to early 19<sup>th</sup> century Power Figures of the Democratic Republic of the Congo go to or insert this link into your browser:

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/africa-ap/a/nkisi-nkondi>

3. To read more about Rehabilitation Through The Arts and the mission, see the link:

<https://www.rta-arts.org/mission>

4. To view the documentary, *Dramatic Escape*, through the RTA site, cut and paste the following link into your browser: <https://www.rta-arts.org/dramatic-escape>

SUGGESTED VIDEOS FOR INSPIRATION:

- The following is a YouTube video that was introduced by a student in one of my multicultural counseling classes. One can use an aesthetic education, inquiry based approach, with students: What do you see? Do you have any experience with dance? Chinese culture? What are the music and dance styles of students in the class? You can reveal to the students that the dancers are hearing impaired. Have them get into 2 groups:

one group choreographs a short piece to music and needs to teach the other group how to do it – without their hearing the music. What does the video say to them? What do the experiences in the class reveal? How does it relate to cooperation? To see abilities as opposed to disabilities? The link below can be cut and pasted into a browser.

***Hearing impaired Chinese dancers: Thousand Hand Bodhisattva:***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uU10JRoQeG4&t=132s>

- The dance, *After the Rain*, was choreographed by Christopher Wheeldon to the music Spiegel ImSpiegel by Arvo Part. It is danced atop one of the buildings at the World Trade Center, referring to new beginnings after 9/11. To view it, you need to cut and paste the link into your browser.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zMCxmdkcRY>

- The following link is to a musical performance of the piece above composed by Arvo Part with visual accompaniment. Interestingly, Part himself was actually born on 9/11 but in 1935. One of the comments on this YouTube video is a validation of the experience of mixed emotions and an astute recognition of multiple perspectives.

“There is a beauty, but also a melancholy about this music. An emptying out, a diminishing, a fading away. Of course this is my personal response to the music, and probably tells something about my personality. To others, it most probably means something entirely different.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtFPdBUI7XQ>

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Instillations

**Instillations: School building as canvas**

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### Abstract:

Creating a signifier of having been in a place becomes an important part of acknowledging our time and presence, by developing personal understanding, and a reason for making art. Based on an examination of adult art and children's early play set-ups and displays, future art teachers explore designing installations with students in the schools. This paper discusses the notion of how art teachers can build on students' pre-service experience by bringing instillation-based art into their future teaching. The instillation process creates new understandings that challenge the notion of where art lives and expand it beyond what can be made on art room tables.

Key Words: Instillations, Graffiti Art, Public Schools, Vandalism, Guerilla Art, Activism,

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### **Instillations: School building as a canvas**

My daughter has a need to leave her mark on our local coffee shop by recording her height every time we visit. When we fly and connect through Detroit, she looks for her name she left on the rock near an indoor tree. Creating a signifier of having been in a place becomes an important part of acknowledging our time and presence, developing personal understanding and a reason for making art. Our forbearers inscribed their ancient cave walls, but how do we acknowledge where we have been? We may leave carvings in a tree, a school desk, or a tombstone.

The end of my art education students' four years at the University is fast approaching and discussion turns to reflection of their experiences in the art building. I ask students what they want to leave behind? What is their legacy? The students find it difficult to respond, never having been asked such questions in other school settings. 'This has been your building for several years. You have worked here, cried, sweated and spent countless hours of your life bound by every inch of the space. If there is a way to leave your mark on this place, signifying you were here, how would you do it, and what would it say?' This is not an easy question because students generally reflect on the objects they make and not the school building as a canvas for art.

Instillations in school buildings are examples of group art projects. They represent examples of a problem-solving group. In working to alter a school, students have to collaborate by exchanging ideas and managing complex construction acts, manifesting a constructivist approach to learning. Students designs for installations are built through exchanges of ideas in the classroom with other artists. In sharing their thoughts and discussing impressions of their experiences of inhabiting the art room and art

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building, they are able to create powerful statements of art in a familiar or new space. The 20<sup>th</sup> century theory of Constructivism lead by psychologists such as Jean Piaget (1896-1980) believed that children’s knowledge is built through such exchanges as play and experience with adults and other children. Creativity is also built and constructed by design teams in installation art. As artists in the past have gathered with colleagues and friends to build art movements such as Cubism (Year), Futurism (Year), and the Blue Rider Group (Year), contemporary installation artists demonstrate the principles of noted educational researchers like Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), who believed learning to be a social activity and that shared interactions were important to a child’s cognitive development and creative thinking.

For my students, the art building became just another school space in which to work. To consider changing the building, their environment, as an artistic option—a larger canvas challenge—was a question they gathered to solve and construct as visions they ‘bounced of each other.’ It was through the experience of constructing new knowledge as a group, learning and building on their fellow students’ knowledge that brought about new and more defined feelings towards the space and the creating art interactions with it. As future art teachers move into the homes of their schools, they can teach art as working on papers at desks, or open the room, the building, and the world to students as canvases to make art and leave their ‘mark.’



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### Reflection

My students had always reflected on the objects they made inside the building, and not the space in which the art was made. The building was just a place in which to work! To look at the space as having art possibilities was a question they had yet to ponder.

We began by taking a trip to 21C, a hotel/museum in Louisville, KY, which brings art into every crevice of the building. Videos projected in the bathroom above the sink and the floor used as a film screen asks a viewer to question where the art museum stops and the hotel begins.

Exploration with students turned to ways contemporary artists have looked at space as part of the creative process. We look at the works of contemporary street artists such as Banksy, knit bomb artists, and JR. We examine the 80s movement of Guerilla Art, and how artists such as Keri Smith altered the environment. In her book, Smith defines Guerilla Art as ‘a fun and insidious way of sharing your vision with the world. It is a method of art making which entails leaving anonymous art pieces in a public place’ (K. Smith 2006). Smith is encouraging of others to participate in the process using her suggestions in ‘how-to’ books. Students also looked at art that addresses larger social implications such as those of JR. Raffi Khatchadourian of *The New Yorker* states, ‘JR’s preoccupations reflect a deeper set of contemporary artistic concerns: how to produce work out of human relationships, or “relational art” —conceptual pieces that blur the distinction between artist, subject, and spectator into a social puzzle’ (Year, p.56).

Looking at EKU’s art buildings edifice as a potential canvas, my students wanted to create projects not to vandalize, or leave a permanent mark on the art building, but to generate a lasting impression on classmates, faculty, and for themselves. These pieces

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would potentially be interactive, site specific, art interventions, and environments. They are pieces that convey a sense of activism and a call for change.

Vygotsky's theory of sociocultural learning highlights the importance that social interactions have on the learning process. His theory, known as the Zone of Proximal Development states that knowledge is co-constructed as individuals learn best from one another. In this case, by students interacting with each other and their community through art and shared experiences:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

The arts and art education classes have traditionally had many opportunities for group experiences and problem solving, from artists bouncing ideas off each other, participating in group critiques, being part of design groups and acting as members of architecture or interior design firms and other art circles. Installation of art into a building is a strong platform to promote such group experiences between art class peers and artist-teachers.



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### **Altering the Space**

Contemporary artists have used and challenged the architectural elements of museum spaces, showing art on the floor and descending from the ceiling. We talked about the history of the museum, and how art had traditionally been lined up on walls. Today, many artists dialogue with the architecture, moving audiences through mazes and reshaping the experience of being in the gallery such as the work we saw at the Hotel 21C.

Like most K-12 schools and college art buildings, the art in our university is placed on bulletin boards or protected inside glass cases. While many contemporary artists have moved off the wall, and stepped off pedestals to become a part of the audience and viewing space, the place of art in schools has not changed. We teach about Earth Works, Guerilla, and Instillation art while our hallway presentations seldom represent what we teach. The students and I proceeded to walk around our building, making suggestions about how each space could be altered. Not toting art supplies, or being concerned about materials or financial restrains, we simply looked for ‘meaningful spots’ to spend time, sit and think about what to say and place into the space. After discussions that stretched ideas, produced sketches and new material collections, my students set out to work.

### **The Project**

At 9 p.m. after all classes were over, students took their supplies and began to install their projects in the halls, bathrooms, elevators, lockers and in freshly discovered crevices in the building. By morning, the women’s bathroom stalls had been wallpapered and

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beautified with area rugs. A small stand was set up for lavatory needs. Comment cards were made so they could be filled out, and the scent of exotic flowers was introduced into the air. Custodians and faculty celebrated the bathroom stall project. Men cautiously asked to enter the women's restroom.

Other student installations included Facebook like/comment whiteboard signs outside of studio classrooms where anyone could comment and doodle about the classes, as they might on an FB wall. On one stairwell, there was an instillation using old textbooks that had been made into chains and tied to the wall. Words taped to stairs unfolded a message: 'Even when you fall on your face you are still moving forward!' The art melded into the experience of being there, available for interaction and comment. The projects were gently displayed all over the building without overwhelming each space. In a hallway, a trail of art supplies formed a track to a locker with a plaster head on the top shelf, and art supplies filling the rest of the space below. The neighboring locker became a wall for remarks. Next to faculty offices, flocks of cutout geese were placed. Each piece metaphorically depicted a professor's disposition and/or artistic persona. These pieces were meant to be humorous, and a year later all of them are still on display. An empty landing between floors became a cave of parking lot cones and wet floor signs, while crevices in a brick wall were filled with bendable toy figures. Many exciting ideas had been sketched and referenced, but, because of financial and time restraints, not all of them could be completed.

As the building came to life in the morning hours, everyone began to see the spaces and surfaces as a work of art. In hallway conversation throughout the day, new ideas kept blossoming. There was talk of what could be done inside the dorms, cafeterias

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and other buildings on campus, as well as which structures in town that would be perfect for installations.



### **The Reception**

An interesting aspect of the project was the reception by students, professors, and administrators. Our class became voyeurs to the experience since the artists who created the pieces did not sign or advertise their contributions. Through comment cards and simply sitting by and listening to peers and colleagues talk, we could gauge the reaction over the next few days and weeks. For example, by 11 a.m. the first morning, we had over 30 comments in the women's bathroom, stating how the art had brightened the day and made the experience positive and artistic. We caught professors participating in the work in hallways. Professors stopped to tell me how excited they were to find geese by their door, and that they were going to leave them.

Not knowing who had created the work, one negative comment arrived in the form of an administrative email addressed to the faculty. The letter stated that there is a difference between art and vandalism, and that if the faculty did not know the difference, to come and see the chair. The email caused a great stir and overshadowed the agenda of the next faculty meeting. During the weeks that followed, only a single piece was

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removed: a humorous installation over a urinal describing step-by-step instructions for use.

The above controversy helped students to engage in reflective class discussions about the value of installations, art vs. vandalism and the opportunities for related endeavors in the public schools. Class readings about art and vandalism helped to move our discussions to larger issues of ‘what is art,’ the limits of artistic freedom and new ways of defining artistic space. One student suggested hanging gold-framed inscriptions simply saying ‘vandalism’ around the art building.

### **Further Discussion**

Commenting on how art can interact in a public space, Tom Finkelpearl, the Director of the Queens Art Museum, stated, ‘Public art is the best way for people to express themselves in the city. Installation art gets dialogue going. That’s very good’ (qtd. in EW/KCE, 2010). In further classroom discussions, my future art teachers saw their art as creating installations, not as an act of vandalism. Several spoke of their art as a political statement or expressing a social view, as having a sense of activism and being a motivator of change. A student suggested that, ‘Audiences looking at a work that they don’t think of as ‘art worthy,’ tend to automatically place it into the graffiti-vandalism, or a lower-than-art category.’ Repeatedly we came back to the question of who gets to decide what was art? As one of the students explained, if there is no gallery label, and a piece of art is not in the ‘correct’ spot, than no one let’s the viewer know that it is in fact ART. Finkelpearl, for example, doesn’t find graffiti to be art, and says, ‘I can’t condone vandalism... It’s really upsetting to me that people need to write their name over and over again in public space. It’s this culture of fame. I really think it’s regrettable that they

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think that's the only way to become famous' (qtd. in EW/KCE, 2010). Finkelpearl however points out that installations throughout the city are art, made to interact with the public, and it's not vandalism.

One of my students entered the discussion by saying, 'It is easy to see these acts as vandalism as they are intruding on public space, and may not be called beautiful works.' Another student responded by adding, 'What we created was not always beautiful, but we were not hurting anything, or anyone. We used glue or wheat paste that can be easily removed with water, and nothing was permanent. Sometimes one person's art is another's vandalism.' I referred to Banksy, who claims that art can have positive effects on the environment by making people think, even if it causes some discomfort:

Thoughtful and attractive street art, however, has been suggested to have regenerative effects on a neighborhood. In fact, the popular street artist Banksy, has catapulted his guerilla street art into a profitable career as an auctionable contemporary artist. He has come under criticism for his art contributing to the gentrification of neighborhoods. (EW/KCE, 2010)

In hindsight, over the semester, many of our fellow artists in the building not only contributed to the installations, but also came up with editions of their own. An unassigned dialogue began to take form in the art building. To test our experiences in the public schools, I discussed with my future art teachers the notion of children as installation artists. Our class worked on several projects with elementary students in the area. The following section discusses taking the theme of installations to children and the public schools.

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### **Installations in Schools**

To enter a child's room, one has to pass through an elaborately decorated door complemented by doorknob signs and hanging displays. Inside, on the bed, under the table, and in the closet are myriads of play installations set up with pillows, furnishings, and toys. Free to create in many rooms of a home, children's art in school becomes relegated to table and chair work. Art seldom flows into the room's space, or beyond it to the hallway. Art classes can provide opportunities for playful use of the art room space, and the possibility of using all school spaces to set up creative ideas by creating a space for installation to be used as source of artistry for children's art.

### **Art beyond school desks**

To promote children's art room installations, my students decided on a symbolic start: the classroom doors. Decorating doors has become the teacher's task, but can be opened to showcase the work of young installation artists. After classroom doors, my students decided to focus on display boards as the next area of teaching about installations.

Children's corkboard works in their room are often amazing installations, going beyond the board onto walls, and moving into the room space. Yet, in many art rooms and hallways, adults neatly decorate every display board. Several boards were opened to young artists to anchor multi-dimensional creations that involved the ceilings, walls, and even the hallway floor. The art class corkboard became a favorite creative playground—a place where children happily took ownership of the space and created their own child centered displays.

Moving art off school desks onto the floor became an important step in promoting installations. Envisioning the whole art room as theirs to use and play in allowed the

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experience of a boundless art that extended beyond pictures on papers. When the whole art room can be used for play and art making, it opened children's thinking about creations in the hallway, the front lobby, and being active artists in other school spaces. For example, scouting the cafeteria and its 'gifts' of trays, straws, leftover foods on plates, or long tables, promoted ideas of creating set ups with what is available. In one such inventive act, the public school students designed and installed a celebrity birthday party made from found objects placed in between ordinary tables set up for school lunch.

When students sat in the front lobby to discuss what they could do in the large open space, even the art teacher was surprised to hear the proposals: 'We could do a pretend playground using packaging stuff,' the response of a student to seeing the pile of cartons and foam pieces stacked before the front office.' On the way to the lobby, 'We can make a garden with flowerbeds and grasses and rolling out paintings like play carpets in the hallways.'

My future art teachers also found that the children enjoyed creating installations in outdoor spaces, a place that they were familiar with and had many creative play experiences. The children worked on ideas involving the trees behind the school and using the playground equipment to install a show on the playground. Seeing the outside of the school for the first time as part of the art class, everyone was excited about the many possibilities to place art on the ground, and into the landscape.

Public school students were happy to offer their opinions about...the best play-set-up they made in their room, or the most unusual hanging decoration they created. As students look at floors and ceiling as possible canvases and sites for art making, they can recall the fun they used to have playing and creating set-ups in their home studios. Future

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art teachers who participated in the art building installation are preparing to teach their students that art can be made anywhere and demonstrate the natural extensions to children's home set-ups and decorating that can continue in school art classes.

## Ending

School installations can challenge the notion of where art can live and expands art beyond what can be made on art room tables. Since so much of children's art starts out in the form of installations and play set ups, this art form needs to be continued in school. Art teachers can follow up on aspirations for recreating spaces, and dreaming of leaving one's creative marks and designs everywhere. With future art teachers, or young children, thinking of art in terms of installations leads to a great sense of freedom to say, and think, extraordinary things. Art class discussions become lively and boundless, 'we could put art into the coke machine so that every time you get a drink an artwork appears!' 'Could there be a secret art show under the stairs in the dark, that one can only be seen with glow lights?' While not always possible to consummate, ideas for art in school spaces flow with possibilities. Installations turn students into futurists; making long-term art plans and considering the art of the future.

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## **Keynote Address: Interview with Eleanor Duckworth Interviewed by Dr. Andrew Stremmel**

**Interviewer:** It's my honor and pleasure to be able to be part of an interview with Dr. Eleanor Duckworth, something that she had very much wanted to have happen at this conference. You know, our theme is Our Future Lies in the Past: Looking Back at One Hundred Years of Constructivism. Well, between us we just make that hundred years.

**Eleanor:** (laughs) I make it almost alone.

**Interviewer:** I wasn't saying that (laughs). So let me introduce Dr. Duckworth first. These are words that others have used to describe her: cognitive psychologist; a keen observer of children's learning; a teacher of teachers; an education activist, theorist, and scholar; a former student and translator of Jean Piaget. Eleanor Duckworth grounds her work in Piaget and Inhelder's insights into the nature and development of knowledge and understanding, and in their research method which she has developed as a teaching-learning approach of critical exploration in the classroom. She seeks to bring a Frierian approach to any classroom, valuing the learner's experience and insights. Her interest is in the experience of teaching and learning of people of any age, both in and outside of school. Eleanor is a former elementary school teacher and has worked in curriculum development, teacher education, and program evaluation in the United States, Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and her own native Canada. She is a coordinator of Cambridge United for Justice with Peace, and she is a performing modern dancer. And just yesterday she tells me she was performing in Boston. And so I think if you notice something on her arm, that's one of the things that can happen as a performing dancer. She also wanted me to mention something she's very proud of. She's now working with the non-profit Critical Explorers.org, which was established by her colleagues who have all been former students. And so with no further ado, I'm going to start.

**Interviewer:** I'm going to ask you, Eleanor, to talk about the influence that your parents have had on you and your career.

**Eleanor:** Yes, I'm happy to do that. My mother was a farmer's daughter in Quebec and her mother thought it was important for her daughters to go to university, and so my mother did. She entered McGill when she was sixteen years old and did her degree there. She was a very shy young person. My father lived in Vancouver where he worked for the Canadian Pacific Railroad. He spent at least one winter alone in the woods in the mountains tracing this feed of a stream so they could know where to put the tracks and where to put the bridges. And he worked as a volunteer in the YMCA and then he became committed to the YMCA with an emphasis on the Christian in the YMCA, and committed his life to working with young people. And so he needed to get a university degree to do that, and ten years later than most people who went to McGill to get a degree. So they both were very committed to social justice and peace and that drove both of them and all of their work all of their lives. My mother was a non-professional. When I was little I made a chart of all the things I wanted to be when I grew up, one was a ballet dancer, one was a weight lifter, one was a housewife with lots of committees.

*Audience: (Laughter)*

**Eleanor:** So they just, there was no inclination among any of us, myself and my two brothers, to do anything but work for peace and justice the rest of our lives as our parents did.

Interviewer: Thank you. Now I think a lot of people would like to hear this next question and the answer that you give. Describe your first meeting with Piaget and maybe some of the things about Piaget that people maybe don't know.

Eleanor: Well, when I finished my B.A. I wanted to do graduate work in psychology and I also wanted to go see the world. So I applied for fellowships here and there, and I won a Rotary Fellowship for which I am very grateful. It's not a particularly scholarly-based fellowship; it is more for good international relationships. So they chose to send me to Paris because I knew a little bit of French. Paris wasn't a highlight in Psychology in those days, but after all, this was 1957. I'd never heard of Piaget. But when I got to Paris I was given a course. I had majored in Philosophy. I was given my series of courses I was supposed to take and one was by this man named Piaget.

The first day that I went I was swept away with the range of his ideas. I was still really a philosopher in my heart. He was talking that year about how children's understandings of spatial relations—geometry—developed, and how the history of geometry developed, and how the logical structure of geometry developed. The logical structure is the opposite direction of the history. So he was curious about whether children's ideas developed like the history or like the logical development, and he found that it was like the logical development. The broadest ideas are the base, the topological geometry, and the last to come is Euclidean geometry, which is what instructional history came up with first. Anyway, so that was just fascinating to my little philosophical soul.

So after the first class, I sat in the third row. My French wasn't very strong, so I sat in the third row to make sure I didn't miss a word and I was thrilled. And sometime late in the end he stopped me after class and asked what I was doing there, and I told him, and then we went on to a wonderful relationship about that. But he told me later that he noticed me because I laughed at his jokes.

*Audience: (laughter)*

**Eleanor:** And he said he put all of his important points in his jokes. So, then I went to Geneva for two years, but that was how I met him.

**Interviewer:** Thank you. You were given credit for introducing Piaget's methods and analysis to the classroom in the United States' educational research community after World War II. Can you tell us more about that?

**Eleanor:** That is a huge thing to be given credit for. I might have played some role. When I left Geneva, I wanted to learn more psychology. I knew that I loved what I was learning in Geneva with Piaget and Inhelder. I knew that all I was learning, if anything else, was just survey courses, so I thought if I was to be a serious psychologist I should learn other things. So I went to Harvard to do so. In Geneva I did all

the course work except for the thesis for a doctorate. But I went to Harvard to do a doctorate. And I actually had a horrible experience there and dropped out. And then I needed a job. So I cast around for a job. But by then, a few years after I met Piaget, he had become a very celebrated. I think it was Bruner's report of what was called the Woods Hole Conference--I forgot the name of the book now--it was a short book that he wrote. Inhelder had been at that conference and was presenting the ideas of Piaget and herself, and it got a lot of attention. That really got Piaget's name to the forefront. My new job was elementary school curriculum development with an organization called The Elementary Science Study...um, no science.

*Audience: (laughter)*

**Eleanor:** I knew nothing about curriculum development, nothing about schools except that I had been to some. But they started to be impressed with Piaget and since I had worked with Piaget, I got this job. Besides, in the 60's was sort of, "Do you want a job? Well, here's a job." Those were the days. Really, it was an amazing time.

So there's a conference in I think '63, I believe, where a small group, between 30 and 40 directors of curriculum programs who were like...David Hawkins was the director of The Elementary Science Study. He was a philosopher of science. There were many curriculum programs developed by academics in the field, or lead by academics in the field, and it was a very strong time for curriculum development in many areas. So for the conference he brought Piaget to be with this small group for four days. And David Hopkins asked me to represent him. He had conflicts. And so I went. And it turned out that the translators that had been lined up for this conference were not adequate to it. Their first language was French and it's very hard to translate into your second language. And they didn't know anything about Piaget's ideas and so after their first efforts, which didn't work very well, Piaget asked me to translate. So I spent four days translating languages in both directions all day long. It was the most exhausting four days of my life. But it was a fantastic experience, which brought me then to go to a similar conference in Berkeley, and following was one at Cornell. So I got to go to that one, too. So I was with Piaget eight days translating, and it was a thrill of my own, personally. And I wrote a report of it for my organization, which let me do this, and that thing was called Piaget Rediscovered. I really had my own rediscovery because I'd left him some years before. But it could also have stood for in the United States because he had gotten honorary doctorates from both Yale and Harvard in the thirties. I mean, he was big already in the thirties. My mother studied him when she was at McGill. So it was a bit at that level also, that paper. That paper of ours was well received and got a lot of press, well not press...a lot of readings. So I think that did help and the paper was getting away from the idea that stages are the only important thing in Piaget's work and talking more about power of children's own intelligence to do what they wanted.

**Interviewer:** Two aspects in the work of Piaget and Inhelder were especially important to you. First, this basic idea of assimilation, in which every person creates meaning on her own while taking any experience into her own schemas or structures or previous understanding. And second is this notion of the clinical interview or clinical method where you engage children in talking about their ideas with the researcher. Can you say more in particular about the power of the clinical method for teachers?

**Eleanor:** I sure can. It's one of my favorite topics. So I trained in Geneva as a researcher, learning how to talk to kids and finding out what they thought about things. And that took engaging them in thinking about something, so they didn't just talk off the top of their heads, and making them free to say what they thought, and encouraging them to say more.

When I got to the Elementary Science Study, which was a very important move for me also, an important experience in classrooms, because I didn't know any science, right, I wanted to see what the kids were thinking. So my colleagues would give them whatever they were to think about and the kids went to work with each other and their own ideas to do whatever was requested of them, and I went to talk with them about what they were learning. And I found that when I was asking Genevan-type questions, which didn't give away the answers I wanted them to give, they got more and more interested in telling me their thoughts. If I was really interested in their ideas, they wanted to tell them to me. And they started to take their ideas seriously also. So then we got to work with teachers. We introduced; my colleagues had this good idea to introduce teachers to the materials by having them be students learning to use the materials as they were hoping the kids would. And again, I found they were interested in their own ideas as I started to teach as I got into those units that we were developing and I found that teachers also were interested in their own ideas if they were given a chance to think about their own ideas, with materials and with other people's ideas to go along with it. I also found myself totally fascinated by it. I was learning a lot of science by doing things with the materials my colleagues and I were developing, and I would show my friends all the fascinating stuff that we were doing and I found that they liked to talk about their ideas rather than hearing me explain. I mean, I had to hold back from explaining, but once I did that, they really liked it better. So that's led me to think that giving students interesting materials to work with, with lots of potentially grand ideas in them, and asking them questions like a researcher, like a Genevan researcher, got them very interested in the subject matter and very deeply involved with it, providing there was stuff to think about, not just, well like knowledge they could study themselves, but materials in the world that they had to explore. The curriculum developers just chose which materials to start with, which questions to ask, and had other back-up materials for when they would go next. So it's not just sitting and talking off the top of your head, it's a different approach--without telling learners what to think, but instead asking questions like a Genevan researcher, not giving hints. As a researcher it does you no good to give hints on what the answer is before you let them tell you. You have to be very encouraging, make it obvious that you really are interested in their ideas without telling them any particular direction to go.

I have found now over four or five decades that I have been doing this, that that is the best way to involve people in learning--to be in the classroom like a Genevan researcher asking the questions, letting the students get the answers, give their thoughts, then you're very well equipped to know what they're thinking and what needs to happen next. If you don't like what

they're thinking at that moment, or if you...that's not the right way to put it...but if you know they could go more deeply into the subject matter, just keep giving them...The job of the teacher is to have the materials ready to keep the learners having enough to think about. That confirms some of the thoughts, that challenges some of the thoughts, that gives them surprises, that gives them support, that gives

them encouragement. The teacher's role is to keep the students in direct contact with the material and ask the questions with a neutral response towards the correctness of the answers. An enthusiastic response towards the fact that they're giving ideas, but not say, "Yes, that's right" or "No, that's wrong." So what I've been doing with my students...in science you can see how that could work, because the materials will give the answers before long. But my students have shown me that it is the case in any subject matter that without correcting, just getting them more deeply into materials of the subject matter, the ideas develop and the students remain deeply involved in their own thoughts and getting their own selves to match what they see in the materials and in each other's thoughts.

So I follow---critical exploration is the name that Inhelder gave to the Genevan approach. Piaget had called it clinical interviewing, and for some reason Inhelder changed it to critical exploration, which most people found a more adequate name. So I followed critical exploration in the classroom, which is a harder thing because instead of one person each time, you have thirty people at a time. But it's also more fascinating because instead of one session, you have many, many sessions on one subject matter with this group of children. So it's a fascinating work to be done and teachers and children learn together. Children (or whatever the age of the learner is--for me, most of my learners are adults)...So the learners are always giving insights into the material that the teacher hasn't thought of before. No matter how long you teach the same thing, people come up with things I haven't thought of before on this subject matter, and everybody wins.

**Interviewer:** Thank you. Your landmark book, *The Having of Wonderful Ideas*, it's one of my personal favorites. It's one that I always ask my students to read and I'm sure many of you have read that, I've always loved the quote which I found out on the train coming in was not necessarily originally Eleanor's but it's one that has stuck with me a long time, and that is "You don't want to cover a subject, you want to uncover it." In your words, tell me what you mean by that and talk more about how this book has, how you feel this book has influenced the work of teachers and teacher educators.

**Eleanor:** Those are two questions.

**Interviewer:** That's right.

**Eleanor:** "What does one sentence mean?" and another "What does one book mean?" I'm not sure I can answer the one about the book. But, yes, Dave Hawkins quotes this line, you know, "Don't cover subject matter, uncover it" and I quoted him on that. He quotes it from somebody else, who is Victor Weisskopf, who was a physicist friend of his who was around at the time. He was a very humanistic physicist, so very interested in education. David Hawkins himself, as I might have said, is a philosopher of science. His wife (this is not your question), his wife was a nursery school teacher and he learned a great deal about teaching from his wife.

So covering a subject as opposed to uncovering it--I sort of see the way a textbook covers a subject is sort of painted over, sort of, there are all the words, lots of words that hide the depth of the meanings behind them. They are taken too facilely and too superficially explain, so you can't ever get beyond to the subject matter itself. Whereas uncovering it, you just keep finding new things and new surprises.

One subject matter I do with my students all the time is moon watching. This came out of the Elementary Science Study from my experience. I modified it somewhat. So what I have my students do is watch the moon, keep it in a book, write down every time they see it, write down what it looks like, where it is, date and time, and other stuff they wish to. They now, of course, take pictures of it all the time. There's less drawing than there used to be. And then every couple of weeks we get together with what everybody has seen and try to figure out what are the habits of the moon, the moon's movements, essentially. It's a perfect topic, really, because the moon is there and available to almost everybody. There are some places where it's not safe at night to look for it, so that makes it difficult. But then people find that they can see it in the daytime, so that becomes possible. It's good to be able to see it at night, to get more information, but it's not essential. It goes...finding the general habits of the moon is one thing which is fascinating, if you can find its habits in the course of a day or its habits in the course of a month. And then as you get into it you find its habits in the course of a year. But there are all these different levels to be finding out about. You get some insights, and then you get some other insights, and then you go back to the first insights. But putting it all together and figuring out which data you want to present at the end of the year, if we have these. Where is the sun and where is the earth and where is the moon? If the moon in the sky looks like x, it looks like x followed by y, what must be going on up there in the sky? And it's very difficult ...that was a poem.

*Audience: (laughter)*

It's very difficult to do. It takes an awful lot of work putting it together. And I can't remember why we're talking about this. What did you ask?

**Interviewer:** What properties....

**Eleanor:** That's right, that's right, that's right. So in the case of the moon, most people haven't even noticed you can sometimes see it in the daytime, and haven't noticed which direction it moves, and all kinds of things they haven't noticed. There's so many things to notice. And everybody's studied it in the textbooks, we all read before what goes around what, and at what speeds, it's all printed up in the textbooks. That's it, essentially.

**Interviewer:** Thank you, thank you. In the interest of time so that we can have some time for questions, I'm going to kind of end with two questions. I'll ask them one at a time. The first would be, "What would you consider to be the central question of your research over five decades?"

**Eleanor:** Yes, that's easy. My question is, "How do people learn things and what can anyone do to help them?"

**Interviewer:** Very good, very good. And then...

Eleanor: Let me say, let me say, at least to my definition of what a teacher, not a definition, my view of what a teacher is, a teacher is someone who has helped somebody learn. Teaching is helping somebody learn. It's not telling. Telling is the least good way to help somebody learn. But often people think, well, I'm not telling them anything, so I'm not really teaching them, I'm only facilitating. No, not telling them

anything is the best thing you can do as a teacher. It's hard, it's hard, but finding other ways to get kids into a subject matter is the most rewarding. So yes, what can anyone do to help? That is how I want to be a teacher.

**Interviewer:** Thank you. I love how you describe yourself as a philosopher and on the train coming over I mentioned that one of my favorite philosophers was Maxine Greene who said, "I am who I'm not yet." And so I want to ask you this one last question, "What would you still like to do or accomplish?"

**Eleanor:** Well, I'm going to the Critical Explorers organization you mentioned a while ago. We're working hard to get a curriculum in schools and teachers in schools prepared to be teaching this way as much as possible. So we've...I was once asked to make Elizabeth New Jersey a whole school system of this kind of work. I was thrilled by the notion. But the ask was by an acting superintendent and within a couple of months the superintendent came back and it all ended. I was very sad about that. So I tried to redo, recreate that experience. We're working in a Watertown middle school right now. A teacher invited us in. She knew what we were doing. She learned that we had some curriculum on ancient Greece. She was a seventh grade teacher and she had to teach ancient Greece. So she asked for our help. And that's how we got into that school where our one staff person is a historian. We only had enough money for one staff person. She's a history teacher and so she now has been working at that school, this is the fourth year, I think, developing different curriculum, mostly in the humanities, a little bit in science. The curriculum is essential for being able to teach the way I describe, letting the kids...not getting between the subject matter and the kids. Because, as I've already said, you can't just say here's some beans, now do math with them. They sort of have to have some idea of what curricular materials are, and what steps there are. So she's been doing that. There's only one posted on our website which is a middle school curriculum for slavery, on slavery and reconstruction. We've been developing another one, but haven't yet gotten it out there because of little manpower, on the industrial revolution from the point of view of women dairy farmers. You know, what were the consequences for their work when the trades started taking their butter over hundreds of miles away, and where the butter was made in the creamery, and so on. Fascinating. And how did they keep it cold? Who was designing the stuff? It's fascinating material. And there's one the Middle East. And there's another big one, I'll remember it in a minute, I can't remember. So we started with two middle school history teachers, and now in that school we have about 20 teachers involved, and the principal and the superintendent are both very enthusiastic. So we're trying to get enough funding to get other staff people to get into other schools, and also to get the materials written up on the website that we have, because we, this poor one person is doing four jobs full time, so...It's going very well and I hope that we'll be able to get that this month.

**Interviewer:** Wonderful. Thank you so much. I think there's some time. We'd like to have some questions from you. And so I think there will be a few people walking around with microphones. Kate has one. Yes...

**Audience member:** Jane Meade-Roberts from Salinas, California. Can you describe the difference... or describe constructivism. Is it a methodology or a theory?

**Eleanor:** Well, it's not a word I use to talk to...I think it has a broad meaning or different meanings through history. I think basically it's a view on learning--a theory about learning with which I have no...Well, Piaget's view of it, I think Piaget's view...because there's some approaches to constructivism in teaching where you let kids have their own ideas until you really have to tell them the answer. And I think that undoes it. But Piaget, of course, wasn't a teacher. So I'm wrong to say that I'll stick with his view of teaching. I stick with his view of constructivism that is the essence of...anything important is done by the knower him or herself. Other people can be of help, some help, but the work has to be done by the person who knows. You can't put knowledge into people's heads, they have to assimilate it. So I would say constructivism is the theory and there are many people who claim to be doing constructivist teaching and I think that has to be looked at carefully.

**Jane:** Thank you.

**Eleanor:** You're welcome.

**Interviewer:** Anyone else?

**Audience member:** Can you give us an example of the Geneva method of asking questions?

**Eleanor:** An example of the Geneva method of asking questions...Well, you know the conservation experiments, I imagine. So let's take the classic glass of water, two glasses of water, and you just make sure, you have to make sure you know the questions you are asking. There are two equal glasses of water, and you pour some in each, and the kid agrees, "Yes there's the same amount in each of these." Then you pour one of them into a tall glass and ask what they think now. And then one of the aspects often is a counter question. Piaget used to say, "Another little child told me that he thinks this." I don't use that. I say, "Some people say..." "So some people say"...If the child says, "Yes, they're still the same" the counter question is, "Some people say that there's more here now because it goes up higher. What would you say about that?" And then you just take it, what they say. Or you might say, or if they say, "Well, there's more here now" then you'd say, "Well some people say there's the same amount because it was the same before." So that's one aspect of it. Is that an answer?

**Audience member:** Yeah.

**Eleanor:** OK. And that goes on in classrooms all the more easily because usually there are other children in the classroom saying it. It reminds me of a class I once did in the ninth grade with...the teacher was a very fine student of mine, Lisa Schneider. I should say that the staff person in Critical Explorers, her name is Alythia McKinney, she did a totally extraordinary job.

So in this ninth grade class we were looking Piaget's proportions, I think it was coffee, the storage of coffee...I don't think I should go to that..."How milky is your coffee?" was the question. For kids it is usually how chocolaty is your chocolate milk?" But then there were two usual versions, like having them compare two cups and they know how many units of each is in each cup, and they're supposed to decide whether the two cups would taste the same or whether one would taste more milky than the another. And one group, what half these kids were committed to, "They're the same. There's no reason that, you know, because there's only one more of the milk in this one than in that one, otherwise they

are the same.” And the other ones would say, “No, they’re not the same because of this difference.” They were really having a big battle with each other and the teacher and I, Lisa and I, didn’t have a word to say. They finally said they wanted to know the answer. They asked Lisa the answer. And she said, “Well, I’ll tell you what I think. “ And they said, “We don’t want to know what you think, we want to know the answer!”

*Audience: (Laughter)*

**Eleanor:** They didn’t want her to tell them what she thought, so she didn’t. And they got really grumpy at not being told and when they left, I heard one of the angriest kids say to one of the others, “This is the only class I open my mouth in.” Which seemed perfect, because they all had counter arguments for each other and went on and on and on.

**Audience member:** I’m just curious, I’ve read your work and I actually taught in Geneva, Switzerland in the U.N. School and folks from the Piaget Institute came and were asking my students questions.

Eleanor: What years were those? What year?

**Audience member:** 1972. Anyway, I thought it was a wonderful experience for me and now we’re in 2015 and I’m very depressed. And I’m wondering what your thoughts are about the country, this country and education, and if it will right itself or, I mean, what’s going to happen?

**Audience:** (laughter)

**Audience member:** I know it’s a big question.

**Eleanor:** No, it’s very sad, it’s very sad. Yeah, we’re all very sad. And I really don’t know what’s going to happen. I’m not very optimistic. But it’s just going so terribly badly. The one thing that gives me a little hope is, do you know what fair test...?

**Audience member:** Yeah.

**Eleanor:** fairtest.org. Monty Neill is the director there. I think it’s on fairtest where they post, or it’s on, you can find out if you get in touch with fairtest. It has weekly about fifteen new stories about responses to testing, about school systems and teachers and parents and superintendents on rejecting the testing movement, so I do think that’s growing, and I do have some hope that before too many more years there will be a...they’ll let go of the testing. But it’s such a powerful commercial industry. But you know what? You had...this is sort of...I don’t know. One of the questions, I think, was what inspires me?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Eleanor:** What inspires me is people who are... who strive hard to understand. It’s learners I see in classrooms. But it’s also people struggling in every part of the world, I guess, enormous numbers just keeping up the struggle and kids learning in classrooms being beaten down often, being elevated often, dutifully struggling. It’s not painful struggling in the case of kids, it’s enthusiastic struggling, but it’s marvelous to see it happen, as you all know, to see kids really working on something until they understand it. And I like to see, although most of my students are adults, it’s perhaps even more exciting

when you see adults struggling to understand because they have to give up, so much to change an idea that's important to them with this. That has affected many decisions they have made in their lives and in an industry where that wasn't the right basis for those decisions. That can be painful and very inspiring to see people struggle like that.

**Interviewer:** Any more questions? I think we have time for about, maybe two questions.

**Audience member:** Thank you for all your inspirational words. This sort of follows the last question, but a little bit more nitty-gritty. So when your adult members come back for their practicum or internship experiences in a typical public school (I know mine come back and I give them a similar message) and they say, "But, oh, we're scaffolding the children. We're doing what we see in the schools, which is basically telling them the answers." How do you counteract what they're seeing so often with the message you're giving?

**Eleanor:** Well, my students are different from your students. I have very few pre-service teachers, they're not going out to other teachers. They're mostly experienced teachers so they compare to their own work to what they've done. So I don't have quite that problem. But there is the question, "How to do it in the classroom?" which is always, always there, which is becoming more and more difficult given the grip of the testing. So they don't have a choice, teachers don't have a choice. They have to make sure the kids do well on tests. So they have to decide often, am I going to try to help the kids learn or am I going to teach them how to pass the test? And it's a terrible dilemma. People have different responses to it, different at different ages, different grade levels, different testing of a different sort, and different consequences. But some people make a decision, make sure the kids know we're really learning now, but now we'll stop learning and prepare for tests.

*Audience: (Laughter)*

**Eleanor:** So they make it explicit, and still try to get enough time for both of those things. Other teachers just keep to the learning and find that with that the kids do do better on tests, even though they haven't been trained for the tests. So that's when that works. I think it's...there's some kinds of exams where there's so many specific facts that they're supposed to know that that works less well. But it's just a terrible dilemma for each teacher. I think just as long you bear in mind the difference between learning and preparing for tests, then you have some basis for making your own decisions for yourself. But it's very, very difficult.

**Interviewer:** One last question.

**Audience member:** Before I ask my question, I just want to make a comment to the woman over there who feels sad. One of the things that I've been doing that's been very inspiring, is that I belong to three online chat groups and I attend the comments on Monday with some of the people, and there's this grass [roots] movement among teachers to create change. The way they're helping each other create change is they're connecting people from all over the United States—there's somebody from California and somebody from Canada. There are about, in each of the groups there are about 40 or 50 or 60, I don't know how many people, and they just comment on those sorts of things that get them through the day, because they'll say to each other, "What are you doing? How are you getting around this?"

**Eleanor:** Can you give us any way to connect with them?

**Audience member:** Voxer is one of the most important ones...

**Eleanor:** How do you spell that?

**Audience member:** VOXER

**Eleanor:** Dot?

**Audience member:** Not it's just Voxer, it's an app. You can talk with teachers, and it's really a powerful site. Teachers are talking to each other, sharing ideas. And the interesting thing about this is that they're elementary, middle school, and high school teachers, and yet they're sharing common ideas, common strategies which leads to my question for you.

What would you say would be the most important idea that we, as teachers from elementary through college, that we can bring back to our instruction that would have been influenced by Piaget and Inhelder's work?

**Eleanor:** I think, I don't know if it's the most important one, but one of the important ones is that kids love to think and they think better when nobody's telling them what they're supposed to think.

**Interviewer:** Eleanor, thank you for your generosity, your attitude, the gift of your presence here today. I think we're all inspired by your work on the ideas that have been generated over the years. So thank you very much.

**Eleanor:** Thank you, thank you.

## **Sitting Down with Connie Kamii**

Kelly Russell  
**Hayden Elementary School**

Those who attended the ACT conference in Virginia in October, 2003, had the opportunity to hear Dr. Constance Kamii deliver the keynote address on the first day. Dr. Kamii spoke of Piaget's unique contributions to education. Her perspective on Piaget's work is distinctive because of the years she spent in Geneva working with Piaget. Educators worldwide look to Dr. Kamii as a leading expert in the field of constructivist education. I was privileged to sit down recently and ask a few questions about her research and her ideas about the world of education today.



Connie Kamii

KR: In a constructivist classroom, the teacher bases instruction on the scientific research of Piaget. If a person spends time in a constructivist classroom and a traditional classroom, what differences would be observed? In the students? In the teacher? In the social atmosphere?

CK: In a traditional room you would probably see neatly arranged desks, neatly obedient children, probably lots of worksheets. That keeps kids very neat and quiet and well behaved. In a constructivist classroom you will probably see lots of movement, if not noise, especially when they play games. (The students) will certainly be talking a lot and arguing back and forth. Their opinions will be asked, and the kids will challenge each other. There will be lots of spontaneity and what I like to see, but it's hard to produce, children who are thinking. Thinking takes various shapes, and arguing is one way. You also see children who are deeply involved with trying things out with their hands or some other thing. You can tell when

children have an empty head and an empty expression and when they are really thinking. That's what I like to see, and that's what I often see in a constructivist classroom.

KR: After you completed your doctoral work, you went to Geneva, Switzerland. I happen to know that this was more than a trip to the place of your birth. Could you talk about that?

CK: Why did I go to Geneva? I was in preschool education. This was for compensatory education to help teach low-income children, and we knew that we were looking for a better cognitive foundation than what they usually come to school with and yet in terms of classroom education, I just could not figure out how to conceptualize objectives, so I literally spent a year going through every piece of library material I could find about preschool education methods and also psychologists' research about classification, etc., etc., and I could not come up with objectives for preschool education. I wanted to go beyond the vague objective of cognitive development, and Piaget was not directly useful, but that was the only thing that I could find that gave me some hope of finding something. That is why I started to study Piaget's theory, and then I went to Geneva to hear this guy. I was surprised that I caught his last lecture, and I could understand what he was saying whereas I had been reading his books and they were impossible to understand. That's when I found out that written Piaget is one thing, and spoken Piaget is something else. That's where I made up my mind that I wanted to study under him, so that's how I got there.

KR: How long did you stay?

CK: I stayed for a year, and then three years later I went back for another year, and that was not enough; so I stayed for another year. I ended up going back and forth for 15 years all told.

KR: If you had not made that trip to Geneva, not studied with Piaget, how would your life be different today?

CK: I was at that time very much interested in improving the educability of children of low-income African-American families. I firmly believe in public education and I think that for lower class minority kids education is the hope, and yet I also knew that education was not reaching those children, and so I would probably have stayed in that realm but with the usual fluff

that educators are doing or had been talking about. Those tend to be very specific and isolated, and that is still the battle that I'm fighting now. There are standards now for preschool mathematics, and those consist of specific things like teaching children how to count, how to sort things – the red things, the blue things the circles and the squares-- and manipulating geometric shapes, get in line first, second, in front of, in back of, etc. These are very specific things. That's how preschool math educators think, and that's not cognitive development in my opinion. Cognitive development is much richer, much deeper, much more complicated than these itty-bitty things, one thing after another. That's probably what I would be doing (had I not gone to Geneva to study with Piaget).

KR: Piaget is best known for his conceptualization of four stages of development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational (Campbell, 1976). What is the most misunderstood aspect of Piaget's work?

CK: I think there is a whole mystique to think of Piaget's theory as a maturationist theory. In other words, when children are seven, concrete operations are believed to kind of flower and unfold, and when they get to be sixteenish, formal operations unfold. I think that's the most misunderstood thing. It is a misinterpretation. Plus, I would say that I don't know many people who even understand conservation. (Conservation refers to "our ability to deduce, through logical reasoning, that the quantity of a collection remains the same when its spatial arrangement and empirical appearance are changed" (Kamii, 2000, p. 6). There are lots of textbooks about Piaget's theory and developmental psychology in general, and when I see a new one, I always go to conservation, and usually it is wrong. Usually the authors don't know about logico-mathematical knowledge or that there is a difference between logico-mathematical knowledge and physical knowledge. They don't even know that, so they cannot possibly understand conservation. (Piaget distinguishes between three types of knowledge. Social knowledge is knowledge that has been created by people. An example of social knowledge is the knowledge that American Independence day is celebrated on July 4<sup>th</sup>. Physical knowledge is knowledge of the physical attributes of objects. The color and weight of an object are physical knowledge. Logico-mathematical knowledge are the relationships that are formed by individuals in their own minds. Noting that there is a difference between a red ball and a blue ball is an example of logico-mathematical

knowledge. The difference does not lie in the balls. The relationship is formed mentally by the observer (Kamii, 2000).

KR: Schools of education have come under fire recently. What could be done to improve teacher education?

CK: To improve teacher education, I think the best education is to have future teachers in the classroom to begin with and to have them generate questions about certain problems and what to do with certain problems and to start reading and teaching from those questions. I think that what is wrong, at least from what I have seen, is that generally (students of education) are now stuffed with words and theory and so teachers come out thinking that theory is irrelevant and useless. They are going through these theories without relationships to the classroom situations, and so all that means nothing whereas if they generated their own questions and were then sent to theories, education would be much better. On the contrary, future teachers are often told good, useful principles, and they go into public school classrooms and see flatly contradictory, bad practices. That is the reality of teacher education. Schools of education tend to be much more theoretically advanced than the usually awful classroom situations. (Future teachers) have to be very lucky to end up in a constructivist classroom for student teaching. Those things should be improved, but that is much harder to do in reality.

KR: What words of encouragement could you offer educators in our “test happy” environment?

CK: There is just no end in capitulating. If your score gets higher, the principal is going to want higher and higher scores. All that for whom? Not the kids. My recommendation is: Do what’s best for the kids.

KR: What is your latest area of research?

CK: I am doing two things. One is baby stuff – the development of logico-mathematical knowledge in physical knowledge activities. I am working with day care teachers in Japan. In playing with objects making an incline with a block and a board, and then imitating the teacher who rolls down a cylinder at age one, two and three and how they improve in this imitation. They make better and better relationships, and these relationships are interrelated. As they make progress in spatial reasoning, they make better

categories, and that is what I am trying to prove. Those categories do not come out of those stupid sorting tasks.

The other thing I am working on is why “length times width” is hard. It is now taught in fourth grade, but I can get you the data to show that it’s too hard in eighth grade and ninth grade regular math sections. The only kids who can do these things are the eighth graders and ninth graders in advanced sections. All of this is related to formal operations. Piaget says, for example, if you show squares to do “length times width”, that’s super easy, and that is how kids are taught now.

If the rectangle has a grid inside and kids are asked what is the area of this rectangle, it is only about 60 percent of seventh graders who can give you the right answer. All they have to do is count those squares, and they can’t do it in seventh grade. The question is why can’t they do it, and Piaget is the only one who offers an explanation about it. He says that those squares are easy to do multiplication with, but area is not those discrete objects. Discrete objects are easy. Discrete object conservation is easier than continuous quantities, and he says that to understand area, you have to understand why one uni-dimensional continuous quantity times another uni-dimensional continuous quantity results in two dimensional space and to be able to understand how this two uni-dimensional thing results out in a surface you have to be able to understand the infinitely close parallel lines without which you just cannot think about surface area out of two linear measurements. Nobody has seen infinity. Formal operational kids can think about it, and that is why only the advanced kids can understand that stuff. That is what I am working on.

KR: What topics would you like to investigate but have not?

CK: I have an endless amount of things. I am continuing that research that showed that to get children to be fluent in subtraction, you have to get them to be fluent in addition. That is the research that I did in a constructivist school, and now I want to go to a traditional school where the teacher has demanded worksheets and “facts”, and I bet we will get the same results even if you insist on memorization. That is my hypothesis. My other things that I would like to do are estimates. Kids cannot estimate, and estimates are very unnatural for kids. That is what I would like to prove. Elapsed time is very hard, teachers have told me, so I want to study that so elapsed time would not be required on tests. Kids have trouble dealing with coins, too. That is the list I have for now. I always have a list.

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# A Conversation with Rheta DeVries

Catherine Twomey Fosnot



*Executive Editor Catherine Twomey Fosnot talks with Rheta DeVries, whose life's work has been about the application of constructivism to education. In this interview, DeVries describes her journey as a constructivist, from graduate student to researcher, writer, and teacher educator.*

***L***et's begin with the beginning. How did you become interested in constructivism?

Well, in 1961, I took a course on child psychology from Helen Koch, who required us to read a book by Piaget. I read *The Construction of Reality in the Child* and was immediately entranced and awestruck by the brilliance of this man and his insights about young children. I later learned that Helen Koch had been introduced to Piaget's work by Larry Kohlberg when he was her student. Larry came from Yale to the University of Chicago the next year, and I then became his student.

***So, is that how you got interested in moral development . . . working with Kohlberg?***

Well, actually, we didn't work on moral development together. I figured he had already figured that out. I worked with him on cognitive development, and we did factor-analytic research on children's performance on standardized intelligence tests and Piagetian tasks. We modified some Genevan tasks to make sure children were motivated to try to give correct answers. For example, we used candy and bubble gum straws for conservation and class inclusion tasks. My dissertation

project was an extension of some of Kohlberg's work and of Piaget's as well.

***What was the topic of your dissertation?***

It was on children's understanding of the constancy of generic identity. Larry had interviewed young children about whether a cat could become a dog, using pictures. I was skeptical that children believed such a transformation was possible, and I said that to be sure, you would have to interview children using a live cat wearing a mask. Larry said, "OK, why don't you do that?" Then began a search for someone to make masks for a cat! After quite a few people hung up in response to my telephone calls, I finally found an artist willing to undertake the challenge of making realistic dog and rabbit masks. I trained a cat named Maynard to wear the masks and then interviewed children between the ages of 3 and 6 years about whether they believed the animal's identity really changed. I involved them in petting him before and after the transformation and then assessed their emotional reactions, both before the masking and after.

***Interesting . . . what did you find?***

Well, I found developmental levels. All the 3-year-olds absolutely believed in the transformation in identity. By age 6, only 25% of the children believed in the reality of the transformation. Children who believed in the reality of the transformation and predicted he would bark, chose to feed him dog food when he wore the dog mask. They chose to feed him lettuce when he wore the rabbit mask and predicted he would hop. I had one 3-year-old, for example, who, when I said, "Can he hop?" turned to the cat wearing the rabbit mask and commanded, "Hop, hop, hop for her." When he didn't hop, he turned to me and said, "He don't wants to hop now. He'll hop for you later." So it was that kind of evidence that really convinced me that young children experience the world in qualitatively different ways than older children and adults.

*Rheta DeVries and Betty Zan facilitate a workshop for early childhood educators.*



***And what did you do when you completed your doctoral studies?***

I spent a year as a research associate at the University of Chicago, completing a factor-analytic study of Piaget-type tasks and standardized tests of intelligence and achievement with children in three IQ groups. Then in 1969, I went to the University of Illinois at Chicago as an assistant professor. I was there for ten years, two of which I spent in Europe.

***What brought you to Europe? Were you in Geneva working with Piaget?***

From 1976 to 1978, I had a year of sabbatical from the University of Illinois at Chicago and then a National Institute of Mental Health post doc for a year. I spent these two years in Geneva. The first year I was learning French. It was pretty painful. One of the hardest things that I have ever tried to do in my life is to operate in another language. I sat in on

courses even during the first year when I was still studying French. Then the second year I was able to sit in on, not only courses, but the meetings that Piaget conducted in the Center for Genetic Epistemology. Every Monday for two hours there were about twenty people who gathered to discuss theory and presentations of experimental results. It was quite something to watch Piaget doing his research—really a treasured memory.

***You worked with Connie Kamii, too, didn't you? When was that?***

We started working together around 1971, when I recruited her to the University of Illinois at Chicago. We worked together for about five years before I went to Geneva, and then Connie was in Geneva for part of the time, too. Actually we were writing the books, *Physical Knowledge in Preschool Education* and *Group Games in Early Education*, while I was in Geneva. It was a big distraction from working on French and studying.

***And where did you do the work on children's understanding of shadows? Was that in Geneva, too?***

No. I did that in Houston, although I started it when I was at the Merrill Palmer Institute. I interviewed children ages 2

through 9 years about their conceptions of shadows. Piaget did that, too, but only with verbal interviews. I developed an active interview where I got kids engaged in talking about shadows of themselves, and shadows of other things, that they could see on the wall and floor.

***What did you find?***

Well, I found developmental stages in children's conceptions of shadows. At age 2 years, children believe that the shadow is an object like other objects. That conception even continues with some children as old as 4 or 5 years who try to scrape the shadow off the wall or floor. Young children believe shadows are caused by their own actions, never mind the light! They try to make shadows move from behind to front by leaning in the direction they want to make the shadow! Even at age 9 years, almost all children believe a merged shadow is still there, even though they can't see it.

***Really . . . that's fascinating!***

Understanding the causality of shadows is a very difficult concept for children to construct because you have to think about the effect of action at a distance, with no direct connection between the object and its shadow. Beliefs about the nature of light are also involved, and it is a great step forward

*Rheta DeVries talks with Libby Robinson, a teacher in the Columbia (MO) School District.*



when children begin to conceive of light as active and moving to hit objects.

***How did you go from work on physical knowledge, group games, and conceptions of shadows to your more current work on social development?***

Well, for twelve years (beginning in 1981), I was director of the Human Development Laboratory School at the University of Houston, working with teachers on developing the entire curriculum. With that responsibility, I had to be concerned about the whole program and not just parts of it. The teacher-child relationship was something that I had thought about for a long time. I had been profoundly influenced by Piaget's book, *The Moral Judgment of the Child*, which I did not read until after I had finished my graduate work. Most people think that my work on sociomoral development stems from work with Kohlberg. Well, it really doesn't. It came after that, as a result of my trying to respond to teachers' concerns about children's competition in group

games. I went to that book to find out what Piaget said about competition. I found competition only in about three places. The whole book was actually about cooperation. What I drew from that book that has been very important in my subsequent work is Piaget's discussion of the two kinds of morality and the two kinds of teacher-child relationships that parallel those two kinds of morality.

***Would you expand a bit on that . . . perhaps some examples?***

Sure. Well, he talked about heteronomous morality in which people follow moral rules because someone else tells them to, perhaps out of fear of punishment. This is in contrast to autonomous morality, where the moral principles are really owned by the person who follows self-constructed principles that guide relationships with other people.

***And the teacher-child relationships?***

Parallel to the two types of morality are two types of adult-child relations, one being

heteronomous or coercive in which the adult commands and tells children what to do and think and say. In extreme situations, children are so preoccupied with doing what the adult wants that they tend not to reflect, to examine ideas, and to construct them as personally their own. Whereas the second type of teacher-child relationship is a cooperative one in which there is mutual respect, not just unilateral respect. In the heteronomous relationship, the child is expected to respect the adult. In the cooperative relationship, the adult returns the child's respect. In practice, this means giving children choices and encouraging them to regulate their own behavior as much as possible. For me, the first principle of constructivist education is to establish a sociomoral atmosphere in which mutual respect is continually practiced. Betty Zan and I wrote about the practical ways in which teachers can accomplish this in our book, *Moral Classrooms, Moral Children*.

***And so a constructivist-based program would be characterized by cooperative relationships. You did a comparison study on this, too, didn't you?***

Yes. The study was done in Houston after teachers were implementing a model demonstration program of constructivist education. It then seemed

appropriate to go on and ask a comparison question. And I should say that I really did not know the answer, so it felt like a risky undertaking. Actually there were two questions: (1) Would children in a constructivist program progress and develop the way we predicted they would? And, (2) Are children in constructivist programs any different from children in other programs? So, I studied three kindergarten classes, mostly comprised of African-Americans in high poverty areas of Houston. One class had a constructivist program; one was traditional; and one was eclectic with some characteristics of both. What I wanted to look at was the sociomoral atmosphere of the classrooms as well as the sociomoral development of the children. We videotaped the teacher for two entire days and developed a coding system based on Bob Selman's model of developmental levels in interpersonal understanding that were derived from Piaget's theory of perspective taking. Then we were able to assess the degree to which the teachers in those three classrooms were being heteronomous or cooperative with children. We found that the constructivist teacher was much more cooperative and that her interactions with children were characterized by higher levels of interpersonal understanding.

***And the results for the chil-***

***dren? Where they what you expected?***

Yes. We looked at the children in pairs outside of the classroom in a game situation. An experimenter taught them a board game in the first session and then brought them back for a second session and told them that this time they were going to play by themselves. She turned her back and busied herself with papers while they went ahead and played. We did the same kind of coding with the children as with the teachers, looking at their levels of interpersonal understanding. We found that the children from the constructivist classroom manifested significantly higher levels of interpersonal understanding than both of the other two groups.

***For example? How was their behavior different?***

They were much more cooperative with each other, more respectful. They exhibited more of what we call level two interpersonal understanding, which is taking the perspective of the other person and trying to be persuasive rather than just commanding or using physical force to get what you want. We found much higher levels of the persuasive approach. We also found more shared experience. There are two aspects to Selman's interpersonal understanding conception: one is

negotiation (which I was talking about to begin with), where there is tension in the interpersonal dynamic; and the second is shared experiences, where the interpersonal dynamic is in a kind of equilibrium. It is a friendly or neutral dynamic. There was more of that kind of dynamic in the interactions of the constructivist pairs of children. Moreover, children from the constructivist classroom resolved about twice as many of their conflicts in comparison to the other two groups. So the results were very clear in showing that the answers to those questions were that yes, children in constructivist classrooms are making developmental progress in the direction of reciprocity as we predicted, and they are different from children in classrooms where the sociomoral atmosphere is not as cooperative, but is heteronomous.

***And this brings us to your most current work.***

I can mention three current projects. One is a study of the effects on young children's moral reasoning in opportunities to discuss social and moral dilemmas from children's story books we published at the Regent's Center for Early Developmental Education. A second is a study with colleagues at the Regents' Center in which we are comparing four instruments that purport to

assess developmentally appropriate practice. We are developing our own instrument with a particular constructivist flavor. Third, we are going to write a book on constructivist early primary education with a special focus on academics, based on videotapes we have collected from the best classrooms we know.

***We'll look forward to the results. Keep us posted.*** □

**Rheta DeVries** is Professor of Curriculum and Instruction and Director of the Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa. **Catherine Twomey Fosnot** is Executive Editor of *The Constructivist*.

***For further reading:***

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Rheta DeVries will be a keynote speaker at the 1996 ACT Conference. See page 21 for additional information.