The Foxfire Approach

Inspiration for Classrooms and Beyond

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This collection of essays and reflections are dedicated to all of the students, teachers and community members who have supported Foxfire over its 50 year history. In particular we want to call out to Ann Moore for her long time commitment to the Foxfire Fund, to Jonathan Blackstock for keeping the Foxfire Magazine as a vital part of RCHS' students lives, and to Hunter Mooreman for his sensitive and progressive leadership as chair of the Foxfire Board. Robert Murray is no longer with us but his love for the land and his knowledge about its ability to empower all who visited with him will always be missed.

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AN INTRODUCTION

Consider the contexts in which many, maybe most teachers try to teach today: (1) burdensome, detailed, curricula, often in the form of "standards," sometimes accompanied by day-to-day prescribed instruction; (2) large classes (imagine a biology class with 32 students in which you are expected to conduct "experiments"); (3) disconnect between schools and the communities they serve; (4) school administrators who seem bent on enforcing whatever the "system" requires; (5) education hierarchies which seem remote from the realities of schools, students and teachers; (6) schools which seem designed to perpetuate the socio-economic disparities of our national culture.

Did you miss anything you expected? Perhaps high-stakes tests, with teacher performance rated on students' test scores?

Less obvious, unless you are an educator tracking such things, is the reality of the short shelf-life of promising innovations. If you stay in the profession longer than five years, you are almost bound to be a participant in something promising, often promoted by your school or school district. Then the funding disappears, or the administration announces that program will be replaced by something *they* have decided would work better. Is the current trend of teachers leaving the profession after or before five years surprising?

At one point Foxfire-sponsored initiatives at the high school included a video program, developing video versions of magazine articles, taught by Mike Cook, a former student in the magazine course. Bob Bennett created an outdoor education program as an alternative to required physical education courses. George Reynolds, skilled musician and certified in music education, involved students who had never had an opportunity to try their hand at music, especially the traditional music of Appalachia. One group of those students bonded into a string band, performing at schools, civic events, and clubs in the region. They appeared on the nationally televised program "Grand Ole Opry," where the announcer forgot whatever they had selected as a name, stumbling out "The…uh…Foxfire Boys!" That name stuck and the group has stayed together for the intervening years. They have recorded their music. And this writer tried adapting Foxfire to required high school social studies courses, an initiative which provided valuable perspectives when we initiated Programs for Teacher.

In light of the foregoing portrait of teaching, is it surprising that in 2016 we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the *Foxfire Magazine*, published by students at

Rabun County High School, Georgia. Foxfire students and alums are preparing volume #13 of the Foxfire books to mark this milestone.

This cultural journalism project has survived changes in Rabun County school superintendents, new principals at the high school, and wave after wave of state-mandated curriculum "reforms." Consider also the political and sociological tensions wracking the U.S. during those years (1966-present), often manifested in attempts to make public schooling a corollary villain for the failure of citizens to behave as expected.

More to the point of this book: In 2016, we will celebrate the 30th anniversary of Foxfire's *programs for teachers*. As will be manifested in the essays and commentaries, the durability of those programs reflects our determination to maintain the integrity of what we came to refer to as the "approach," as well as a conscious disposition to deal with the realities of schooling, reforms, retrenchment, and retreat to the familiarities of the past. As we work with classroom teachers as they contemplate how to implement Foxfire's Core Practices in their classrooms in contexts with mandated curricula and limited resources, we often characterize the process as *subverting the dominant paradigm*. More about that throughout the book.

THE APPROACH

With the publication of *The Foxfire Book* in 1968, containing articles composed by students for previous issues of the *Foxfire Magazine*, the high school project gained national attention. English teachers wanted to know how they could engage their students in that kind of accelerated acquisition of composition skills. Over the next decade Wigginton and his students addressed educator audiences of all kinds, Foxfire books came out at regular intervals, and this modest program attracted the attention of educators and foundations.

The Bingham Foundation of Connecticut paid us a visit in 1986 at our offices at the Foxfire Center, the collection of old buildings of various kinds donated by families in the region interested in the preservation of those artifacts of a disappearing culture.

Apparently many foundations reassessed their sponsorship of education programs during the 1980's. The visit by the Bingham Foundation ostensibly was to probe our thoughts about best programs to consider for additional funding. The real purpose: An assessment of Foxfire's potential to become a change agent in unshackling schooling from the entrenched, unpromising practices typical of most public schools.

The next week the Bingham Foundation offered Foxfire a challenging grant: To actively explore the potential that the pedagogical practices which guided Foxfire's cultural journalism program at Rabun County High School could be adapted – key word there: *adapted* – for students in grades K-12, all different subject fields, and all demographics. It was a one-time grant: $5M; five years.

All of us involved in Foxfire were high school teachers – magazine, music, video, outdoor education, social studies – so we engaged this challenge with perspectives informed by those experiences. Three durable guidelines emerged from our deliberations:

1. Participation by teachers would have to be by their informed choices, not by direction from someone in the central office to participate in a "staff development" session.
2. There would have to be continuing support, preferably involving the other participants in ongoing dialogue, for teachers to figure out how to adapt the Core Practices to their own unique situations. We noted how so many professional development programs resembled summertime religious revivals: the righteous enthusiasm disappearing with the temptations of fall and football and automobiles.
3. Aware of the loss of integrity and momentum of promising education movements as they expanded in concentric circles – each subsequent circle a diluted version of the original – we agreed that somehow we had to maintain the integrity of whatever we initiated. At the same time, we knew we had to respect the perspectives of fellow educators from different grade levels, subject fields, and demographics – just as we expected to be respected as classroom teachers. Note: Turns out that the tensions involved in those two perspectives provide a continuous dynamic which stimulates flexibility and deliberation. Almost 30 years later, our dialogue and decisions reflect continued attention to both perspectives.

How to label our venture into programs for teachers? What we advocated was not a "method," nor a "strategy," nor an "activity," nor a "curriculum," nor a distinctive "pedagogy." In year two of our implementation of the Bingham grant, in a conversation involving a teacher from the Foxfire teachers' network in up-state New York, the coordinator of the Foxfire teachers' network in North Carolina, and this writer, one of us said something like, "Well, it's how you *approach* situations as a teacher…" That was it: The *mind-set* each of us holds as we *approach* planning, implementation, and reflection on our instructional practices. Through our programs for teachers we aim to influence each teacher's instructional practices by considering Foxfire's Core Practices as key elements in his/her mind-set.

THE CORE PRACTICS

Foxfire developed the first version of the Core Practices for use in a cultural journalism project sponsored by the Institutional Development and Economic Affairs Service (IDEAS) around 1980–87. The six practices in that version established the central practices of Foxfire: Student involvement in all aspects of the work; clear focus on academic learning results; production for an audience; and active learning.

In 1986–87, we revised the Core Practices to (1) reflect the need to embrace practices that complemented those in the original version, and (2) serve as guidelines

for the practitioners who would be participating in the K-12 Foxfire teacher networks forming as a result of our Teacher Outreach initiative.

The third version, developed around 1997–98, reflected the contributions of practitioners though the first ten years of the Teacher Outreach program. This version included the expansion of some of the Core Practices, as well as some needed refinements in the wording of the Practices.

Participants in the Foxfire-Piedmont Partnership's Programs for Teachers from 2004 to 2008, including college instructors, agreed that it was time for another revision of the Core Practices. Long time practitioners agreed, affirming that the Core Practices should be a *dynamic document* which reflects our awareness of developments we should embrace, while avoiding the latest fads promoted as the new magic wands to improve schooling in the U.S. The 2009 version reflected those perspectives, plus ordering the Practices in a sequence intended to guide new practitioners into effective implementation over time.

The current version came from a systematic review in Fall 2013. It reflects some refinements in language, plus a slight adjustment in the sequence. We added a "Note" providing the criteria an instructional practice had to meet to be included.

The Core Practices define what we came to refer to as "the Foxfire approach." They serve as guidelines and criteria for classroom practitioners, not as a "method" which can be presented in a staff development session on Monday and applied on Tuesday. Like the ongoing effort in this nation to fulfill the principles of democracy, Foxfire-inspired teachers strive to fulfill all ten Core Practices. In practice, those moments rarely occur – and they are transitory when they do – but they are affirming, shining moments, shared by students, teachers, and their communities.

In our courses and workshops for teachers, we encourage active, critical engagement with the Core Practices, as opposed to passive acceptance. We take time to consider the "yeah-buts" that result from projecting each Core Practice into the realities of each participant's classroom, including the challenges entailed in mandated standards, high stakes tests, and lock-step curricula. Thus each practitioner takes charge of the application of the Core Practices in her/his classroom – and then becomes a contributor to the next version of the Core Practices.

The Core Practices appear as Exhibit A. We encourage readers to engage them – preferably with two or three colleagues – to imagine classrooms where the *approach* to planning, implementing and reflecting on instruction includes The Core Practices in practitioners' mindsets.

Four essays in this volume flesh out the development of Foxfire and provide perspectives into the contexts in which Foxfire became a respected journal about Appalachia, then expanded into a model for instructional practices.

- Barry Siles' short essay puts the creation and development of "the Land," as we refer to the Foxfire Center, into historical perspective, and includes brief mentions about current developments.

- The title of George Reynolds essay, "Sound Reasoning: How the Foxfire Boys emerged and became a community institution," clearly describes the focus of his essay about the evolution of the Foxfire music program under his guidance and provides inspiration for Foxfire-inspired initiatives in the arts.
- "No Inert Learning Accepted at Foxfire!" provides what we describe as a "brief overview of the development of Foxfire…and an update on what Foxfire is doing… more than 40 years later."
- "Eliot Wigginton's Relational Pragmatism," Frank Margonis' stimulating analysis of the pedagogical insights which enabled Wigginton's ventures to succeed beyond what he and his students envisioned, take us inside the yin-and-yang of decision-making in such an enterprise.
- Janet Rechtman's substantive piece, "From Active Learning to Activist Learning…," provides both a political and a pedagogical perspective for Foxfire's development. Her closing reflection – "the path from active learning to activist learning has spiraled into more questions than answers" – leads to the admonition to "be prepared for the long haul, since we've been talking about this for nearly 50 years."

Essays representing three (actually four) generations of Foxfire Magazine students aptly convey how the Foxfire Magazine has continued publication for 50 years – through several school district superintendents, several high school principals, many changes on the local school board, as well as economic and political developments which urbanized the area – inspiring students and expanding the reach of the magazine into other states.

- Lacy Hunter Nix's essay, "Looking Home to Find My Way Forward…," will resonate with anyone with teen-aged children as well as teachers for grades 8–12.
- Katie Lunsford's essay, "Foxfire and the Community…" , contains insights which demonstrate the durable learning resulting from being part of the magazine project, learnings which continue as insights into the socio-economic trends today.
- Joy Phillips' project with her 5th and 6th graders to publish their on-line version of the Foxfire Magazine, "Foxfire is More…," inspires us all with Foxfire's prospects in "the digital age." Read her piece to find the "fourth generation."

Kiel Harrell – surely inspired by his wife's experience taking the Foxfire course for teachers then using the Foxfire approach teaching a fifth-grade class in rural central China, "From Rabun County to Yonji County…" dipped into his dissertation research to provide the most complete and affirming narrative of the Foxfire course for teachers, "The Foxfire Course for Teachers…".

Though Foxfire began as a high school venture, we have found that teachers in grades 1–6 actually seem to get the vision and design instruction guided by the Core Practices quicker than teachers for grades 9–12. Sara Alice Tucker, early childhood educator, describes her early encounter with Foxfire – a professional development experience with a Foxfire-inspired educator – then her applications of the Foxfire

approach in elementary classrooms, both public and private. On the way, Dr. Tucker lines up the burdensome requirements forced on teachers for a scathing review that politicians need to read and heed.

Teachers contemplating instruction guided by Foxfire's Core Practices nearly always express concern whether their "administration," usually referring to the school principal, will support their efforts. Edd Diden, a school administrator who actually steered his teachers toward Foxfire, as well as developing a support system for them, provides guidance to administrators in "Administrative Support for the Foxfire Approach…".

Early in the development of our Programs for Teachers we noticed that the Foxfire approach might show up in almost any education endeavor. Jan Buley, one of our Foxfire course facilitators, describes her adventures using the approach in higher ed. "Foxfire Goes to University…".

Three essays locate Foxfire in larger contexts: "Nurturing Civic Involvement…" by Greg Smith and "Project Based learning, a Center for Design Class and Foxfire" by Keith Phillips describe how Foxfire facilitates Place-Based Education. Clifford Knapp takes us on his education journey into many institutions and programs, "Experiential Education…", so we can see multiple possibilities for the Foxfire approach.

Most every educator considering all the preceding success stories might say, "Yeah, but will it work for me where I teach?" Steve Williams, Foxfire practitioner, and his wife Wilma Hutcheson-Williams, chair of the Education Committee of the Foxfire Board and a facilitator of our course for teachers, provide us with a scholarly response: "Research: How Do We Know Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning Works?" Cynthia's answer to the question, "will it work for me?" comes from her long association with Foxfire in many facets: "Foxfire as a Need-Satisfying, Non-coercive Process". The title is a good clue to the answer.

George Wood's association with Foxfire goes back almost 50 years, when he served on our first national advisory board. Currently serving as director of Coalition of Essential Schools, George wraps up this book addressing this: *In case you didn't get the message from the preceding pages about why you should consider the Foxfire approach in whatever you are doing, here it is again!*

Assembling these essays affirmed our shared sense that for many more decades Foxfire and our Programs for Teachers have potential to inspire teachers at all grade levels, all subjects and all demographics to engage their students in bringing content to life. In the process, students and their teachers acquire durable learning—the kind of learning that equips them with the knowledge and dispositions to be effective citizens in a democracy. Is there any doubt that those traits are in short supply these days, a dispiriting by-product of schooling-as usual, standardized curricula, restrictive policies, and uninspiring instruction? At the same time these essays remind us of the challenges we face to fulfill Foxfire's vision. Educators inspired to join us in this venture may initiate contact at www.foxfirepartnerships.org, or hsmith@piedmont.edu.

THE CORE PRACTICES

The Core Practices were tested and refined by hundreds of teachers working mostly in isolated and diverse classrooms around the country. When implemented, the Core Practices define an active, learner-centered, community-focused approach to teaching and learning.

Regardless of a teacher's experience, the school context, subject matter, or population served, the Approach can be adapted in meaningful and substantial ways, creating learning environments that are the same but different – environments that grow out of a clearly articulated set of beliefs and, at the same time, are designed to fit the contour of the landscape in which they are grown.

Considered separately, the Core Practices include eleven tenets of effective teaching and learning. Verified as successful through years of independent study, teachers begin their work through any number of entry points or activities. The choices they make about where to begin and where to go next are influenced by individual school and community contexts, teacher's interests and skills, and learners' developmental levels.

As teachers and learners become more skilled and confident, the Core Practices provide a decision-making framework which allows teachers to tightly weave fragmented pieces of classroom life into an integrated whole. When they are applied as a way of thinking rather than a way of doing, the complexities of teaching decisions become manageable, and one activity or new understanding leads naturally to many others.

If teachers choose the Approach to guide their teaching decisions, it is not important where they start, only that they start. The adaptability and room for growth in skill and understanding make the Core Practices a highly effective, life-long tool for self-reflection, assessment, and ongoing professional development.

The Work Teachers and Learners Do Together Is Infused from the Beginning with Learner Choice, Design, and Revision

The central focus of the work grows out of learners' interests and concerns. Most problems that arise during classroom activity are solved in collaboration with learners, and learners are supported in the development of their ability to solve problems and accept responsibility.

The Academic Integrity of the Work Teachers and Learners Do Together Is Clear

Mandated skills and learning expectations are identified to the class. Through collaborative planning and implementation, students engage and accomplish the

mandates. In addition, activities assist learners in discovering the value and potential of the curricula and its connections to other disciplines.

The Role of the Teacher Is That of Facilitator and Collaborator

Teachers are responsible for assessing and attending to learners' developmental needs, providing guidance, identifying academic givens, monitoring each learner's academic and social growth, and leading each into new areas of understanding and competence.

The Work Is Characterized by Active Learning

Learners are thoughtfully engaged in the learning process, posing and solving problems, making meaning, producing products, and building understandings. Because learners engaged in these kinds of activities are risk takers operating on the edge of their competence, the classroom environment provides an atmosphere of trust where the consequence of a mistake is the opportunity for further learning.

Peer Teaching, Small Group Work, and Teamwork Are All Consistent Features of Classroom Activities

Every learner is not only included, but needed, and, in the end, each can identify her or his specific stamp upon the effort.

There Is an Audience beyond the Teacher for Learner Work

It may be another individual, or a small group, or the community, but it is an audience the learners want to serve or engage. The audience, in turn, affirms the work is important, needed, and worth doing.

New Activities Spiral Gracefully out of the Old, Incorporating Lessons Learned from Past Experiences, Building on Skills and Understandings That Can Now Be Amplified

Rather than completion of a study being regarded as the conclusion of a series of activities, it is regarded as the starting point for a new series.

Reflection Is an Essential Activity That Takes Place at Key Points Throughout the Work

Teachers and learners engage in conscious and thoughtful consideration of the work and the process. It is this reflective activity that evokes insight and gives rise to revisions and refinements.

Connections between the Classroom Work, the Surrounding Communities, and the World beyond the Community Are Clear

Course content is connected to the community in which the learners live. Learners' work will "bring home" larger issues by identifying attitudes about and illustrations and implications of those issues in their home communities.

Imagination and Creativity Are Encouraged in the Completion of Learning Activities

It is the learner's freedom to express and explore, to observe and investigate, and to discover that are the basis for aesthetic experiences. These experiences provide a sense of enjoyment and satisfaction and lead to deeper understanding and an internal thirst for knowledge.

The Work Teachers and Learners Do Together Includes Rigorous, Ongoing Assessment and Evaluation

Teachers and learners employ a variety of strategies to demonstrate their mastery of teaching and learning objectives.

J. CYNTHIA MCDERMOTT AND HILTON SMITH

1. NO INERT LEARNING ACCEPTED AT FOXFIRE![1]

INTRODUCTION

Among the many brilliant educators who have brought alternatives to the classroom, perhaps none has created such an interesting marriage between all aspects of the Outdoor Education traditions and the traditional classroom than Foxfire and the imagination and experimentation of Brooks Eliot Wigginton (Wig). This chapter introduces a brief overview of the development of Foxfire, some insight into Wig and his personal philosophy and an update on what Foxfire as an organization is doing today, more than 40 years later.

Alfred North Whitehead, philosopher, mathematician and educator, in his Presidential address to the Mathematical Association of England in 1916 challenged the status quo educational model. Strong words as he stated, Culture is activity of thought and receptiveness to beauty and humane feelings. Scraps of information have nothing to do with it. A merely well informed man is the most useless bore on God's earth. What we should aim at producing is men who possess both culture and expert knowledge…. In training a child to activity of thought, above all things we must be aware of what I will call "inert ideas" – that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations. …Education with inert ideas is not only useless: it is, above all things, harmful;—Corruptio optimi, pessima. From the very beginning of his education, the child should experience the joy of discovery. The discovery which he has to make is that generally ideas give an understanding of that stream of events which pours through his life, which is his life. …The only use of knowledge of the past is to equip us for the present. Theoretical ideas should always find important applications within the pupil's curriculum. This is not an easy doctrine to apply. It contains within itself the problem of keeping knowledge alive, of preventing it from becoming inert, which is *the central problem of all education* (pp. 1–3; italics added).

Some educators struggle to create educational experiences that are relevant and, happily, the central aim for Experiential education is exactly that. Gardner found "that scholastic knowledge (inert) seems strictly bound to school settings while outdoor education fosters "connected knowing," where education is part of, rather than separate from life (p. 122). Unlike classroom learning, outdoor education uses the students' whole environment as a source of knowledge. The community, rather

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 1–9.

than the classroom, is the context for learning where real experiences can occur. Experiential learning theory defines learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience (Kolb, 41).

What is significant about Foxfire is the transformation that it allows. Wig describes the pecking order that exists for many students in school. "Certain students get to do everything and other students get to do very little. And one of the magical aspects of this whole endeavor is that virtually anybody can play a part and make a contribution and it doesn't have anything to do with strength or looks or popularity or money of whether or not you have a car or any of those other trappings of adolescent prestige. Those fall by the wayside in a stiuation like this" (Wigginton, 1988, p. 32).

Boss describes three outdoor education approaches. The first, adventure education, usually takes place outdoors and aims to develop interpersonal competencies and enhance leadership and decision making skills. Outdoor education nurtures a respect for our connectedness with nature and the wider community and this connectedness flows over into an awareness of our relatedness to others in the community. Kurt Hahn, in an address in 1965, eloquently described his hope for Outward Bound and what it could accomplish for society at large.

> The tragic history of continental countries transmits the warning that we should take heed of Napoleon's words: "The world is not ruined by the wickedness of the wicked, but by the weakness of the good." Again and again when disastrous decisions were taken by German governments in the last 50 years, wise men retreated in noble helplessness, lamenting events which they could have influenced. If we take to heart the lessons of history, we will regard it as a very serious responsibility of schools to build up the nervous strength in the vulnerable, the imaginative, the sensitive by methods which will harden yet spare them so that they will be better able to stand the strain which responsible citizenship imposes. (Hahn, p. 4, 1965)

The second, cultural journalism, helps students understand their community and their place in it. Gathering community resources through interviews and research is an historic process that takes many forms such as courses, magazines, newspapers, anthologies and various nonprint forms. It may be community based or may portray a culture for a general audience. Even though the process is not new, the term—cultural journalism—was first used to describe publications inspired by Foxfire (Olmstead, 1989). Olmstead states that as the world grows smaller, the mutual understanding of diverse groups of people becomes more important to peace and cooperation. Cultural journalism is a vehicle to promote such understanding (p. 2). This was an essential concern for Wig's regarding his students because he found a deep level of prejudice and mis-information not only about those outside their community but also about their own community. Cultural understanding is a powerful way to help students understand their role in our democracy.

> We see decent people commit unthinkable acts. We see decent people silent in the face of unthinkable acts. …The survival task of humanity is clear; it is to envision and create institutions, from our schools to our media to our businesses that foster our democratic selves—people able to feel and express empathy and to see through the walls of race, culture and religion that divide us, people who know how to exert power while maintaining relationships. We've blinded ourselves to the most powerful tool we have. That tool is democracy. (Lappe, 2006)

The third model, participatory research, is best exemplified by Myles Horton and the work of the Highlander Center. Participatory research is done by members of a community who want to solve (and resolve) a problem that affects them personally. Similar in philosophy to the work of Paulo Freire, engaging the community in ways that support their own skills and capacities provides lasting change. Horton describes the efforts of three liberatory programs and says that they "were based on the democratic principle of faith in the people: i.e. trust in the people's ability to govern themselves and make decisions about their lives. The underlying purpose was the same: to empower people. That is the common denominator (p. 185).

What is clear from the 40+ years of work of the Foxfire Fund, is that all three elements of Outdoor Education are present. The place where the learning takes place is both the community and the classroom. Cultural Journalism is a key component, as the students interact with the community not only to preserve elements of the culture but to understand their place in that culture. The third piece, participatory research, yields numerous opportunities for the students to work with the community (both within the classroom and outside of its four walls) to find solutions to challenges. But a question to be addressed here is how did Foxfire become so clearly linked to the principles of outdoor education when the founder, Brooks Eliot Wigginton (known to his colleagues and students as Wig), was not an outdoor educator?

The most complete record of the history of the development of Foxfire is found in Wigginton's personal narrative, Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience (Twenty Years Teaching in a High School Classroom). Published in 1985, and six years in the writing, it chronicles Wig's thinking beginning in 1963 during his college years at Cornell. Wig shows us how his dissatisfaction with inert education generated his willingness to try something different.

A brief history; Wig graduated from college ready to begin his career as a high school English teacher. Without much planning and after a few letters to find a job, he ended up in Rabun Gap, Georgia, an area he knew since he had grown up in Athens (some 80 miles away) where his father had been a professor of Landscape Architecture. He began his professional career in Rabun Gap in August 1966.

It turned out to be an odd job, teaching at the Rabun Gap Nacoochee School (RGNS) which was a semi-private high school (some students came from the local community and others were boarding students). In addition to his teaching assignment (all ninth and tenth grade English, one section of geography) he was

also an assistant house parent. Wig was busy! Unfortunately, things did not go very well for Wig and his classes. He writes, "On one of the bleakest fall days in 1966, I walked into my first-period class, sat down on top of my desk and crossed my legs and said, very slowly and very quietly, "Look this isn't working. You know it isn't and I know it isn't. Now what are we going to do together to make if through the rest of the year?' The class was silent" (p. 32).

With fits and starts, and many ideas that were initially accepted and others that were rejected, students made suggestions and Wig worked with them all. He continues, "for several weeks we experimented. Seasoned teachers, had any been watching us, would say we floundered, but I prefer the sound of experimented" (p. 46).

Many hours and discussions later, and with Wig relating his personal experience with magazine writing, the classes decided to move forward with a magazine and determined that it would contain work by Rabun Gap students and work from students from other schools, work by professional writers and authors and articles from the surrounding community. This last insightful decision in fact made all the difference.

But what was it that allowed Wig to take this kind of educational risk. What did he have in mind that would allow students the kind of freedom necessary to make decisions? What supported his thinking to allow the practices of democratic teaching practices to prevail? Loathe to keep much of his personal journals entries from college, this tidbit gives us something of a sense of the kind of personal philosophy that was at work.

> I sincerely feel that this cautiousness stifles all individuality even more than the machinery of society. People are no longer willing to live dangerously, try things that may hurt them or possibly knock them flat, We think too damn much and don't rely on impulse anymore. In a way that's too bad. I think. Millions of little aspects enter every decision and we see all the aspects and it scares us off from making any decision at all except to forget the whole thing. April 1963. (Wigginton, p. 47, 1985)

Born on that impulsive day in 1966 was the start of what has come to be known as the Foxfire Approach. No formula, no teachers manuals, no curriculum guide, no in-service from the visiting expert. Just one teacher believing that children could make decisions and take responsibility for carrying them out and figuring out the skills they needed in the process was all it took!

Of course it was not easy. There was no money for the production, no equipment except an old WWII camera that had been handed down to Wig. But the interest and excitement and commitment from the students (and of course the support from Wig and the principal) made it happen.

But what is Foxfire? One person who worked closely with Wig is Hilton Smith. For the remainder of the article we will proceed with an interview format to be

consistent with the method the Foxfire magazine students would be using if they were writing this article.

WHAT WAS IT ABOUT WIG THAT ALLOWED HIM TO HAVE SUCH TRUST IN THE STUDENTS?

Initially, he had no more trust in students than any other teacher at that school. But once he noticed how well students handled the responsibilities entailed in creating issues of the magazine – and how quickly their language arts skills advanced – he connected the dots and realized that they craved that trust and that he had to extend the trust for the venture to continue past a one-year project.

Also, his trust is not a matter of either/or sentiment. To some teachers the prospect of that much trust comes across as giving up "control." Wig is not naïve about adolescents, so his classroom management involves anticipation of the students' responses to challenges and opportunities. Control becomes a collaborative responsibility, with the teacher being vigilant about the possibilities of things going off the rails.

The magazine was a huge risk, even though he had the support of the principal. Why do you think he was able to take that risk?
His passion about the potential value of language arts skills served as a kind of keel for his teaching. Wig did not see the magazine as a "risk," but did see the risk to his students if they did not acquire those skills. Also keep in mind that since RGNS was a private school, with a student population consisting mostly of underachievers at that time, there was less chance of parents questioning the efficacy of the magazine as a worthy endeavor. Finally, as he acknowledged frequently, when the local community responded so positively to the published interviews of local people, the project had all the support it needed to deal with any nay-sayers.

Outdoor Education and other experiential experiences are designed to help students grow and mature in ways that "inert" education can't. What benefit did the Foxfire approach have on students?
Students acquired an enhanced sense of themselves as learners, along with some durable skills in and appreciation of literature and composition. That tends to translate into what we'd call metacognition now, in the sense that they approached other learning situations more aware of how to cope with them.

Along with those gains, his students began to realize that the culture of the southern Appalachians had many aspects to be proud of. They moved away from that sense of being hillbillies and therefore something inferior, toward more positive attitudes about themselves as part of that culture. The fact that about half the members of his classes were residential students from other part of the nation added to that development as they, too, looked on that culture with more appreciation. This

enabled Wig to work to dissolve the endemic racial and ethnic prejudices of the local students, an aspect of the Approach that continued when the program moved to the public comprehensive high school.

Finally, Foxfire students learned that much of what is worthy to be learned is in venues other than the school building. That, too, became part of the Approach and was applied in other situations, including Native American communities and inner-city neighborhoods.

As a community-based process, did Rabun County change as a result of Foxfire?
With the publication of the Foxfire books, there was a discernable increase in cultural pride in the region. Foxfire became a kind of reference point for the people in the region. The instructional program at Rabun County High School changed, eventually including five Foxfire-influenced teachers (magazine, video, music, outdoor education, and social studies). We have to suspect that had a residual impact on the local area, but documenting that would be very difficult.

Wig had to be encouraged to teach others about the process, partially because he knew that the magazine was not Foxfire. Was he satisfied with the national expansion and did it maintain its integrity as an approach?
During the years following the publication of *The Foxfire Book*, teachers from all over sought him out to learn how to initiate similar "projects" with their classes. When I joined Foxfire in 1984, we kept track of about two dozen of what had become know as "cultural journalism" magazine projects around the U.S. That very few of them survived more than few years – and that none of them caught on with other teachers in their schools – informed our later work with teachers.

Wig avers that he first grasped the possibility that Foxfire was more than a magazine as he wrote *Moments* to respond to an invitation to do some work with IDEAS. As he put it recently, "What were the kinds of practices that stuck with me, that made a difference?" He considered those practices as "common denominators," and they gained definition as he led workshops of teacher. Those common denominators served as the forerunners of the Core Practices.

By his own acknowledgement, Wig did not have a deep background in education, so many of the experiences and encounters during these years served to fill in his knowledge about schooling. John Dewey's work, for example, "was not part of the picture" until Foxfire accepted the challenge of systematic dissemination of the approach on a larger scale. During that time various advisers, such as Junius Eddy, suggested things for Wig to read so he would be more conversant in the discourses he would now enter. That's how Dewey's *Experience and Education* came into his view.

But the pivotal period for Wig and the whole Foxfire organization was from 1984 to 1987, when Foxfire received $1½ K from the Bingham Foundation to mount a major Teacher Outreach program. What had been an almost casual sideline for Foxfire had to be tooled up for a systematic initiative to bring the approach to teachers in all

demographic settings, all grade levels, all subjects, and all types of students. And we had to do it so that the results were more durable and would develop a momentum of their own rather than fading away as most initiatives tend to do.

Wig remembers that he approached the pilot course, summer 1986, at Berea College in eastern Kentucky, "with trepidation." He included *Experience and Education* as a required reading to provide philosophic grounding for the Approach – as he had experienced it. The course was not going well and there was "whining about the Dewey book." One member of the class, an archetype of the Appalachian American Gothic woman, sat stoic through the first week of the class, unresponsive even to the other women in the class and seemingly indifferent to Wig. In the middle of the second week, she suddenly addressed the whining majority of the class: "You haven't heard a thing he has said." She followed that with a 30-minute oral dissertation relating Dewey and Wig's commentaries to the miseries of schooling in eastern Kentucky. It was a "shining moment" and the turning point in that class and in Wig's sense that we could really do this. That teacher returned to the Berea course in 1987 with some of her students to share what they were doing and learning. That set that course on track and established the link between Core Practices, *Experience and Education*, and teachers' own practices. That linkage continues essentially unmodified today.

Anecdotes like that characterize the experiences of all of us working with teachers on the Foxfire approach. Because the approach is defined by Core *Practices*, not principals, and it is an *approach*, not a technique nor a method, *Foxfire becomes the accumulated experiences and reflections of all its practitioners*. That gives it both durability and integrity. Wig recognized that and accepted that Foxfire had spiraled into something beyond the parameters of the Foxfire magazine and cultural journalism. It is significant that he continued to focus on his work at the high school, while accepting invitations to present at various events that aided the overall effort.

The most difficult aspect of the history of Wig involves his conviction to a charge of molesting a minor. How did Wig's conviction affect the organization?

Having the founder plead guilty to a charge of molesting a minor would have killed many education programs. Foxfire survived for several reasons. In the minds of most people in northeast Georgia, Foxfire's contributions to students and to the appreciation of the regional culture weighed more than his transgressions. This was manifested by the willingness of store owners to put "Foxfire Still Glows" signs in their front windows. Of course, there was dismay and some anger. But support for the organization remained strong.

Wigginton had little involvement with the Foxfire teacher regional networks that we had developed as the primary Teacher Outreach vehicle. Most of those teachers had never met Wig, so he was more of a mythic figure to them. At the time of the transgression and guilty plea, Foxfire was very fortunate to have as CEO Billy Parrish, who came to us from the Trust for Historic Preservation to manage the organization while Wig moved his work to the University of Georgia. Billy handled

all aspects of the situation with calm determination to not let it sink Foxfire. To that end, he and I made a point of traveling to the teacher networks and giving them the story straight up, no dissembling. So we sustained trust. In fact, in many ways the Foxfire organization was strengthened by the whole ordeal. Much of the credit goes to Billy Parrish.

What has happened to Wig?

After Wig's arrest he wrote an article from prison (Wigginton, 1993–1994) in which his years of teaching in fact took a deeper turn. Wig compares in rather tragic ways the parallels between public schools and the prison system as he describes a project that the inmates attempted which was to build a library. After 26 years of teaching, Wig makes frightening comparisons between education and prison. He quotes Viktor Frankl, Nazi death camp survivor and world-reknown psychiatrist who wrote that what "exists in nearly all humans; is the desire to make a difference, to be involved in work that matters, to feel a sense of belonging and efficacy. Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life. [What he needs is] the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task (p. 68, 1984)."

The task of a non-inert learning community has at its center such a goal. Involvement, inclusion, shared decision making and utilizing the strengths of each individual are at the core of such work. Wig continues, " in the absence of an environment that inspires and engages, inmates and students soon ask, "Is this all there is?" For inmates it comes after the shock of incarceration is replaced by a numb throbbing in the soul. Having suffered as much self-loathing as he or she can stand, an inmate finally asks, "Now what do I do? Spend the next five years staring at a wall?" For students it comes with the realization that most courses are driven by the same flat gray routines. The students says, "I'm supposed to spend how many years doing this? You ARE kidding, right?" (Wigginton, 1993, p. 70).

As Wig makes the parallel uncomfortably clear, the reader can find some optimism in the continuing work of Foxfire, best exemplified by the Foxfire Core Practices. At their root is the understanding that work must be meaningful and engaging, In order for students to feel committed to the learning, the teacher and students must collaborate in the creation of the work. To that end, Foxfire and Wigginton continue to inspire us to create the kind of practice so necessary for transformation that although rare is in fact at work in classroom and schools throughout the country. For more information about Foxfire, contact the Foxfire Fund.

NOTE

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BARRY STILES

2. THE FOXFIRE MUSEUM AND HERITAGE CENTER

The Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center was created much in the same way as Foxfire itself – through the power of student choice and community support. The people the students were interviewing in the early years of the magazine believed so much in what the students were doing, which was preserving their culture, that they gave many of their personal belongings to the students so that the items could be preserved for future generations. The students had no real place to store or display these items, and it gave them the idea and the dream to create a museum.

This kind of dream requires money to fund it and the money came when students were given the opportunity to write *The Foxfire Book.* When the book contract was signed the intent was to use the monies generated by royalties from book sales to create the museum. In 1974 an old apple orchard on the side of Blackrock Mountain was purchased. A Gristmill, that the students had learned about when interviewing Aunt Arie, was acquired, disassembled and brought up the land and reassembled by the students. A museum was born and a dream became a reality. More buildings were brought up to the land and eventually a village was created. We now have thirty buildings that comprise The Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center. Over the years more and more items have been donated to the museum creating a substantial repository of the Appalachian culture.

What was started decades ago is still growing. Visitation has increased and infrastructure improvements have been made with even more planned. It is Foxfire's intention to have The Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center become a premier destination of the Southeast and have it be the preeminent site for the interpretation and education about the Appalachian Culture. Kindergarteners to college age students visit the museum regularly to learn more about this amazing culture. Special interpretive programs for 4th grade students have been created to fit within their curriculum. Annual Folk events are held at the Museum that promote the understanding of the Appalachian culture. Visitors from around the world come to the Museum to visit the "home" of Foxfire. Increased interpretation and greater accessibility to the Museum are high priorities in the coming years.

Along with the Museum, the students also created a substantial archive on the Appalachian culture. When students conducted the very first interview, which was with former Sheriff Luther Rickman, they found that they couldn't remember all of the details very well and that they couldn't write a very good article from their notes and recollections. They decided to interview Luther Rickman a second time

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 11–12.

and this time bring a reel to reel tape recorder and record the entire interview. How fortunate we are that students learned this on the very first interview. It became standard practice, and still is, to record all interviews. This has created an incredible oral history collection on the Southern Appalachian culture. Thousands of hours of interviews have been collected mostly on magnetic tape. We recently transferred these interviews to a digital format for preservation. Students have also amassed over 100,000 pictures taken over the past 50 years. They have published 194 issues of *The Foxfire Magazine* as well as 12 in the series of *Foxfire Books* and numerous companion books. Plans are being discussed for further preservation work within the archives as well as making the material easier to access by researchers.

What an incredible story: Foxfire is 50 years old and not only still going but still growing!

GEORGE REYNOLDS

3. SOUND REASONING

How the Foxfire Boys Emerged and Became a Community Institution

As the story goes, after the success of the Foxfire Books, Eliot Wigginton (Wig) and the staff had ideas of moving beyond recorded interviews and text with new supplementary endeavors to reach other kids not yet involved in the Foxfire project. A video project had been initiated and the next idea was to produce musical recordings modeling the Foxfire Magazine and to build a business that would support a music program. The business model faltered, but the music program became phenomenally successful, nurturing the Foxfire Boys and a host of young musicians in the Rabun County community.

I arrived in Rabun Gap fresh out of school with a Masters degree in Folklore and an Appalachian pedigree. I had played and performed since high school, and I had learned much of what I knew about playing folk music with the old timers in the back room of Carl Shockley's filling station in the Blue Ridge town of Hillsville, Virginia. I had avoided education courses in college and had been determined to break the family tradition of becoming a teacher. But when Guy Carawan, one of my mentors and a member of Foxfire's National Advisory Board, brought me down to visit the Foxfire Project, life took a different turn from what I had expected: if I was going to work with the Foxfire project, I had to teach. Eventually I came to realize that I might as well have won the lottery because it was the best career opportunity I could have dreamed of, especially learning to teach in the Foxfire environment. When the kids in the program gave Wig and the staff the okay, he made the offer in a five-word job description: "start a music program."

Royalty money from the Foxfire Books made many things possible, but also generated a heavy sense of responsibility. With seemingly unlimited resources available to Foxfire, Wig and the staff had a moral imperative to make Magazine classes the best learning experience possible. I had a mandate to experiment and create something just as special as the magazine and books, but in the music field, something different from the paradigms of band and chorus, something tailored to our kids and community, something that could help repay Foxfire's debt to the generous people who had made it all possible.

As with the Foxfire magazine, the music program evolved as collaboration among students and adults. At that time, the Core Practices had not been codified. None of us on the staff had read Dewey's work, nor did we use the language of Progressive

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 13–17.

Educators. Nonetheless there was a consensus among us that there were golden principles that came out of the process that Wig took the kids through to create the first Foxfire Magazine: "Listen to the kids; they'll tell you what you need to know." Phrases like that became the mantra in our discussions. We had discussions—Wig, Mike Cook, and Paul Gillespie, myself and others—hours of heady and exciting discussions, brainstorming, challenging each other, laughing.

Word among students at Rabun Gap Nacoochee School (RGNS) was that the Foxfire teachers were different, and that they would listen to suggestions. I did listen, too. In the folklore class I taught at RGNS, Filmer Kilby asked if he could bring his guitar to school so that he and Jack McClain could pick and sing for us. Of course I said yes. The kids loved it and so did I. I still remember Filmer and Jack doing the "The Deer Hunter's Blues." If I had never been part of all those discussions with Wig, and Mike, and Paul, I might have told the class, "Well this is cute, but now let's get back to work." Instead, it was a Foxfire Moment. We were on to something. It was not long until Filmer, Clinton Kilby, and Scott Stewart started playing together. I sat in with the kids on guitar and vocals, and suggested we call the group the Foxfire String Band. We practiced, recorded ourselves, and performed a few times. A year later when Foxfire moved the operation to Rabun County High, a similar request came, "could we just bring our guitars and pick." I had been teaching students *about* folk music. They wanted to *make* music. This time my response was to ask the staff and school administration if I could teach a class just for kids playing and singing their favorite music. Wish granted. No Questions. (How likely is that to happen in a public school today?) The class grew and prospered, sticking to acoustic instruments only, venturing into some rock music, bluegrass, country, and gospel. Pretty soon, Filmer's cousin Tom Nixon, an eighth grader, began show up in our classroom to play mandolin. It was okay, Tom said, he had permission. As it turns out, Tom had asked his teacher, Ms. Brown, to be excused to the restroom, and then he'd slip upstairs and visit us. Ms. Brown, concerned, asked Tom if he was all right since he was taking so long in the bathroom. Tom had to fess up, and told Ms. Brown. Bless her, Ms. Brown began to let Tom (a stellar student) come and visit on days when he was caught up with his work.

Dean English had been taking banjo lessons from Freddie Webb, one of his neighbors over in Persimmon, and he joined the class. Mike Hamilton and Steve McCall were in the class by then. I think Wayne Gipson and Richard Hembree joined later, as did Tom Nixon when he reached ninth grade. There were others, too, like Carol Rodgers and Debbie Shirley, school wind band kids, who loved to sing but not play stringed instruments. Those kids made up the Foxfire String Band. Others in the class were doing their own thing and liked different kinds of music. John Fowler, for example, liked the Beatles. Brilliant but shy, John made critical social growth in the safe, yet challenging environment. Like John, many of these kids went on to become Foxfire star students in other areas of the high school curriculum.

Diverging from the rest of the class, the String Band had separate rehearsal sessions to build repertoire. The boys in the group had one good instrumental

piece – I think it was "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" – so they entered the school talent show. They took first place and brought the house down. Stars were born, it would seem. Wig suggested the band play for the Georgia Arts Council awards ceremony, and they were invited. Those kids only knew one tune, and they found themselves in the company of fabulous artists from across Georgia, like the Morehouse College Glee Club, at a gala event at the High Museum of Art. The governor was seated on the front row. What a powerful and unique moment that must have been for those kids. As everyone remembers, the kids "nailed" the tune. Now they were young and cute, but they really did impress people.

It has been my observation over the years that adults just can't seem to do enough to help out talented and gifted youth. When a kid astounds us artistically, we experience an added measure of emotion and pleasure that we might not have if the performer were an adult. When the Foxfire Boys were young, they astounded audiences time and time again. And adults reacted predictably by laying a red carpet of opportunities. I liken this phenomenon to the experience we have when we buy stock in a new company; their success is our success. I joined the band in 1982 when the Boys' bass player had to quit the group. Playing bass and standing in the rear enabled me to provide integrated musical support, leadership without being out front, and an opportunity to broaden their repertoire. I also was well positioned to be the adult, business manager, and bus driver.

Resources matter. As for resources, professional connections like Wig's connection with the Arts Council and his considerable influence elsewhere made a huge impact on the future of the Foxfire band. Foxfire Board member Barry Poss, producer of Sugar Hill Records, gave extraordinary support on many levels, including arranging for the band to play on the Grand Ole Opry. It was Roy Acuff who christened the band "The Foxfire Boys" and allowed other Foxfire music groups to carry on the "String Band" name. My grad school friend, Peggy Bulger, director of the Georgia Arts Federation, got the Boys numerous jobs in the Atlanta spotlight, and made it possible to play during the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillihammer.

Aesthetics matter. Local musicians like Curtis Blackwell, Oliver Rice, and Bob Mashburn had bluegrass bands, and everybody supported each other. Buried deep in the relationship between the Boys and local musicians was a sense of what the music should sound like. We all talked about the music—how the harmonies work, how the hair stands up on your arms when someone really gets it right, how a band "drives" a song, what makes an instrumental solo exciting, and so on. Some venues, especially the Satolah Fire House, were places where bands played "hard core" bluegrass, and audiences there understood and loved the strident, powerful mountain songs. Performing at Satolah reminded us of where our bluegrass roots were.

Community matters. The Boys never forgot their responsibilities as public servants. Community venues like Satolah, Persimmon, Tiger, Clayton Fire

Departments; churches like Camp Creek, Lakemont, Rocky Grove Baptist, and Persimmon Church of God; funerals; Trout Unlimited, and community club events: all of these we played free of charge. There were and still are numerous "die-hard" fans and supporters, old and young, who came to concerts, bought recordings, and listened regularly. Even now in their middle age years, the "Boys" have their benefactors. Tom and Dean's music business, Blue Ridge Music, has received generous support from community individuals helping them with their property, buildings, labor, and programming.

Those who could pay were charged according to their ability to pay, distance, and how busy the Boys were. One time the fellows were complaining about how jammed up their weekends were becoming, and I made them a proposal—I'll start charging twice as much and we'll see if that gives a little free time. The clientele changed a little, but we continued to get as many jobs. People thought they were getting more, I suppose.

Experience matters. Performing certainly was hard work, and we earned every penny. Malcolm Gladwell's book Outliers sets forth the "ten thousand hour rule" which goes a long way to explain the Foxfire Boys' success. As soon as those boys had some success under their belts, they played all the time outside of normal activities. To say that most of them played and/or sang two to three hours per day is not an exaggeration. I've done it myself and seen it plenty—when a kid gets the music bug, they go after it with same passion as a first love, and, like marriage, it can last a lifetime. The Foxfire Boys would certainly agree that of the thousands of hours they have performed and/or practiced, hardly any of it seemed like work.

Reflection matters. The greatest growth spurts the Boys experienced were the times they spend in the recording studio. The process of making a recording requires one to use all of one's artistic and technical skills of playing and singing (posture, articulation, all that). And listening to the playback is reflection on steroids. Nothing else could have underscored the musical instructions I gave them over the years like the process of listening and deciding if we needed to record a song again or publish it. Not only is it time consuming, it is expensive to cut a song over an over. If we had not had Foxfire backing us, we could not possibly have attained the production quality we did in those records. The experience of finding out what "a take" means has inestimable worth to a young person.

Teach someone else. Incredible as it seems to me, I have been away from Rabun County for more years than I was there. When I go back, though, I am deeply gratified to see what the community of musicians I taught has done. I'll have to say that the size of the classes I taught were way too large for me to give any one student much attention. The solution to that problem was for everyone to follow this practice: as

soon as you learn something, turn around and teach it to someone else. Now I find that they have been teaching each other for the last twenty years, and there are young musicians everywhere.

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GREGORY A. SMITH

4. NURTURING CIVIC INVOLVEMENT

From Foxfire to Place-Based Education

In its heyday, Foxfire was mostly known for the cultural journalism associated with the magazines and books that emerged initially from Rabun Gap and then in a multiplicity of forms from communities around the country under the guidance of teachers schooled in the Foxfire approach. In the 1990s, I encountered examples of the creativity unleashed during Foxfire workshops in Alaska (*Cama-i*) and in Oregon (*Coastal Geographic*). If I hadn't attended a session at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New Orleans in 1994, I wouldn't have known about the serious energy the Foxfire organization was also putting into civic education. Hilton Smith, who led Foxfire's extensive professional development efforts, spoke at this session about projects that gave young people the opportunity to become participants in decision-making forums in their own communities. What I heard that day stayed with me and has deeply influenced my own thinking about place- and community-based education. Although I can't remember specifics from what Smith shared, he describes a story in Lee Shumow's 2009 edited volume entitled *Promising Practices for Family and Community Involvement in Schools* I suspect might have been part of his presentation that day.

When Smith was still a high school social studies teacher, he learned from students that a site just across the state line from their own community was slated to become the next storage center for nuclear wastes produced at power plants throughout the South. Smith encouraged students' interest in this topic and incorporated their investigations into the 12th-grade social studies classes he was teaching at the time. With their newfound knowledge, students began attending public hearings about the placement of this waste facility. They raised questions that could not be easily answered in ways that were reassuring to local residents, something that may have contributed to the hearings being cancelled before they were half-finished (Smith, 2009, p. 90). In this chapter, Smith also recounts stories from the School at the Center project in Nebraska. There, in addition to more typical Foxfire projects such as collecting oral histories or preserving local historic buildings, students started small businesses, built new homes or renovated old ones, and took the lead in learning about immigrants who were then finding their way from nearly every continent to the country's heartland. For Smith, this kind of teaching seemed central to meaningful efforts to revitalize the practice of democracy in the United States.

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 19–30.

Over and beyond these civic benefits, Smith also believed that learning experiences like these provided a rich opportunity to integrate the academic disciplines and instill a level of emotional meaning and significance generally missing from the bland diet found in most academic classrooms. He observes that "The students involved in the projects described above were excited—and their excitement served to sustain their efforts and to set what they learned as a permanent habit of mind" (Smith, 2009, p. 98). His observations mirror much of what I have seen in schools where teachers have found similar ways to bridge the gap between classrooms and communities (Smith & Sobel, 2010).

PLACE-BASED EDUCATION – ORIGINS, PRESENT PRACTICE, AND DEFINITION

For more than two decades, a number of colleagues and myself (Bowers, 1987; Gruenewald, 2003; Nachtigal & Hass, 1998; Orr, 1992; Shelton, 2005; Smith, 1993, 2002; Sobel, 2004; Umphrey, 2007) have been encouraging educators to find ways to incorporate local knowledge or issues into the curriculum in ways very similar to the Foxfire movement as a means for nurturing environmental stewardship, citizenship participation, and the work of revitalizing of neighborhoods and communities. This endeavor to ground learning in the local got a strong push in the mid- to late-1990s from the five-year Annenberg Rural Challenge that sponsored over thirty projects nationwide aimed at strengthening the relation between schools and communities through local investigations and projects; the Rural School and Community Trust has continued this work primarily in the Midwest and South. The CO-SEED (Community-based School Environmental Education) Project under the leadership of David Sobel has disseminated and helped implement these ideas in New England, and the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative has for the past eight years been systematically integrating place-based practices with an environmental focus into schools throughout the state of Michigan. Predating the work of the Annenberg Rural Challenge, the Program for the Academic and Cultural Enhancement of Rural Schools initiated projects in schools throughout Alabama that continue to engage students in the publishing a community newspapers, the starting of small businesses, or the construction of low-cost housing, greenhouses, and gardens. In less systematically organized ways, this work goes on in many other schools, some of which will be described below.

Central to place-based educational efforts is providing children with opportunities in the course of their formal education to make genuine contributions to their communities and the local environment. Place-based educators do not see schooling as detached from life outside the classroom but intimately related to it. Also critical is the way teachers in many instances reach out to individuals and organizations outside the school to do their work. Place- and community-based lessons and units can take a multiplicity of forms depending on the opportunities that exist in different locales; they can be incorporated into the work of teachers across the K-12 spectrum

and take place in rural, suburban, and districts. In what follows, I will share a number of vignettes to provide a vision of the possible, moving from smaller scale efforts to some that have impacted entire communities. At the heart of this approach to teaching and learning is a commitment to introducing students and the adults in their lives to the fact that children and youth are citizens and potential stewards right now and that the work they engage in can be both valuable and meaningful. Much as Hilton Smith and the Foxfire Project sought to embed learning in students' own locales with the aim of helping them find their voices and personal power, so, too, do place-based educators seek to cultivate the forms of involvement and attachment critical to the maintenance of healthy democratic communities.

STARTING CLOSE AND SMALL

The first two examples of place-based education are taken from the work of teachers in a suburb of Portland, Oregon. A few years ago, I taught a course on the linkage between sustainability and place-based education to teachers in my local school district. Teachers' final project involved developing a unit they could present later that year that would take their students outside the classroom and invite them to make some kind of meaningful contribution to the school, their neighborhood, or the community as a whole. The projects demonstrate what can happen when educators begin using the school grounds or nearby natural areas as texts with the same potential educational value as books, videos, or websites. Such projects do not need to be overwhelming or costly, and many can be integrated into curriculum requirements by simply determining the kinds of tasks needed to complete a project and then linking these tasks to district or state curriculum guidelines.

The first project was conceived by third-grade teacher and the school librarian who collaborated on the development of a plan to have students write a land use history of property adjoining their primary school that was being transformed into a public park by METRO, the Portland area's regional government. The teacher and librarian had spoken with a local resident who had played a pivotal role in preserving this land, and she had given them a banker's box full of news clippings and other information about the property. The teacher approached her students about this idea, and they were willing to give it a try.

She began by arranging a walk on the property with a METRO staff member who took them to see the sole remaining oak tree on what had once been a large oak savannah. She explained that before EuroAmericans had arrived in the 1800s, the Willamette Valley had been covered by oaks thanks to the burning practices of the Kalapuya Indians, the primary tribe that had cared for this land for centuries. The regular fires kept out Douglas firs and allowed for the spread of the more fire resistant oaks that produced vast quantities of acorns – a primary food source for the Indians – as well as habitat for a wide range of species. The meadows left in the wake of burning also simplified the process of hunting for deer, elk, and other game. She said that METRO as well as other conservation organizations in the state were

attempting to create more oak savannahs to support species endemic to the region and reverse the widespread clearing of trees that accompanied the introduction of farming by American pioneers.

Coming back from their walk, students decided to tell the history of what was to become the Graham Oaks Park from the standpoint of the sole remaining oak tree. They divided up into six teams tasked with investigating and then writing chapters about the indigenous gatherers and hunters, trappers in the early 1800s, 19th-century farmers, farmers in the 20th century, and then urban development from the 1950s through the 1990s. The final group took their cue from materials in the banker's box and wrote about the two-decade long period during which the fate of the land was being decided. To create illustrations for each of the chapters, students tore pieces of colored paper to represent appropriate images for each of the time periods. The book was then assembled and published and ready to be shared during the dedication of the park the following fall.

I attended the pre-dedication ceremony held at the school on a Friday afternoon. The mayor of Wilsonville was there as well as the director of the local library. A number of students from the class—now fourth graders—sat on the outdoor stage in front of their classmates and many parents. In his opening remarks, the mayor enjoined the students to be the eyes and ears of the park adjoining their school as well as the middle school they would later attend; he explained that they would have more contact with the land than anyone else in the community. He then turned the mike over to a few of the authors of the area's land use history and asked them to read sections from their book that was then presented to the Wilsonville Library. Students were clearly proud of what they accomplished, and their recognition spoke to the value of giving young people a chance to make genuine contributions to their community.

A couple of years later, two other teachers from the same class on sustainability education but at a different school were just finishing a long unit on watersheds. They asked their classes of fifth graders what kind of legacy project they would like to leave at the school. After having learned about non-point sources of pollution and the importance of reducing storm water run-off, they identified an alleyway between two wings of the school that was both an eyesore and a site where water collected during the spring and winter. The alley was covered with asphalt and regularly trapped water during storms despite the presence of two grated drains. The students proposed removing the asphalt and lying permeable paving stones. The teachers approved of this idea but said that students would need to get permission from the district and the city as well as developing a design for the intended improvements, raising the funds necessary to purchase the paving stones, and organizing a workday to complete the project. The students eagerly broke into teams responsible for completing these different tasks, and in early June participated in a work party with their parents and interested community members that transformed what had been a problem area into a small oasis with flagstones and large potted plants that filtered

water before it flowed into the nearby Willamette River. Students in each of these instances gained an understanding of their own capacity to make things better and contribute to the common good.

Experiences like these give young people a chance to encounter their own voices, their capacity to plan and act, and their ability to collaborate with others in ways that lead to public recognition and validation. Such moments present to young people a vision of their own identities that takes them beyond a narrow vision of individual selves to a sense of the life they share with others. Communities, if not entire societies, depend upon large numbers of people who possess the willingness to connect to and act with others in this way.

INTENTIONALLY INDUCTING CHILDREN AND YOUTH INTO COMMUNITY PROCESSES

Place-based lessons like those described above present children with what it means to be connected to people beyond themselves and their immediate families and begin to develop in them the skills needed to work with others. Cultivating the abilities associated with effective civic participation, however, may require more intentionality as well as more formal partnerships with people outside the school. Neal Maine, now a retired biology teacher from Seaside, Oregon, as well as an early board member of the Annenberg Rural Challenge, worked throughout his career to persuade his fellow townspeople that children are citizens now and not only after they gain the right to vote at 18. He asserted that young people need to be inducted into civic life in the same they learn to play baseball. On Little League or Cal Ripkin teams, beginning players are provided with all kinds of support as they are introduced to the game. The distance between bases is shortened, the kids hit from a T or after a year or so a mechanical pitcher, and interested parents are stationed around the field to provide informal coaching and direction ("Watch what's happening at the plate so you don't get hit by a ball."). As players get older, the bases and games get longer and their teammates start pitching. Maine argued that cities and counties could do something similar to prepare their own children and youth for active citizenship. As a former football coach as well as a teacher, he was able to convince community leaders, some of whom had once played on his teams, to agree to memoranda of agreement between the city and county to seek out teachers and students when they had research needs that could be effectively completed as class projects, research that could then be used to support important local endeavors.

One year, the Parks Commission was interested in improving playground equipment in parks throughout Clatsop County. The Commission approached an upper elementary school teacher about having her students investigate the topic and come up with recommendations. The children visited each of the parks, assessed their playground equipment, took photos, and developed a report that they then shared at a public meeting of the Parks Commission. In doing so, they gained an

experience that seems likely to make participating in future public meetings less intimidating. Another year, students at Seaside Middle School conducted a survey asking students about the amount of spending money they had access to in a given year and where they spent it. The survey revealed that students spent approximately $340,000 each year, most of it in Portland rather than locally. Their report was given orally to members of the local Chamber of Commerce with some recommendations about how the town's business people could keep more of that money in Seaside. These students gained an understanding about the power of data and their own significance as economic players. High school students one year were asked to collect information needed to run a software program emergency planners had just purchased to model the impact of tsunamis of different sizes on the local community. The planners, however, didn't have enough personnel to collect measurements of all of the buildings on the tsunami plain, data essential to run the program. A pre-calculus teacher was willing to invite her students to participate in this project, using their knowledge of trigonometry to determine the cubic area of the buildings and then assemble a hard document and CD-ROM with all of the information they assembled. With these figures in hand, planners were able to run the program and gain a better understandings of the conditions they will face when an inevitable tsunami hits in coming decades. These pre-calculus students grasped the way book learning can be applied to critical community issues and the degree to which average citizens may possess exactly the expertise needed to address local problems.

Central to the success of these efforts was a willingness on the part of city and county officials to take young people seriously, recognizing their capacity to effectively gather data and make recommendations worthy of adult consideration. Without these partnerships, the full potential of place-based education is more difficult to realize. When public agencies collaborate with schools in these ways, place-based educators' students have opportunities to both learn and contribute to community well-being. Students involved in these experiences began to understand how they could participate in public processes and effect change, learning under the guidance of interested adults both in and out of schools how to become effective citizens able to give back to as well as take from their community.

TACKLING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AS WELL AS PRACTICAL NEEDS

Everything that happens in the public domain, however, is not as apolitical as the projects described so far. Much of the work that Neal Maine inspired in seaside tended to be non-controversial in nature, an important factor to keep in mind in many communities. But citizen participation by its nature can often be conflictual, as was the case with the investigation of the nuclear waste site students in Hilton smith's social studies class conducted. The next example describes a project in a school in Boston, Massachusetts that required students to confront both the city and one of its most powerful agencies in an effort to address damage being inflicted on

a low-income community because of the lack of oversight and disregard by public officials.

Dealing with issues of social or environmental injustice often demands persistence and a willingness to stay with an issue over the long haul. The next place-based projects are something that students and their science teacher at the greater Egleston community high school (Gechs) in Roxbury were able to accomplish between 1997 and 2004. Gechs was founded in the early 1990s with the help of a grant from the us department of labor. Parents concerned about the attractions of street life hoped that a charter school focused on preparing youth to become community leaders would have the strength to point their primarily black and Latino sons and daughters in a different direction. In a few years, Gechs became part of the Boston public school district as one of its pilot schools, institutions given more flexibility in terms of budget, hiring, curriculum, and schedule.

When a science teacher, Elaine Senechal, came to the school a few years later, she wanted to find ways to integrate the school's community leadership mission into her own classes. She began attending meetings of local environmental non-profits to find out more about local issues and to determine whether there were any contributions her students could make. She quickly learned about the epidemic of asthma in Roxbury and residents' suspicion that the high volume of truck and bus traffic helped contribute to this. At one of the organizations, alternatives for community and environment, Senechal met two community organizers who were eager to support her and volunteered to come into her classes to teach students how to be community organizers, themselves. Based on what she had learned and the support she had been promised, Senechal created a course on environmental justice. Initially, she and students helped out with a campaign to raise money to purchase air-monitoring equipment for local public health agencies. Data gathered from these devices clearly indicated higher levels of pollutants and particulates tied to diesel exhaust. Students then conducted a survey aimed at learning how much residents knew about asthma and the relation of the disease to air quality; they also designed and implemented a system to inform the public about that quality using different colored flags displayed outside the school.

At one point early into the partnership, staff at the environmental non-profit learned that a city statute restricted the amount of time vehicles could idle at a single location to five minutes. The statute, however, was not being enforced. Given the fact that the bus lot for the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) was located a half dozen blocks from the school, this failure to enforce the law was contributing significantly to the amount of diesel exhaust released into the local airshed. For a number of years, students from the environmental justice class helped organize anti-idling rallies, wrote public service announcements, demonstrated in city streets, and spoke at city council meetings. In 2004, the issue was brought to trial, and the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority was forced to obey the anti-idling law and convert its buses to burn natural gas. Importantly, the city began enforcing this law

for all vehicles. Instances in which student activism result in changes this dramatic are few in number, but that they happen at all speaks to the significant role young people can potentially play in their community's life.

The residents of Roxbury and all of Boston, for that matter, were the beneficiaries of students' efforts to address this important community issue. Students, too, were beneficiaries. Senechal observed that youth who participated in her environmental justice course experienced a reduction in alienation and isolation; increased engagement, motivation, and skill mastery; enhanced self-concept; and the acquisition of social change strategies (2008, p. 103). By connecting learning to students home places and giving them the opportunity to work with others to attempt to improve environmental conditions for their families and neighbors, students began to see themselves as people with value and competence. Over and beyond this, they learned a set of skills with regard to community development and change that they will now possess for the rest of their lives. Using Neal Maine's baseball analogy, thanks to their opportunity to work shoulder to shoulder with youth developers from Alternatives for Community and Environment, they had been inducted into what it means to be a participating citizen. Reflecting on her experience at the Greater Egleston Community High School, one young woman wrote:

> I am proud of my accomplishments in environmental justice this trimester. More importantly, I have been able to gain confidence to speak in front of large groups of people. Before presenting to the City Council, I was very nervous. But after watching them and my classmates somewhat debate I realized they are regular people just like my family, my teachers, and my friends, and I should not be nervous when it comes to speaking my mind. (in Senechal, 2008, p. 100)

I would argue that democracies, especially during a period as tumultuous and uncertain as our own, need citizens with this young woman's confidence and commitment. In the years since this project, Senechal moved to different school after inheriting her family home in another part of the state, and GECHS became less community-centered under the leadership of a new principal. The environmental non-profits, however, continued to work with students from other Boston schools providing similar opportunities for young people to become effective change agents and activists (Smith, 2012). The partnerships with local organizations that arose during Senechal's tenure at GECHS demonstrate the power that this kind of alliance can have for a teacher concerned about giving her students opportunities to both learn about their local community and address injustice in whatever forms it takes. Her experiences points to the value of collaborating not only with governmental agencies, as Neil Maine did in Seaside, but reaching out to a multiplicity of groups able to help students deepen their understanding about local issues and then ideally take action to address them, especially when these could potentially become a source of conflict.

NOT EVERY PLACE-BASED PROJECT HAS A HAPPY ENDING

The difficulty when dealing with controversial issues is that the outcome may in the end not be as positive as the results Senechal and her students encountered in Boston. The Boston City Council could have ignored the data and protests, and the judge could have decided in favour of the MBTA. Results like these could become a source of discouragement for students and possibly lead teachers to never embark on projects as significant to a community as this one. A final example from Philadelphia shows how even when this happens, the benefits of engaging students in this kind of work can be substantial. Anne Spirn, a professor of urban studies at the University of Pennsylvania and then MIT, was involved for several years in an effort to correct decades of misguided development decisions in a Philadelphia neighbourhood called Mill Creek that had treated an urban watershed as something to be built over rather than cared for (Spirn, 2005). The consequences included houses and streets collapsing into sinkholes, the regular flooding of basements, and the deterioration of an historic neighbourhood. Not surprisingly, urban blight was quick to follow. Spirn believed that beneath all of these problems was a failure to read landscapes, and to address this failure she and her graduate students began a program at a neighbourhood middle school aimed at teaching students how to read their home environment, analyze the factors that led to its current state, and begin to take action to correct this. They figured that what students learned would spread throughout the community.

Starting out in the classroom of a willing teacher, they engaged students in a variety of learning activities. Spirn's graduate students met weekly with students. They took their young charges on fieldtrips to identify the built-over Mill Creek, showed them historical photographs to acquaint them with what their neighbourhood had looked like in the past, and presented them with primary documents including texts and tables of statistics that became the focus of questions aimed at helping these eighth graders draw meaning out of the data. Spirn notes of this process that

> Only after the children had identified potential explanations for what they had observed, did my students tell them about background information that they had gleaned from their own reading and from our seminar discussions. The idea was to encourage the children to form the habit of looking for significant detail, framing questions and reasoning out possible answers. (2005, p. 404)

After establishing this historical background, the middle school students were broken into small groups that investigated a 1961 cave-in, a redevelopment plan for the neighbourhood created by the famous architect, Louis Kahn, and the redlining of the neighbourhood by city banks that prevented homeowners and business people from gaining access to loans. They then had the opportunity to interview staff members from the West Philadelphia Empowerment Zone and the City Planning Commission where they asked hard questions like "Why did you let those new houses be built on

the buried floodplain?" and " Did you warn the people who bought there?" (Spirn, 2005, p. 405). Throughout this time, the participating teacher would integrate topics from the Mill Creek workshops into other subject matter, creating a well-coordinated set of educational experiences for students.

In the spring, the middle school students made a presentation at the University of Pennsylvania about what they had learned, and during the summer additional teachers and students from the school attended a four-week summer program that gave participants the opportunity to interact with local gardeners and community activists, construct a model of the local watershed, build a water garden and outdoor classroom, and learn how to use software and the Internet to share information about their neighbourhood. In subsequent years, the school was divided into four learning communities consisting of approximately 250 students each that would focus on community and watershed issues. Spirn describes how each of these communities was "required to design and carry out a community service project every year: to identify problems in the community and to bring these problems and potential solutions to public attention" (2005, p. 406).

The impact of all of these activities was stunning. The school and the Mill Creek project began gaining state and national attention. Students presented testimony at the State Legislature, the school was featured on a NBC nightly news broadcast, and President Bill Clinton visited the school in 2000. For a time, it looked as though all of these efforts would lead to an amelioration of the conditions that had been so devastating for the neighbourhood. In 2002, however, the management of the Philadelphia School District was transferred to a private corporation whose policies led to the resignation of key staff members at the school. And in 2004, Spirn discovered that city planners had chosen to ignore recommendations they had been on the edge of adopting to improve the watershed and water quality in the area.
For Spirn, this unfortunate ending of a story that had such promise was counterbalanced by the impact this learning experience had on students' sense of themselves. Through their investigation of the landscape, they had learned that they and their loved ones were not the reason for the poor living conditions they had to endure, but were rather bystanders to poor decisions both in the past and in the present made by people who lived elsewhere. The middle school students taught Spirn that

> To feel both at home in a place and ashamed of it is harmful. It saps self-esteem and can engender a sense of guilt and resignation. Before the students at Sulzberger Middle School learned to read their landscape more fully, they read it partially. Without an understanding of how the neighbourhood came to be, many believed that the poor conditions were the fault of those who lived there, a product of either incompetence or lack of care. Learning that there were other reasons sparked a sense of relief. (2005, p. 409)

After being exposed to current positive neighbourhood redevelopment efforts, students came to see their neighbourhood as full of potential. With this sense of

possibility, they then were willing to speak up in the presence of public officials and participate in efforts to affect their own world.

Despite the outcome, students in Philadelphia gained a sense of the power of their own voices as well as their capacity to look at community problems and think creatively about what could be done to solve them. It can be easy for average citizens with few ties to local political leaders to assume that whatever they have to say will be disregarded, that their ideas count for little. What is clear from both the place-based education examples from Boston and Philadelphia is that when given the appropriate supports and opportunities for participation, young people can be helped to set aside the sense of powerlessness that can result in civic disaffection and anomie. During a historical period when the practice of democracy is being threatened by economic as well as political forces, finding ways to develop in the young a belief in citizen activism and the skills required to work collectively for the common good may be among the more critical strategies we can adopt to preserve a governmental system in which the voices of the many are valued over the power of the few. Even when some of these projects result in failure, what students will learn is the importance of resilience, patience, and ongoing problem-solving, things students at the Greater Egleston Community High School must have grappled with over the six years they worked to deal with air quality issues in Roxbury.

A SIMPLE SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE

The work that Hilton Smith and Foxfire began in the 1970s and ’80s rekindled an interest in local culture and local activism that was once part of the fabric of community life across the United States. Judging from Alex de Toqueville’s account of his visit to America in the early 1800s (Toqueville, 1904), people at that point in our history felt empowered to do what they could to create the institutions and social networks needed to live secure and meaningful lives. Much of what they accomplished was due to their willingness to form small associations that pooled their talents and labor in ways that brought into being a new country. Foxfire demonstrated first in Rabun Gap and then throughout the nation ways that students could once again do something similar. Now in the 21st century, educators who are directing students’ attention to the phenomena, knowledge, and issues of their own places are creating opportunities for similar forms of creativity and action to come to fruition. Although their efforts are still marginal when compared to a national preoccupation with test scores, accountability, and international competitiveness, the growing interest in project-based learning and support from organizations like the Lucas Foundation (Hall, 2015) and the state of West Virginia (www.wvde.state.wv.us/teach21/pbl.html) are promising.

An educator in Tillamook, Oregon who oversaw the implementation of an Annenberg Rural Challenge project in his district observed that underlying the changes that happened in schools there was a simple shift in perspective. Teachers

and community members began seeing learning as something that was closely linked to students' lives outside of school as well as the issues faced by people in this small coastal town. They also discovered that when schools entered into a more reciprocal relation to the broader community, they became the recipients of more public support. That shift in perspective is something that can spread rapidly as people begin to experiment and then experience the meaning and engagement that can accompany learning that is grounded in what is immediate and important to the young and their families. The Foxfire experiment is still spreading, still catching hold of peoples' imaginations. My hope is that some of what readers encountered here will inspire them (you) to do the same.

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CLIFFORD E. KNAPP

5. EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Exploring Foxfire and Other Approaches to Teaching

My assignment from the editors of this book was to explain experiential education and show its connection to the Foxfire approach to teaching and learning. At first I felt this was a daunting task and I wasn't sure how to begin. Why was I stumped as I prepared to write this chapter? Perhaps this was because of the complexities involved in the various educational philosophies, principles, and practices. Before I approached my computer, I read about experiential education from my personal library. The array of related books on my shelves displayed titles containing key words such as: theory and process of experiential education, learning through experience, outdoor leadership, challenge education, outdoor and adventure education, adventure programming, adventure therapy, and reflective teaching and facilitation. How would I untangle this jumble approaches to teaching and learning through experience? Then I read some articles from the last five years of the *Journal of Experiential Education*. As I read, the complexity expanded as the terminology multiplied. I found articles including topics such as: service-learning, equine assisted psychotherapy, community-based learning pedagogy, ecological metissage, wilderness therapy, impact of field trips, outdoor orientation programs, situated experiential learning, learning from reflection, outdoor education, place-based education, Outward Bound, challenge and ropes course experiences, humanistic, embodied, and interdisciplinary environmental education, and most surprising, tasting wine as a learning experience. How could I address this collection of topics and help the reader make sense of this field of study? I was becoming clearer about why I had trouble starting.

My first step was to find out how the Association of Experiential Education (AEE) defined the term:

> Experiential education is a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities. Experiential educators include teachers, camp counselors, corporate team builders, therapists, challenge course practitioners, environmental educators, guides, instructors, coaches, mental health professionals … and the list

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 31–43.

> goes on. It is often utilized in many disciplines and settings: Non-formal education, Place-based education, Project-based education, Global education, Environmental education, Student-centered education, Informal education, Active learning, Service learning, Cooperative learning and Expeditionary learning. (AEE, n.d.)

In order to simplify this definition, the AEE boiled this down to: "Challenge and Experience followed by Reflection leading to Learning and Growth". I wasn't sure this had much meaning for those unfamiliar with experiential education. A list of 12 principles of experiential education practice followed.

On the National Society for Experiential Education's website I found a more concise definition along with a list of 8 principles of good practice for all experiential learning activities. This organization stated: "All parties are empowered to achieve the principles which follow. Yet, at the same time, the facilitator(s) of learning are expected to take the lead in ensuring both the quality of the learning experience and the work produced, and in supporting the learner to use the principles, which underlie the pedagogy of experiential education" (NSEE, 2013). The principles from both organizations are available on their websites, but I chose not to reprint them here. More useful, I thought, was to describe some of the events in my professional life that illustrated these principles and helped me develop my philosophy based on experiential learning. As an experiential educator for over 55 years, these principles emerged gradually. I will indicate some of what I learned from experience by italicizing these principles as they arise. This is how I became an experiential educator and an advocate for the Foxfire approach to teaching.

Like many young, middle class boys growing up in the 1940s and 1950s in the Northeast suburbs of the United States, my summer experiences revolved around recreation. I chose to play team sports like baseball and basketball, explore vacant lots, collect coins, raise earthworms, build forts, find box turtles and injured animals and create zoos, play war with lead cowboys and Indians, and build miniature golf courses, carnivals, and circuses. I also fished in a nearby creek and learned about nature by honing my awareness and observation skills. Television was just beginning and radio was usually an after supper activity. Family vacations were few, but included annual trips to the Atlantic seashore to swim, play on the beach, visit the boardwalk amusements, and catch crabs in the bay. As a teenager I took short trips to a farm where my uncle and aunt gave me free rein to fish in the river, drive a station wagon, and shoot sparrows in the barn with a 22 rifle. My uncle and aunt understood the importance of trusting me and giving me freedom to explore. My main goals during summers were having fun with friends and wiling away the long, hot days waiting for school to begin again in the fall. *I followed my needs and interests and exercised free choice in deciding most of what I did with my free time.* I wasn't focused on learning how the world worked, gaining more interpersonal skills, understanding who I was becoming, or growing in awe and wonder of nature. Despite not being aware of any intentions to learn, I was learning how to get along

with others and value the natural world. In those days my parents were not concerned with the possibility of me getting in trouble by being lost or encountering stranger danger. The only real boundary they placed on me was a rule to come home when the 7 o'clock siren blew. I was not aware of reflecting on my experiences, except deciding to repeat the following day what gave me the most fun.

I don't remember any teachers or my parents helping me reflect on my life experiences to enhance the meanings of what I was taught. I wonder if any reflection was happening in my mind without much adult guidance. Now when I read about the importance of guided reflection in the learning process, I'm puzzled how and if I did it. My sixth grade teacher wrote the following in my autograph book at the end of the year: "And still they gazed, and still their wonder grew that one small head could carry all he knew." She obviously saw me reflecting on many of my experiences and learning from them. Only years later I discovered that she had lifted these two lines from Oliver Goldsmith's poem, *The Deserted Village* published in 1770. Obviously, I was reflecting on my own, but without much help from my teachers and parents. *Guided reflection on experience can be helpful in making sense from and transferring what is learned to future situations. Reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis are the main elements that transform experience into a learning experience.*

Elementary and junior high schools provided structured times remembered mostly for the friends I made and lost. Being male, white, and athletic in a middle class town near New York City, I was privileged as a student. I can't recall much from my academic lessons, but I do remember sports, recess, acting in plays, dances, and getting A's and B's on my report cards. I remember playing dodge ball or softball on the school grounds, but that was the extent of my learning outside the classroom. In the fifth grade we planted trees in a nearby vacant lot, but that was my only field trip until the ninth grade. In the sixth grade I remember making a large poster of South America with a friend and gluing food and manufactured products in their proper places. Today I couldn't tell you what I learned from that project, but I remember cementing a friendship with my teammate. *Cooperative and project-based learning with a partner or in small groups provided memorable and lasting experiences*. In my last year of junior high school, my class went on a four-day trip to Washington D.C. I vaguely remember visiting some of the monuments and attending a formal dinner/dance, but the most vivid memory was walking up the steps of the Washington Monument, looking out the window, I asking my girlfriend to go steady. I remember very little about who was President (it was Dwight Eisenhower) or how the various branches of government worked to make a law. School was mainly my social training ground and athletic practice field and court for later activities at college. These were satisfying times as illustrated by a statement about me in the 1954 edition of *The Rocket*, our class publication, when I graduated from the 9th grade: "Happy am I, from all care I'm free. Why aren't you all contented like me?"

In high school I remember reading a boring book titled, *Silas Marner*, but I couldn't tell you today about the plot. I never "caught fire" as a reader, but I was

a compliant student who read what was assigned. By high school, I had read a handful of books and the only title I remember is *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale. Most of my teachers taught in a traditional "tell, read, and test" manner. Learning subject matter in school was rarely exciting and only a few times did I ever have choice in doing an activity, project, or experiment. *I learned best through challenging hands-on, minds-on activities and I wanted to understand how these activities related to my life outside of school.* Were all my teachers' efforts on the academic curriculum wasted? Perhaps not, because I was forming positive images of who teachers were and what schools offered as laboratories for learning about friendships, girl friends, and who I was. Very little of the formal curriculum related to the world I knew at home. Memories of my days playing varsity basketball, going to dances, running long distances, and pole vaulting dominate my high school experience. I knew there was a link, but I couldn't see how school was connected to my favorite music, foods, friends, fishing, and future.

My undergraduate years in college were more memorable than my K-12 years. I still recognize when the musical piece, The Moldau, is played. I know something about educators such as Dewey, Bruner, Kilpatrick, Rogers, Lewin, and Raths. I've had my values clarified about educational issues by a few master teachers. I launched a summer camp counseling job and my career as a teacher in outdoor education largely because of a course field trip to a school of conservation during my freshman year. I met my first wife in camp and we later birthed two daughters. I still have a copper ashtray made in a metal and enameling class. I remember shaking in my shoes while giving my first speech in a public speaking class. I remember many of the field trips with the field natural history and biology teachers. By then, I was turning on to the process of learning and retaining more of what I experienced because I saw how it could apply to what was taught. My vocational path to becoming a teacher enabled me to see a clear link of the curriculum to a real-life job. I was motivated to internalize the course content and I cared about the concepts, skills, and values of education, especially as they related to nature and science. *When I learned with a clear purpose in mind, I was motivated and engaged and I retained much of the content. I often walked with a friend on the wooded campus of my college and learned through my senses about what I saw, heard, smelled, touched, and tasted*. College was made up of much more than taking formal classes. I remember the beer keg parties, camaraderie of the fraternity, soccer and basketball practices and games, and the required trip to a camp to learn about outdoor education. I spent three summers working as a camp counselor and relating to youth outdoors. These camp experiences solidified my choice to become an outdoor educator and science teacher. My college life was filled with exciting experiences. I still keep in touch with two of my undergraduate professors who impressed me as role models and later friends. *I took more initiative for my learning while still following the requirements of the course syllabi.* Occasionally, I researched and wrote papers about topics I loved – science, conservation, group dynamics, poetry, values, and teaching. *I was actively engaged and many of my courses allowed me opportunities to pose*

questions, experiment with ideas, solve relevant problems, and be creative. Many of these course-related activities became useful knowledge. I was able to build on my earlier interests in nature and human nature and mold a rewarding teaching career.

After my first year of teaching, I decided to follow Dr. L. B. Sharp, a distinguished professor, to Southern Illinois University when he moved from Pennsylvania to join the faculty. I had met him earlier as a young camp counselor and was impressed by his reputation and personality. He studied under some of the progressive educators at Columbia University's Teachers College, including John Dewey, and was an established outdoor education leader. I clearly remember my first meeting with him. He led our group of camp counselors along a trail in the forest and was spinning tales about what we encountered. All of a sudden we heard a bird calling in the distance. My curiosity was aroused and I raised my hand and asked, "What is that bird, L. B.?" He paused for only a moment and then said, "I don't know. Why don't you go find out?" I was stunned with his response because I'm sure he knew the name of the bird. I replied, "Do you mean I should leave the group and go now?" He said, "Yes, that's the best way to find out." This was one of my first powerful lessons in experiential education. I did leave the group and discovered the bird later identified as a cuckoo. The name of the bird was not the important lesson for me. It was L. B.'s teaching method. *He believed strongly in learning based in the context of the situation and by becoming actively engaged in solving problems deemed important to the learner. He also believed that students should find the answers to questions themselves, rather than be told by teachers.* That incident in the woods of Pennsylvania long ago stuck with me and influenced my philosophy of education in ways that still guide my practice. In 1943 Sharp first stated, "that which can best be learned inside the classroom should be learned there. That which can best be learned in the out-of-doors through direct experience, dealing with native materials and life situations, should there be learned" (Sharp, quoted in Carlson, 2009, p. 4). *He believed that some knowledge was gained best through direct out-of-classroom experience and that sometimes other alternative teaching methods involving mediated learning materials should be used.*

My career had its ups and down from beginning to end because good teaching is hard work, but I never regretted my decision to become a teacher. I began by teaching science in high school in 1961 and retired 40 years later from a university where I taught teachers about outdoor education. In total I spent 9½ years in public and private elementary, junior high, and high schools and 29½ years at the university level. The first blow to my ego was receiving a B grade in student teaching. My rationalization for receiving that grade was that I was paired with a supervising teacher who had a different teaching style and philosophy and who knew much more science than I did. He stuck to the textbook and lectured a lot. This didn't fit well with my way of teaching and learning through indoor and outdoor activities. Later as a 7th grade junior high school science teacher, the principal gave me a mediocre evaluation one year because I didn't squelch all of the off-task behavior of my students. I suspect he also didn't agree with my decision to allow the students

to call me by my first name. I wrote a counter view of my teaching evaluation to file with his sub-par report. *I enjoyed creating out-of-classroom lessons in the surrounding community and taking my classes there to learn.* Inside the classroom I planned lessons using concrete materials for experimenting, observing, questioning, and other science skills. *I viewed the whole community as the classroom and my guest speakers and the context of the surrounding environment as my co-teachers. I wanted my students to delve deeper into the subject matter and examine their values about what was important and the role of science in their lives. My lessons were rigorous enough so they would learn the ways of doing science and at the same time, enjoy each other and what they were learning*.

John Dewey's philosophy of "learning by doing through hands-on activities" is based on students constructing meaningful knowledge from experience and applying it to life situations. Dewey opened his laboratory school at the University of Chicago in 1896. His purpose was "to discover …how a school could become a cooperative community while developing in individuals their own capacities and identifying their own needs" (quoted in Tanner, 1997, p. xii). His goal matched my purpose in teaching. *Key words describing his school were: curriculum beginning with children's natural interests and abilities; social significance of subject matter emphasized in instruction; children solving real problems, past and present; child's attention is self-impelled; and children develop habits of cooperation and service to the community* (Tanner, 1997, pp. 177–178).

In 1974 I co-founded a 3-week summer camp for children ages 11–14 in New York's Adirondack Mountains. I wanted a chance to test my expanding educational philosophy and to emulate Dewey's school in a wilderness setting. The camp, known as The Human Relations Youth Adventure Camp (HRYAC), was one way to experiment with teaching through experience (Knapp & Goodman, 1980, pp. 183–220). In 1978, after five years of operating our camp, I wrote: "*We are trying to find better ways of building a close, supportive community of people of all ages. We are striving to create a place for everyone to be somebody special. We want to create an atmosphere where people will have a sense of personal power to get what they need to live rewarding lives. Our goals include giving people permission to touch other humans in caring ways. We want people to like themselves more and to fill time with worthwhile things to do. We want them to express thoughts and feelings easier in ways that consider others*. *We want them to be able to listen to others by 'walking in their moccasins'*" (p. 213). The context for learning about human relations skills was the natural setting of the wilderness. I wanted our campers and staff to grow in their appreciation of nature while participating in adventure activities such as hiking, campfires, canoeing, swimming, and stream exploration to learn about human nature. *These camper experiences must be authentic, have a real world context, and be useful in other settinsgs. Many lasting relationships were developed among the campers, staff, and the natural world.* Each evening we held a community meeting to evaluate the day and plan the next one. *The campers took turns conducting the meetings to*

practice their emerging leadership skills. They took the initiative, made decisions, and were accountable for the results of their choices. Success, failure, adventure, and risk-taking were important parts of the camp's program.

In 1979 I accepted a teaching position at Northern Illinois University. I left the camp to my co-founder and many of the staff members. I was looking forward to becoming a teacher educator on a faculty dedicated to helping undergraduate and graduate majors teach outside the classroom. Educating teachers had been my goal for many years and I wanted to apply what I had learned about experiential education. Our faculty supervised a master's degree in Outdoor Teacher Education and taught Elementary and Physical Education majors for several days in a resident setting. Having a facility where the university students could spend three—five days at a time to learn about outdoor teaching and child development was an ideal laboratory. Here was another opportunity to apply some of Dewey's ideas. *Our primary roles as faculty members were to select suitable experiences, pose challenging problems, set reasonable boundaries, insure physical and emotional safety, and support the learning process*. The university students culminated their learning experiences by teaching elementary school students who visited for three days. *They had opportunities to implement their planned lessons and to respond to spontaneous and unplanned, teachable moments that frequently arose on a daily basis.*

The freedom to be innovative and creative in teaching was more available in my university position. That part of teaching was one of the aspects of the job I loved most. I enjoyed opportunities to experiment and take risks with new outdoor lessons and teach a variety of courses during that 21-year period. In a graduate course titled, Integrating Community Resources into Curriculum and Instruction, I used the Foxfire approach for the first time beginning in 1991. My plan was to guide the writing of a book designed to help teachers learn about local interdisciplinary field trip opportunities. I taught the course thirteen times over the next 11 years and came to appreciate the power of this method. Graduate students not only learned how to integrate community resources into their curricula, they learned to work cooperatively and improve their writing skills. *They chose a topic to investigate and write about based on their perceived needs and interests*. The research involved selecting a site and talking to the people there. They delved into the history and current operations of these places. My challenge was to orchestrate these students and join with them as we worked toward the production of a useful book. I usually wrote a preface or epilog and worked diligently as an editor and writing coach. When one of the students served as publication editor, I helped that person bring the publication to completion. *When I became aware that the students were having difficulty with a particular skill or concept, I planned an intervention to help them overcome that barrier. I worked hard as a facilitator, and the rewards were plentiful.* I described my struggles and successes of this Foxfire experience in more detail in an article in the *Journal of Experiential Education* (Knapp, 1992, pp. 36–39).

I was inspired by Eliot Wigginton's book, *Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience* (1986). I read and re-read it several times and used it as a

textbook. I knew that the Foxfire approach meshed perfectly with the principles and practices of experiential education. I wanted to learn more about Foxfire so I interviewed Eliot when he lectured at our university (Knapp, 1993, pp. 779–782). Meeting him helped me become a better experiential educator. In a chapter in one of my co-edited books, *Sourcebook of Experiential Education* (2011), the co-editors of this book (McDermott and Smith) explain Foxfire and show how "…the Foxfire approach is experiential education" and how the AEE's principles of experiential education "…are quite parallel to those stated in the Core Practices of the Foxfire approach" (2011, p. 269). The core practices capture many teaching and learning ideas already expressed in this chapter. For example, Foxfire teachers are advised to: *honor learner choice; collaborate with students when engaging in the subject matter and mandated curricula; make connections between the classroom work and the community; serve as a facilitator in following the curriculum and meeting students' developmental needs; lead activities characterized by active learning; draw upon imagination and creativity in the learning process; promote teamwork through peer teaching and small group work; allow lesson outcomes to benefit other audiences; include the students in rigorous assessment and evaluation; and engage in thoughtful reflection of what is experienced* (McDermott & Smith, 2011, pp. 267–268).

In 1993 at Northern Illinois University I taught a one-credit graduate course for one weekend. This course was rotated among faculty members and we were free to select the topic, find resource people, and promote it to attract an audience. I wanted to teach a course about Native Americans because I had a long-time interest in the topic. I titled it, "Native American Influences on Outdoor Environmental Programs: Issues and Trends." After the faculty approved my idea, I suddenly got cold feet. Did I know enough about the topic? Who would I find to help me? How could I learn more in a short time? How could I get more experience with Native wisdom? Why did I choose this topic anyway? To answer these questions, I began reading books and talking to people who might know how to help. Fortunately, the University employed an advisor for the Native American special interest group, Jim Gillihan. He proved to be my savior. He was taught by famous Sioux medicine people such as Fools Crow, Lame Deer, Joseph Rock Boy, and Henry Crow Dog. Jim was an appraiser of Native American art, storyteller, archaeologist, and the fourth keeper of Sitting Bull's prayer pipe. He helped me find native and non-native speakers and make the right contacts for building a staff. For the next eight years I taught this course and filled the resident facility to capacity with over 100 people each time. It was a great success and I learned so much about indigenous cultures from my new-found friends.

One of my resource leaders was Carlo Carlino. He too was taught by traditional Lakota elders and was an accomplished teacher and ceremony leader. In 2001 I wanted to learn more about the vision quest or Hanbleceya, as the Lakota call it – more than what I knew through reading books. Hanbleceya means "crying for a vision", and is a one to four-day outdoor experience spent alone in a circle bounded

by red, yellow, white, and black cloth prayer ties connected by string. I went to Carlo with a tobacco offering and asked him if he would lead me through this sacred Lakota ceremony. He agreed, but only if I would complete four separate vision quests, one each year. Momentarily surprised by this extended commitment, I agreed and asked him how to begin. "First, he said, you must have a prayer pipe." I asked him, "How do I get one?" He replied, "The best way is to make one and I'll help you." My experiences multiplied as I learned about this ceremony. During the next few weeks, I successfully carved a pipe and was ready for the next step. Each year I formed 405 pieces of multi-colored cloth into tobacco-filled prayer ties and connected them in a large circle. Each year at the end of the ceremony, Carlo burned them in order to send my prayers to the Creator. I fasted for 36 hours and spent 24 hours alone in the forest wearing only a bathing suit, accompanied by two blankets and my pipe. When I finished my four-year commitment, I had a much deeper understanding of what a vision quest was. In addition I gained a better understanding of ecology, namely how I was connected to the surrounding ecosystem. The terms, "web of life", "interdependence" and "biocentrism" mean more to me now from a lived-experience perspective. The Lakota term, "Mitakuye Oyasin", or "all my relations" now holds real meaning for me. In retrospect the knowledge gained through all my readings was shallow and incomplete compared with what I knew afterward. Over the years, I have participated in other Native American ceremonies such as conducting morning prayer with the pipe, doing a purification lodge, attending a traditional wedding and spirit naming, supporting a Sun Dance, and restoring the mourner. *Firsthand, direct experiences often bring deeper and more lasting meaning to the written word.* I describe my vision quests in more detail in a book chapter I co-edited with Thomas Smith (Knapp & Smith, 2005, pp. 264–272).

In 2009 the Association of Experiential Education invited me to deliver the Kurt Hahn Address in Montreal, Canada. This opportunity is offered each year to someone for making outstanding professional contributions to the field. Kurt Hahn was another influential person in the development of my experiential education philosophy. He founded schools in Germany and Scotland in the 1920s and 30s and eventually started Outward Bound, an organization dedicated to training youth for service and to follow their interests in a variety of outdoor pursuits (Flavin, 1996, p. 45). In that speech I quoted Hahn: "It is a sin of soul to force young people into opinions – indoctrination is of the devil – but is culpable neglect not to impel young people into experiences" (quoted in Knapp, 2010, p. 276). When he founded his school at Salem in southern Germany in 1920, he outlined "The Seven Laws of Salem" as the basis for impelling young people into experiences:

1. *Give the children the opportunities for self-discovery.*
2. *Make the children meet with triumph and defeat.*
3. *Give the children the opportunity of self-effacement in the common cause.*
4. *Provide periods of silence.*

5. *Train the imagination.*
6. *Make games important but not predominant.*
7. *Free the sons of the wealthy and powerful from the enervating sense of privilege*.
   (Flavin, 1996, frontispiece)

Outward Bound later incorporated some of Hahn's laws in a list of ten learning design principles used in their Expeditionary Learning K-12 schools (Cousins, Mednick, & Campbell, 2000, pp. 320–322). These principles are considered as guides for developing experiential education programs. For example, one principle is "The Primacy of Self-Discovery" in which *"A primary job of the educator is to help students overcome their fear and discover they have more in them than they think"* (Mednick et al., 2000, p. 320). Another is "Intimacy and Caring" in which *"Learning is fostered best in small groups where there is trust, sustained caring, and mutual respect among all members of the learning community"* (Mednick et al., 2000, p. 321). A third is "Service and Compassion" in which *"One of a school's primary functions is to prepare its students with the attitudes and skills to learn from and be of service to others"* (Mednick et al., 2000, p. 322).

In my speech I told personal stories of how I learned through direct experiences. I mentioned two types of knowledge described by Howard Gardner, author and psychologist – "know-that" and "know-how" knowledge (Knapp, 2010, pp. 277–278). Know-that knowledge is the type emphasized in most schools today. It consists largely of mastering conceptual knowledge such as: "Water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit at sea level." This kind of knowledge is more easily evaluated on standardized and teacher-made tests. Know-how knowledge is more skill based, but still employs intelligence – for example, being able to start and maintain a fire to boil the water. This type of knowledge is harder to evaluate with typical standardized and teacher-made tests. Most schools over-emphasize know-that knowledge at the expense of know-how knowledge and separate much of the curriculum from applications in the larger community. That is where experiential education philosophy enters the picture because it serves to correct this imbalance. I remember what Albert Einstein said about placing value on something: "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts" (quoted in Knapp, 2010, p. 278). Just because know-how knowledge is harder to measure, it doesn't mean it is less important.

I continue to enjoy writing about experiential education. My writings are directed mainly at teachers, camp counselors, naturalists, and administrators of schools, camps, and nature centers. My first publications were in 1965 and included my master's research paper surveying selected resident outdoor education programs. I also wrote an article about constructing a simple device to test the compaction of soil. Since then I have authored or co-authored over 150 journal articles, 15 book chapters, assorted posters and activity cards, and 12 books. My most recent book, co-edited with Thomas E. Smith, is *Sourcebook of Experiential Education: Key Thinkers and Their Contributions* (2011). This project came to life because one of

Tom Smith's students asked, "If I want to understand the philosophy of experiential education, what should I be reading beyond Dewey and Hahn" (Smith & Knapp, 2011, p. ix)? Tom gave the students a list of other important people, such as Paulo Freire, Jean Piaget, Eleanor Duckworth, Maria Montessori, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, and L. B. Sharp, but there were others who made contributions over the years. That student's question prompted Tom to invite me to join him in editing a book to help future students develop their philosophies of experiential education. We decided to invite 32 other experiential educators to write about the person or persons who had influenced them in their professional development and philosophy of experiential education. The result was a collection of biographical stories about 37 leading experiential educators. In the first chapter we outlined some of the issues facing experiential educators and defined the key terminology. Dewey and Hahn's contributions were briefly outlined and the remainder of the book described the lives of other educators deemed worthy of the label, "experiential educators". In the appendix Tom and I dialogued about some of the philosophical issues raised in the book to help the reader reflect on some of the key points. We discussed the importance of reflecting on experience, whether listening to a lecture or reading a book qualified as an experience, how we learn best, whether experiential education will become accepted practice in schools, compared experiential education with spirituality, whether experiential education could be considered a theory of instruction, the differences between teaching and learning, difficulties in organizing the book, and our own biases and values. Perhaps we raised more questions than we answered, but we believe the book is helpful to those interested in probing why they do what they do as a leader and learner.

Another topic of interest to me is helping teachers and other leaders develop skills in conducting individual and group reflection sessions to expand meaningful knowledge. I want them to consider the reflection phase of teaching as essential to experiential learning. Reflection is also known as active processing, reviewing, debriefing, bridging, critical thinking, and thinking about thinking (meta-cognition). Reflection results in many benefits to teachers and students. One benefit is providing more obvious feedback about the experience to both. Another is it often reveals valuable assessment and evaluation information. In 1984 I published an article about designing questions to guide reflection (Knapp, 1984, pp. 47–49). *That article stimulated my interest in using more questions and problem-based techniques to enhance teaching and learning.* Other articles and book chapters on reflection followed in 1985 and 1990. In 1992 I wrote a book on the topic. It was reprinted seven times and translated into Chinese (Knapp, 1992). I wrote other book chapters on reflection published in 1999, 2005, and 2016. In the 2005 chapter I focused on supportive cognitive and affective research findings and six factors contributing to successful facilitating and debriefing of the solo experience (Knapp, 2005, pp. 20–30). *Reflecting on experience should extend beyond just acquiring cognitive knowledge.* As Bert Horwood believes: "reflection should also include emotions. We cheat our students when reflection is confined to the levels of intellect and

cognition …I wonder if, in fact, we have reached a stage where the distinctions among the cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects of mental work have outlived their usefulness" (quoted in Knapp & Smith, 2005, p. 298). Perhaps some educators today have not fully accepted these ideas, but most experiential educators have.

As I live my life as a teacher, husband, parent, grandparent, and great grandparent, I attempt to enrich my journey by accumulating worthwhile experiences, reflecting upon them, and extracting as much knowledge as I can. I have always done this. I have not been as concerned about my IQ (Intelligence Quotient) as much as I have about my EQ (Experience Quotient). I first heard of an EQ from reading an article about an "experience method of learning" by my mentor, L. B. Sharp (1935, p. 8). My previous story about him sending me off into the woods to find a bird illustrates his belief in encouraging a variety of life experiences. One of Sharp's camp staff members was William Vinal, a renowned naturalist and professor. Vinal prepared a list of experiences he deemed essential for a person to earn bachelor's and master's degrees, in lieu of the courses one might take at a university. For example, he thought that finding a hummingbird's or a great horned owl's nest was worth 30 credits towards a bachelor's degree. He believed that collecting and identifying 75 minerals was worth 100 credits toward a master's degree (Vinal, n.d.). Since Vinal's long list of key experiences was constructed in the 1930s or 40s, the individual items might be changed today, but his idea of checking off worthwhile experiences as a way to achieve a quality education is still sound. School curricula should be examined to see if there is a reasonable balance between educative experiences leading to know-that and know-how knowledge.

I call myself an experiential educator because of my career involvement in this complex field of study and my compatible educational philosophy. I have learned many lessons from focusing on topics such as values and ethics education, place-based education, cooperative and problem-based learning, indigenous cultures, environmental heroes and heroines, community building, group dynamics and communication, children's nature literature, naturalists such as Lewis, Clark, Leopold, and Agassiz, and places I've traveled such as Ecuador, Australia, and Taiwan. Recently, I have concentrated upon learning as much as I can about the American bison. I have done this by using all the available resources I could find: readings, writings, lectures, videos, computers, artifacts, firsthand contacts with people and places, and discussions with experts. I have given bison lectures, presented hands-on workshops, and prepared museum exhibits and displays. Collectively, all of these experiences have provided me with a knowledge base that I have reflected upon and learned from. When I learn, I teach and when I teach I learn. This interplay between learning and teaching has given me a deep understanding of these topics. My accumulated knowledge base has been composed of a kaleidoscope of meaningful experiences spanning direct and mediated learning resources. These activities take time to do well, process, and transfer to other situations. Experiential education must be viewed as a seamless combination of worthwhile events woven

into a life blanket of wonder, joy, pain, hard work, play, and contemplation. All of these experiences have made me who I am.

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LACY HUNTER NIX

6. LOOKING HOME TO FIND MY WAY FORWARD

Insights from a Foxfire Student

My introduction to the Foxfire approach was not rooted in professional enrichment, but rather, during my formative years as a teenage student. I am a former Foxfire student from the classroom in North Georgia where Foxfire—the magazine and the teaching approach—began and continue to this day. I remember seeing those groups of teachers coming and going from the workshops on the Foxfire mountain property in my hometown in North Georgia, but I rarely considered them or what they were doing. The truth is that I was far too busy to pay them any attention. With almost stereotypical teenage hubris, I considered the theory they studied to be entirely beneath the job I was there to do: produce that magazine. Quite a few years later, I look back and wonder at that confident, even arrogant, girl. During those days, though, I had no time to consider. Instead, I had a mission.

I spent two years as a student in that classroom of choice. While the decision to produce a magazine had been made long before, quite a few years before I was born, each semester, as a part of the magazine class, I was still faced with choices. What subject did I want to pursue? What article did I want to write? To whose voice would I give my pen and magazine pages that semester? I usually came to care deeply for my subjects because the process of hearing their stories, sharing meals with them—those gracious mountain folk rarely allowed any of us teenagers to leave without a sweet treat, if not an entire meal—transcribing, editing, and rewriting their stories left me with great respect for people who had often been strangers at the beginning of a semester. My passion was to tell their stories in ways that made them proud of themselves as well as me, and then I basked in the approval and new friendship that had developed in the process.

I did not stop to consider that I was responding in exactly the manner that hundreds of teachers through the years have trained and worked to provoke in their own students. In those days, I did not think to examine the pride I took in seeing my name in print, or how I agonized over wording, phrases, spelling, formatting, and even photography, which I never learned to enjoy even as I worked to improve my craft, because I had invested myself in the larger project. I strove to improve in all those areas and more simply because each article was my own. Without fanfare or my attention, new skills emerged while old ones sharpened, all while I was steadily working on making each article better than the last.

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 45–51.

My teaching career has not followed a traditional path. I spent several years just after college graduation teaching private piano lessons at a small Academy for the Performing Arts in Florida. During those years, I supplemented my piano teaching schedule in a variety of other places; extra classes at the Academy, teaching preschool, and finally as substituting in a music classroom in a local public elementary school. After several years away to be home with young children and following my husband's career across two states, I began to teach private piano lessons again. Now, in addition to my piano studio, I educate our two children at home and teach music and writing classes in our local homeschool coop.

After many years, I've come to recognize that the ideas planted within me during my years as a Foxfire student—that student choice leads to student ownership, both of the project and the learning; that partnership between student and teacher inspires students to reach for a greater understanding than a more authoritarian model will permit; that partnership with the community gives the work of students a sense of meaning sometimes lacking in isolated classroom environments—have fundamentally and profoundly shaped my approach and growth as a teacher. My life as a teacher is inseparable from my years as a Foxfire student. Having seen beauty and wonder in the educational process, I can never return to lesser goals.

The idea of student choice and ownership fits naturally and tidily within the framework of instrumental instruction, especially that of the one-on-one atmosphere of private instrument lessons. Most students come to music lessons with at least some idea of what they want to play—or at the very least what they like to hear—and many wise teachers before me have capitalized on the student's desire to produce beautiful sound to lead the student on the path of true musicianship. I certainly began my teaching career anxious to cover the basics of good musicianship in order to build in each of my students a firm foundation of correct knowledge and technique, upon which they could then begin to build their own musical lives. Almost immediately, though, as I began to relax in my role as instructor, I also began to consider, more carefully, what each student—both child and adult—really wanted to gain from their piano lessons.

For some students, my initial theory and technique approach worked beautifully. Those students were almost always driven to learn to play the piano by some inner working of their own soul. Left to their own devices, they would somehow, teacher or no teacher, have found a way to play. In working with those students, technique exercises were a joy, and they could turn the dullest exercise or scale into an expression of beauty. Learning to decode lines and spaces to produce sound was an adventure rather than an exercise in mental fatigue, and in learning the language of music, they found their native tongue. Those students are generally fascinated by most styles or types of music, and they typically respond beautifully to almost any piece placed in front of them. Their own drive to play was more than enough to carry them through working with a new, young teacher, and their enthusiasm gave me fresh love for parts of my own musicianship that had gone stale.

For other students, though, the path to learning to play involved first developing an appreciation for music. They all ostensibly wanted to play the piano—or, at least, a parent or grandparent wanted them to learn—but the joy wasn't so much in the journey as in the destination. Therefore, their path to true musicianship was to find what stirred them and start from there, even as we, slowly and gently, began to expand their appreciation for all music. Even in developing an appreciation for music, I learned to meet each of those students where they found inspiration. For some, this spark came in the form of music that told stories and painted pictures; others found themselves drawn to music that evoked sentiment and emotions; still others found the modern music they heard on the radio to draw them; there was even one, a middle-aged mother of two, whose musicality came alive in the presence of patriotic hymns and songs. In each case, though, the simple feeling of fingers on keys was not enough; those students and many of the ones I still teach today need to find the sounds which stir their souls. In private piano instruction, as in the classroom, it is with the students who are not necessarily entranced with learning for the simple sake of learning that Foxfire's idea of student ownership brings hope and help for the weary student and teacher. A student who might simply wither under the pressure of Bach comes alive when given the chance to learn Top 40 hits. Yet another one finds those same hits insipid but races toward the complexity and bombast of Beethoven or the beauty and structure of Mozart, pushing to acquire new skills so that they can experience the joy of Hayden in fingers on keys. To spark the enthusiasm for learning the fundamentals, these students need to understand how the basics contribute to their goals. The job of the teacher, then, becomes less that of dragging the student down the path of enlightenment, or rather musicianship, and more that of partnering with the student in search of new and beautiful territory. The sharing of skills and talents, all while trying to see the matter from the student perspective, in turn gives the teacher new vision and fresh eyes, or ears as it were, for the subject.

After many years, I find my approach to starting new students to be somewhat different than the approach I took so many years ago. I no longer allow students to flounder while we discover each other slowly. Now, I start off, from the first lesson, deliberately searching for that which makes their hearts sing. For those who know, we start with what they tell me, or as nearly there as I can take them. I make sure they understand, at each step along the way, how what we are currently studying in their lessons is taking them toward the music that they love. For the students who cannot tell me what inspires them, we start off with theory, technique, note reading, and the simple pieces and songs in their method books, but I make a point to use part of their lesson to listen to music with them, to play for them, and to suggest music for them to listen to with their families each week. Often, I'm surprised by what moves them.

Recently, a Kindergartener sat at my piano, discouraged and grumpy. He had just recovered from an illness, so he still felt poorly. He had not practiced while he was sick, and he was not playing his assignment well. I certainly understood

the little fellow's plight, but he was very unhappy because he likes having his old pieces marked finished and having new ones assigned. The truth is that he is a delightful little worker, and failing to complete an assignment just makes him mad. His frustration began to compound the problem, causing him to stumble and forget things he already knew. Finally, tears threatened in the corners of his eyes, and he dropped his head onto the keys, unable to hide his aggravation. So we stopped. Instead of playing, we listened to music. I believe we were both surprised—as were his parents, who were listening from the nearby sofa—when his little frown melted after the first few notes of The Royal March of the Lion (Saint-Saens, Camille. "I. Introduction and Royal March of the Lion." (*The Carnival of the Animals*). Then, as the music swelled into the mighty, magnificent roar, he lifted his head and mouthed a roar to match the lion's, eyes twinkling in a tired, pale, little face. I watched the tears dissolve, the furrowed brow smooth, and the joy return. A moment of frustration opened the door to my understanding this little boy a bit better. His joy in that piece told me where to begin to look, and further investigation in subsequent lessons revealed to me that he thoroughly enjoys big, bombastic classical music. Now, I make sure to give him as much music as I can that resembles what he enjoys while telling him at each step along the way how what we are currently studying still take him to the music that he has come to love.

Even as we work toward music that brings each student joy, we are experiencing another of the pillars of my own Foxfire education: that the process of education should allow the student to produce a meaningful, valuable product, not simply a scorecard. The teaching of students to play an instrument or sing lends itself naturally and comfortably to this idea. Much as Foxfire's approach holds that skills should be learned in the context of the production of that product, musical skills are best learned within the context of playing actual music rather than solely in the isolation of theory and technique exercises. The way that music is typically taught—through songs and pieces, supplemented by technique and theory studies—emphasizes that, even from the earliest days of study, students can and should produce a product through their practice and lessons. Working their way through technique exercises is not enough to justify the effort of music lessons. The goal, from the beginning, is for them to make music.

The opportunity for students to engage in meaningful work was the key that elevated a children's choir that I taught during my early years as an educator from an ordeal for teacher and students to a wonderful, beautiful occasion for us to learn and grow as a group. On Wednesday evenings, I had a delightful group of Kindergarten through Second graders for an hour each week. We were the Junior Carolers. This class could have been very difficult based on timing alone—by Wednesday night, young children are often tired from their week, anyway, and the hour between six and seven in the evening is not ideal for learning by anyone's standards. The group of students that I taught had few, if any, choices in this class. Rather, they were there to do a job: learn the music chosen for them for two or three performances each year in Sunday morning church. It was that very job, though, and especially the importance

of it, that gave my little Carolers the will to push through adverse circumstances and produce a consistently excellent performance. I was then, and I am now, amazed at how even the youngest children will often work diligently when they know that their work is valued by adults who are important to them. I learned that the best way to pick up waning enthusiasm was to give the students a manageable goal—"Tonight, we will learn the first verse and chorus,"—and then the opportunity for their goal to become a product—"…and then we will demonstrate for the Choir Director how you already know so much of your song for next month." In truth, I quickly found that it did not matter much to the students if we sang for the Choir Director, their parents, or even the patient and kindly soul who answered the telephones. What did matter was allowing children to witness that they were not just working for the sake of working—or in this case, singing for the sake of singing—rather, that they had an important place within the larger community of the church, and that their work would have impact and be recognized. It was the very importance of their work that carried them on through after school fatigue week after week. My job was primarily to catch their enthusiasm for contributing to the larger community, and then release it into the good land of appropriate goals and helpful sharing of my own accumulated knowledge and skills.

Likewise, for a great many piano students, it is when they are preparing to share their pieces with others through the context of performance that they begin to invest more of themselves into their music. Students will push themselves to perfect each expression, each dynamic contrast, each small detail when they know their music will be heard and appreciated by others instead of living only within the confines of their practice space and my piano studio. When the students have the opportunity to choose their music and then share it with a community of friends and family, their passion to share and perform often grows and then becomes a driving force in the development and refinement of their skills and talents.

After many years as a music teacher, I find I have now travelled full circle. This year, I began a new venture in my life as a teacher. The director of my children's homeschool coop reached out to parents and teachers to say that there was a need for someone to teach a middle school writing class. I waited for weeks for the announcement of a new teacher while those old Foxfire Books and Magazines on my shelf whispered questions and taunts: what had all those years working, writing, for the Foxfire Magazine and Book series been about, exactly, if not to prepare me for the moment when my community, our coop, would need someone with a skill that I had practiced. Finally, after a chat with her revealed the dearth of willing volunteers for this particular class, I discussed my experience with Foxfire with our director, and we also covered my lack of experience teaching in this area. A few days later the announcement came: I am the new middle school writing class instructor.

On my first day, armed with direction and a lesson plan, I faced my class of sixteen middle school students, ranging from fifth through eighth grades. They will all need to be able to produce essays in high school, college, and beyond, so we would start there. I began the lesson explaining to them why they needed to learn to express

themselves in writing, and as I discussed a subject that I find fascinating, I saw one pair of eyes after another begin to glaze over and slowly go blank. These students are still young, the oldest barely teenagers, unsure of themselves and mostly eager to please as long as no one else notices, and have not yet grown into the hardened, cynical teenagers that stereotypes would lead us to fear. No one attempted to set my podium on fire that day, as goes the Foxfire creation lore. Rather, one by one, they all mentally left the room. In that moment, as I watched the interest of my class slip away, and failure slink in to claim the class, a memory stirred in my mind, and a flush of remembered joy from my young life at home in the mountains warmed my heart. The wisdom of my own education pointed toward the path to home. I put down those lesson plans, came out from behind the table, and together, we all sat and talked about why any of us should bother learning to write at all and what subjects could possibly be worth all the effort. That first week, we wrote letters to friends and loved ones, and I mailed them. Three of the children sent letters to relatives overseas, and I heard later from several parents how the assignment had sparked a week's worth of discussion at home. The next assignment was more letter writing, this time business letters, to organizations, favorite authors, local and international businesses. One young man used this opportunity to send his own parents a very formal letter outlining why they should raise his allowance. The students surprised me with the dedication and passion with which they approached this assignment. They all thought carefully about the recipients of their letters and the subjects they felt necessary to discuss, and I found several sending out impassioned pleas and arguments about changes they felt could make the world a better place. Several others sent letters to favorite authors. Most of those letters were requests for additional books in favorite series, and some contained suggestions to the authors about new subjects or characters. Their passion carried over into later assignments as we discussed story telling and its importance in our society. Of course, I could not resist reading to them bits and pieces from the Foxfire Books, and those old stories surprised me with the appeal they held for a new generation living quite a distance from my beloved hometown. Giving the students a small amount of ownership in their assignments by allowing them choice, showing them how their writing could impact the world around them, and then expecting them to produce a product, allowing and helping them to learn the necessary skills as they go, has created a class of young people who have now come a little closer to owning their educations. I am not dragging them down a path of understanding; rather, I have shown them where they can go and change the world, and I am lending them my support as they start to walk it.

When our class meets again after winter break, they all know that we will begin to study and produce essays together. They know that their spring will include a great amount of writing and even more homework than last semester. I warned the kids and their parents. This time, though, instead of shrinking away in boredom and fear, they are eager. Several of them are already thinking of possibilities and topics they want to explore, even though our next class is still several weeks away.

Their idealism has already begun to infect me, to change me. I find new passion and excitement growing in myself. Their fresh, young eyes, have given me new vision.

I think back to my younger self, the confident, passionate, fiery girl who debated with other students and teachers over magazine covers and article topics, who crafted polite responses to difficult customers, who poured her heart and soul into writing feature pieces on local mountain folk, and I remember the absolute conviction I had in the idea that the magazine was my own, and that my work for it was valuable. My Foxfire teachers, my wonderful parents, and my amazing community fed that idea, and I never thought to question it. In my middle school writers, I see the same ideas beginning to blossom. So I look back to my Foxfire teachers and my education in that classroom because in looking toward home, I find my way forward. These children and all learners both young and old need choice that leads to ownership over their education; and they need meaningful work that provides them a connection to their community. It is not only in the deep woods, or in a tiny town in North Georgia that Foxfire glows. Foxfire's teaching approach glows in the hearts of former students like me, and we carry it forward until the day that our students can reach a new generation.

JOY PHILLIPS

7. WE ARE FOXFIRE

Foxfire is more than just a magazine or a program designed to preserve the heritage of the North Georgia Appalachian communities. It is a bridge between the rivers of youth and the oceans of wisdom. As a former student of Foxfire in the 1980's, I have first-hand knowledge of the advantages of the program. Through my own personal experience, I was able to master skills in grammar, vocabulary, editing, and publication, as well as being introduced to skills in communication, socialization, and human decency and compassion. This program allowed me to expand my horizons from a normal classroom to the real world and experience the benefits of education through application. I was involved in video classes, audio classes, photography, and the production and publication of the Foxfire magazine. As one of seven children from a rural environment, these experiences provided me with opportunities I would not normally have afforded to me, including the chance to travel and associate with people of different cultures and beliefs.

As the mother of two, Foxfire has again proven its value to my family. Both of my children have served as editors of the Foxfire magazine, and have broadened their academic and personal success because of the program. My son, Ethan, is currently enrolled as a graphic design student in Piedmont College and the scholarship he was awarded through his work with Foxfire allowed him to pursue his educational goal. His affiliation with the program has also helped him acquire jobs exhibiting his musical talent. My daughter, Jessica, is a dual enrollment student at Rabun County High School and Piedmont College. Her work with Foxfire has strengthened her confidence and value not only as a student, but also as an individual. While they both were actively involved in the publication of the 50th anniversary edition book for Foxfire, Jessica is also involved with the publication of another Foxfire book currently being compiled. The summer leadership programs and student jobs offered to the students have not only increased their leadership potential, but have also provided them with summer jobs continually giving to and building up the students within the course.

As a member of the community, I realize the importance of learning from our ancestors in order to create a better future for successive generations. The wonder, experiments, and experiences of the past entice us to acquire knowledge to satisfy our needs and solve our problems. To better understand who we are today, we take from our individual and collective pasts. By sharing this knowledge with our children, it is our intent to pass on our best and worst hoping to evolve into a more productive

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 53–55.

society. Through this realization, I was happy to become an active member of the Foxfire Community Board upon invitation. Through volunteer service, I am able to contribute to the betterment of the students, raising funds for scholarships and other student services. While serving on this board, I realized that the program has not changed very much over the years, although the students and the audience has. Limited by funding, it didn't seem that an integration with newer technology would be possible in order for the program to evolve into a modern form.

In 2015, I was chosen as one of two teachers to begin a new program at Rabun County Elementary School called the School Within a School (SWIS). The program incorporates a rigorous, project-based learning environment for gifted and accelerated students in 5th–6th grades, permitting them to learn through inquiry and hands-on approaches, while developing a deeper understanding of the curriculum. M'ryanne Peacock and I continually research and implement strategies that will challenge these students and help them develop into motivated, independent learners, while offering them tasks that are authentic and valuable. As a teacher, I often reflect on the concept of Foxfire being all about the success of the students. Everything done within the program is for the kids and is contemplative of how they learn and how they achieve. This seemed to be a perfect fit for our new program. It is often difficult to keep the attention of kids when teaching Language Arts. I then began thinking about using the Foxfire approach for instruction of the course, while integrating technology into the classroom. It would be great to allow students to conduct interviews and write articles in the same manner as the high school students, while at the same time, creating something new. This is when the idea of a digital magazine was developed.

The idea was that sixth grade students could lead the project while fifth grade students followed. These students would perform the traditional interviews as in the original Foxfire magazine, but the publication process would be more modern. The interviews would be recorded and then digitally transcribed, but edited manually to reinforce Language Arts skills as required through content standards. The interviews would then be compiled through a digital graphic design layout and made available through online subscriptions or downloads. This could possibly broaden the audience of the Foxfire magazine through a partnership with the organization and allow a new generation to be introduced to the Foxfire legacy and approach to education.

The concept was introduced in July to Ann Moore, the Executive President of Foxfire, and Jon Blackstock, the Foxfire instructor at Rabun County High School. As the idea seemed appealing to them, it was then presented to Bryan Edwards, principal of Rabun County Elementary School, before being introduced to the Superintendent (Melissa Williams) and the Assistant Superintendents (Laverne Beck and Joi Woods), for approval. The final endorsement by the County Board of Education was granted on December 15, 2015. This would be the birth of *Foxfire Today*.

All 5th and 6th grade students received explicit instruction for interviewing, including conduct, how to develop appropriate interview questions, and how to guide the interview process. Following mock interviews for practice, sixth grade

students have chosen their topics and interviewees, conducted and recorded their interviews, and are in the process of transcribing the articles using digital dictation methods and Chrome Books. Students will self-edit and peer-edit their articles, prior to submission to the instructor for final edit. Fifth grade students will follow with the same process. The layout will be conducted through the assistance of graphic design experts volunteering their time and expertise to help with the production. It is the hope that an additional partnership with a local organization will enable the subscriptions/download process to be performed through their company. All proceeds from the sales will be given to the SWIS program to be used to further the digital magazine program and purchase materials for the students.

It is my belief that the success of this project can and will spark a new interest in the Foxfire program. Younger students will become involved and be loyal to the program throughout high school. Participation should increase and new programs can be introduced over time. I would love to see the creation of a virtual museum and other digital programs which educate a new generation to a new Appalachian culture – our Appalachian culture. As time has evolved, so have we. We have voices and have made so many accomplishments which are worthy of recognition. The past teaches us, but the present defines us. We are Appalachia and we are proud. We are *Foxfire Today*.

SARA ALICE TUCKER

8. CORE PRACTICES IN USE

Foxfire—definition: organic luminescence, especially from certain fungi on decaying wood.

Foxfire, as defined above, has to do with plants; and plants have to do with roots. As I think and write about the Foxfire Core Practices, I find myself often using some form of the word "root." I think that may be significant.

My best work, both as a teacher-learner and as a student-learner, is *rooted* in the Foxfire Core Practices. Those "*roots*" were not named for me until I experienced them during training to become a literacy coach. In 2002, our rural Georgia county was on board with Reading Recovery, a program of one-teacher/one-student intense reading instruction for at-risk first graders. The continuation of that effort to improve reading and writing instruction for all elementary grades was the reading and writing workshop model, based on the work of Irene Fountas, Gay Su Pinnell, Lucy Calkins, and others. This was to be a huge paradigm shift for teachers in our county, and so the decision was made to train literacy coaches to facilitate the shift. Two things eventually followed: my "formal" introduction to the Foxfire Core Practices and my "up close and personal" realization of just how complicated systemic school change really is.

Our instruction in "how to be a literacy coach and workshop teaching" was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. Our group of twelve or so literacy coach trainees arrived for our first class with standard note taking apparatus in tow. Imagine our surprise when instead of settling in for initial lectures on how this new workshop model of teaching "worked" or how we were to "be" as literacy coaches, we were asked things like what time we wanted to begin and end class each day? How we wanted to read and respond to suggested readings? Whether we wanted to work in small groups, pairs, or alone? Our responses to these innocuous questions were blank stares; uncomfortable shuffling of papers, prolonged silence. Now I have come to recognize these responses as quite typical for anyone "schooled" in non-democratic settings…. the way most schooling has always been done, and for the most part, the way most schooling continues to be done today. And now, I also recognize this as Foxfire Core Practice One: "From the beginning, learner choice, design, and revision infuses the work teachers and learners do together." These small choices were the start of four years of the most intense, most uncomfortable at times,

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 57–64.

most participatory opportunities for learning that I had ever experienced. Much later I learned that our "facilitators" were Foxfire trained, and were manifesting Foxfire Core Practice Four: "The teacher serves as facilitator and collaborator." These two shifts meant something very different was afoot. One, the "teacher" was not the "holder of the wisdom" who decided all the aspects of how and when said knowledge would be dispersed to those waiting to receive it (and regurgitate it on demand.) Two, the knowledge itself was not fully constructed—in its final form. The construction of that knowledge would flow from the collective understandings of all participants and be *rooted* (there's that word again) in our lived experiences. Now, this was something new. Oddly, however, when our group was sent for "further training" at another location under the tutelage of different instructors, our experience was very different—the aforementioned note-taking apparatus was very much required and we were told exactly what we were to think and do—and exactly how our success or failure at "absorbing" the wisdom would be evaluated. Like so many students in other venues, studying other disciplines, I felt my passion and interest in being a literacy coach and the workshop models of teaching begin to wane. And, in spite of a promising start to a generative way of learning and subsequent sharing of learning (one that involved passion and excitement, and the desire to dig deeper) this initiative died the death of so many promising initiatives: the paradigm of "thinking" was again replaced by "receiving"; the paradigm of "active participation" was replaced by "passive acquisition" and the endeavor lost its zest. A new superintendent, looking to "make his mark" summarily declared null and void in our county all workshop teaching and all literacy coaches. It was time to return to worksheets and basal readers—school as usual, back to basics, and all that. And, as you might imagine, the level of literacy in our county continues to decline, with the latest solution being the imposition of more demanding "standards" and more punitive consequences for teachers and schools who fail to deliver. Once again, the "*root*" of the issue is ignored.

Although my work as a literacy coach came to an end, my friendship with my first Foxfire facilitator did not. And in one of those strange life coincidences, my facilitator friend had a long acquaintance with my then-boyfriend, now-husband, Hilton Smith, who is a co-author of this book and a longtime Foxfire practitioner. It seems my Foxfire fate was sealed. In the summer of 2004, I, too, studied at the Foxfire Center on Black Rock Mountain, the site of the original Foxfire success story. And my involvement with Foxfire continues today as I try to apply the practices with prospective teacher candidates who are now my "students." Sometimes the result is a stunning community of learners where interest and passion run high for multicultural education or children's literature, or whatever curriculum aspect we are pursuing. Sometimes it does not. Elliott Wiggington, Foxfire's founder, captured this reality perfectly in the title of his highly reflective book, *Sometimes a Shining Moment.*

And in retrospect, when I reflected on the "shining moments" of my 34+ years of teaching in public and private elementary schools, with rich and poor students, in

urban and rural settings, the *roots* of those moments could be traced to the Foxfire Core Practices, although I did not know to define them in that way at that time. Three examples follow.

In a small private school on Maryland's eastern shore, we noticed a lack of apparent diversity in our second grade. My teaching partner and I decided to bring this to the attention of our small students by initially reading stories to them about children from different cultures, different countries. One student's response to a story about Native Americans elicited the response, "Hey, my dad is one-quarter Cherokee." This started the other students' queries about their respective heritages. Together we developed a plan for finding out about our ancestors. Parents got interested and involved. It turned out that there was much more diversity than was initially apparent and soon the hallways were adorned with child-sized paper dolls (holding hands, of course) decorated in renderings of the traditional garb indicative of each child's ancestors. The children, their parents, their siblings, and any other agreeable artists were included in the effort. But the research hardly stopped there: each child invited a guest speaker (usually a grandparent or parent, but not always) to tell stories, give information, share pictures or videos, and of course, bring traditional foods. We build a model of the Eifel tower, ate escargot, sampled buffalo meat, and were amazed by the ability of the Masai villagers to jump to such great heights. We located the geographic sites of origin and learned about not only the history but also the current events of each. The overarching "big learning" was that "different" does not have to be defined in terms of "good" or "bad", a concept that was absent before our study. In this "shining moment" it seemed all the Core Practices came into play. Core Practice One: choice (mom's ancestors or dad's), Core Practice Three: connections between the classroom work, and the world beyond the community; Core Practices Five and Six: active learning and creativity; Core Practices Seven and Eight: peer teaching, small group work, teamwork and an audience beyond the teacher (visitors to our "gallery" were numerous). Core Practices Nine and Ten: rigorous work and reflection were evident throughout. Core Practice Two, the work manifests the attributes of the academic discipline involved was also true in the instance. I am confident that the seeds of interest in history and geography were planted during that study. And, as the teacher, I was definitely a facilitator and a collaborator, not a "sage on the stage."

Another shining moment came about when our community was raising funds for a local hospital. The nearest one was about 40 minutes away and often those forty minutes often spelled the difference between a good outcome and a bad one. Our second graders wanted to contribute. Because our school was located near a popular summer tourist destination, most of our parents did not take summer vacations. Instead our school calendar provided for a winter break—just three weeks after the Christmas holidays. Bread machines were a new item in those days and our students took on the task of baking bread in four borrowed bread machines each day of the three weeks between Christmas vacation and winter break. The bread was frozen until the last day before winter break when our classroom became a bakery for a day

and we sold our loaves to students in other grades and to parents. Second graders ran the bakery, rotating the required jobs as cashiers, busboys, and servers. And our profits for the day (along with some healthy contributions/tips) went to the hospital capital campaign. Again, Foxfire's Core Practices were evident.

A third example involves young students teaching grandparents to use computers. There's nothing quite as magical as pairing youngsters with oldsters and the results were newsworthy. The local television channel sent reporters to capture this "shining moment" and we made the front page of the Sunday newspaper.

There were other equally compelling examples of the shining moments of my teaching career, and when I reconsidered them through a Foxfire lens, the Core Practices are easily depicted. I think that is why writing this chapter has been a task I've resisted. It seems that in the way the Common Core standards are interpreted and effected, there is little room for experiential learning like the examples described above. In so many places, especially in areas of low socioeconomic standing, the way to "meet the standards" has been internalized as something that shuns "mere experience" (John Dewey), for "genuine book learning." It is my opinion that "book learning" alone is rarely genuine or even learning. But somehow, perhaps more stridently than ever, this seems to be our prevailing paradigm. In too many schools, it seems almost impossible to envision the education without students spending long stints sitting in desks (to my mind, wholly unsuitable for the demands of young, growing bodies), the expectation of passivity and quiet (equally developmentally inappropriate), the prominence of books or workbooks (usually boring or unreadable) or even mindless technology, the demand for attention (please note that there is no need for "demand" when youngsters are truly engaged), the teacher as sage and knower of all content (and absolutely responsible for whether or not learning takes place—that explains why we can hold him/her "accountable" – because if teachers are deemed responsible, then surely they are accountable) and so on ad nauseum. Where is the choice? The connections? The active learning? The creativity and imagination? The audience beyond the teacher? The ongoing assessment by the participants (not *of* the participants) but through their own reflection? Too often, it's not there. A wise person, (OK, it was my husband, Hilton Smith) once said that when we do something for a child that he or she could do for himself/herself, we rob that child of a learning opportunity. It seems by not attending to the precepts of Foxfire's Core Practices, by handing the responsibility for the learning to the teacher alone instead of sharing the responsibility with the students, their parents, the community, we rob everyone of opportunities to learn. And so, I am discouraged. When one has been a part of something as inspiration and wonderful as a "shining moment" or what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi terms "being in the flow", it is impossible to substitute the boredom and disconnectedness that describes the students and teachers in so many of the classrooms I observe today. I am appalled to think of my precious grandchildren housed in schools that too often seem more like prisons. Prisons where curiosity, creativity, and a healthy sense of self-efficacy are regularly executed. And if we don't want our grandchildren there, we shouldn't want any children there.

The foregoing is the rant that has dominated my thinking for several years now. But as I write this chapter, I'm convinced more than ever that the *roots* of a more positive school experience lie within the Core Practices.

We can get back to the *roots* of durable and engaging education by reflecting on the times in our own lives that resulted in real learning. But in order to do that we must shake off the shackles of prescribed curriculum and methodologies, punitive threats against schools and teachers, and trust capable teachers who love and care about children to create the opportunities where true learning can and does happen.

But wait, I must reflect (Core Practice 10). The students of today and the prospective teachers of today have had different experiences than I have had, so perhaps they CAN work in a different, generative ways. One way to get back to this "bottom line" might be to examine what has been the kind of true learning, at its *root,* that each of us has experienced. Let's take a look at that kind of personal learning with a Foxfire perspective.

In the Foxfire Course for Teachers, there is an activity called "Memorable Experiences" where participants reflect on a learning experience that was particularly "memorable" because it was very "good" (empowering, engaging, fulfilling) and resulted in durable learning and in the desire to pursue the field of study further. Alternatively, it was very "bad" (embarrassing, discouraging, belittling, boring) and resulted in a thorough disconnection from the topic at hand. Hundreds of participants in Foxfire courses for Teachers have recounted their memorable experiences. When analyzed for the traits present in the "good" experiences or for the traits that were missing in the "bad" experiences, there are compellingly similar lists across ages, disciplines, and ethnicities. For the most part, these traits are captured in Foxfire's Core Practices.

An example of a durable learning experience for me was *rooted* in my desire to learn to cook biscuits for my daddy. I was eight years old at the time. My mother's directions were simple, including the following:

1. Make a mountain of flour like a volcano.
2. Put a hole in the top.
3. Shape the fat like a big egg and put it in the hole.
4. Pour one cup of milk over all like the lava of a volcano.
5. Squish it all together with your fingers until it is like dough.
6. Pat out the biscuits.

She modeled the process for me several times as I watched and listened to her. My first attempt on my own (planned to be a surprise) was a disaster. I confused "broil" and "bake" when I set the oven. My patient mom applauded by attempt and taught me how to recover the good bread under the burnt tops. In just a few minutes, I proudly served my daddy my first biscuits. I still bake biscuits to this day and every time I do, I recall this experience. And I've gone on to be a fairly accomplished cook—and find much joy and satisfaction in cooking.

What does this experience have to do with Foxfire's Core Practices? Core Practice One is choice. It was my choice to learn to cook biscuits, not something someone else insisted that I do. So how do we reconcile the importance of choice to the dictates of what must be learned by students in schools? That's a good question and has at its heart the bigger question of whether or not compulsory education, particularly education for which the highest and best goal is presumed to be college attendance. This question is especially weighty for older students. But putting this particular controversy aside for a bit, perhaps we can agree that while choice of content may not be possible in all or even most education settings, choice of method or timing or sequence or assessment can generally be negotiated. Perhaps the involvement of the learner in any part of the decision-making process sends a message that the learner has ownership of at least part of the learning process. Without this essential concession, learning becomes something that is done "to" the learner, not "with" the learner. Unfortunately, this subtly indicates that his/her cooperation or even participation is not necessarily essential. And in actuality, nothing could be further from the truth.

Core Practice Two refers to "habits of mind" of the learning. In my example of learning to make biscuits, part of this "habit" was to recover from mistakes when possible. In a broad sense, this is the scientific method—to learn from the outcomes of each attempt to frame further attempts. In my cooking, this means I'm always looking for ways to recover my cooking experiments when they go bad as well as learning and improving my culinary expertise based on every cooking experience I've had. It's my cooking "habit of mind" that I attribute first to the experience of learning to cook biscuits. I would offer that "habits of mind" are the rooted in learning experiences of lasting value, regardless of the subject.

Core Practice Three is about connections. The connection of my daddy's favorite food (he once said if he could have hot biscuits every day, he wouldn't care what else he had to eat all day) and my desire to show my love for him is quite evident. In the larger context of schooling, when students make connections to their own lives that they deem important, the topics inherently have more traction…more reason for their attention. So often we skip this step: "you're in tenth grade, geometry is in the curriculum, therefore you will learn geometry…" rather than finding possible connections to real lived experience. Please note that making these connections "for" the students is another example of robbing the student of the learning opportunity. Involve the students in the exploration of how the study of the topic at hand may have or could have connections with his/her life. The teacher cannot begin to know all possibilities that exist for students. But seeking out the connections…making it clear that having connections is important….is a big part of the work that teachers and students must do together. Disconnected lessons are transient at best.

Core Practice Four speaks to the teacher's role as facilitator and collaborator. I would like to offer that this Core Practice has to do more with how the teacher is perceived by the learner than by any specific pedagogical moves the teacher may make or avoid. My mother "taught" me to make the biscuits by modeling, repetition,

and revision. Her directions were clear and within my zone of proximal development. She used praise and positive reinforcement liberally. The collective result of these actions was that I felt supported as a learner. Contrast this with a teacher who is not a facilitator and collaborator: someone who "covers" the content without care as to whether or not it was understood by the learner; someone who does not attempt to understand possible causes of confusion or mistakes; someone who has narrowly defined expected outcomes even before the instruction takes place; someone who does not have a relationship with the learner. Big difference!

Core Practice Five, active learning, is easily seen in my example. I didn't just listen to my mother's directions about making biscuits, or read how to make biscuits from a cookbook or watch a video about making biscuits. I made biscuits! Active learning means involvement. And involvement means thinking. It may not always involve bodily action, but it does always involve thinking.

Core Practice Six, which highlights imagination and creativity seems to be the one most often downplayed in today's reach for academic world domination. And that is such an oddity. Consider China, for example where math and science scores are very high, yet creativity is low. Chinese educators are seeking ways to expand students' capacities for creative thought through the arts and music and sports while western educators seem bent on eliminating these same sources. Back to my example, once I learned to make biscuits, my mom helped me expand the basic recipe to dumplings, to piecrusts, to toppings for cobblers, to pizza crust, to bread sticks, and so on. I'm pretty sure the root of my creativity with cooking started with learning to make biscuits for my dad.

Core Practice Eight, having an audience beyond the teacher, has proved to be one of the most stimulating practices for both my students and for me. I remember when I first heard about this practice, it seemed really odd to me. Things learned in school stayed in school, right? Other than the yearly program for parents, I didn't think much about the motivational effect of ensuring that there would be a real audience for sharing what we had learned. Yet, when I reviewed my "shining moments" there was ALWAYS an outside audience. And, of course, back to my biscuit example, what better audience than my dad?

Core Practice Nine involves assessment and evaluation, but somehow when taken in the complete Foxfire context, assessment and evaluation is different from usual school assessment and evaluation. Again, it seems to me that it's about the motivation behind the assessment and evaluation. Engaged and motivated students seek out assessment and evaluation in order to continually learn more, improve performance, and move to wider understandings. In other contexts, assessment and evaluation involves more of a static mentality – a report from which there is no motivation to learn from errors and move forward to greater learning. A connection here could also be made to the popular work of Carolyn Dweck whose "mindset theory" values effort—often repeated effort in the form of practice – over "natural talent." And, my biscuit example holds: assessment and evaluation of the quality of every pan of biscuits is welcomed as a way to ever widening proficiency.

And lastly, Core Practice Ten is reflection. To move from one experience to another without reflection is a bit like stringing pearls onto a string with no knot. It is within reflection that the fruits of our endeavors are appreciated, and the myriad of ways that that our experiences can be continued, changed, enhanced, and shared is revealed. Learning without reflection is mindless. I can assure you that my daddy and I both reflected often and fondly on that first pan of biscuits, and what is learning if not joyous? The Foxfire Core Practices hold the potential to return joy to the pursuit of learning.

KATIE LUNSFORD

9. FOXFIRE AND THE COMMUNITY

Making Real Introductions for 50 Years

Each time I sit down to write about Foxfire, I assume that, after fifty years, there can be nothing new to write. While considering this section, on a dreary day, I drove down Highway 441 through my hometown of Clayton, Georgia. Then, I saw something. Through a break in the fog, there was a group of low-laying clouds running between the ridges of Little Hogback Mountain and an adjacent hill. I marveled at this typical, everyday sight. I remembered the sunny early mornings in the summer when I drove north and watched a single layer of clouds, like puffy sheets, roll down the southern slope of Little Hogback. In this moment, I realized that my life is different. It is in moments like these when I am reminded that I am blessed with the privilege of being the fifth generation to grow up in this beautiful place. I remember that I am graced with roots, roots that I will pass down to my children, and I have a sense of belonging that people seek for a lifetime. My passion for Foxfire and its mission stems from experiences and realizations such as this one.

I spent four years in the Foxfire classroom at Rabun County High School from Fall 2009–Spring 2013. Each article that I composed and each article that I edited changed me a little bit. Foxfire honed my writing skills, my reading skills, and my appreciation for my home. In these four years, and in my work with Foxfire since my graduation, I have begun to recognize that Foxfire has served, and continues to serve, as a portal between Rabun County and the rest of the world. As I pondered this portal, I began to consider how Foxfire has affected my Southern Appalachian home and culture by serving as a connection between Appalachia and the globe. Each part of this chapter addresses Foxfire's profound and undeniable effects on its community.

It is with great pleasure that I have the opportunity to continue to contribute to the program which has given so much to me, both in my education and personal growth, and to remove myself from the throws of an Athletic Training major at the University of Georgia to compose this piece. I must admit that when asked to write this piece, I was intimidated, and that at times during the writing process I felt overwhelmed. In the end, though, I am glad that I have had the opportunity to compose another piece on my dear home.

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 65–72.

INTRODUCING MEMBERS OF A CULTURE

For decades, this beautifully isolated part of the world was undisturbed. Life was peaceful. Within the county, people from one small community did not pay any mind to the affairs of the people in the next small town. There was too much work and not enough time to be worrying about the frivolities of others. Their lives were not considered anything special. Folks simply lived as they always had, making it harvest season to harvest season, canning all they could and living conservatively. Not until 1966, with the birth of Foxfire, did self-documentation of the Southern Appalachian ways of life begin. Since then, the organization has become an essential part of the community. Tens of thousands of pages of literature have been published on a global level in an effort to study and record the customs and ways of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. The effects of these efforts have been significant and permanent.

The first Foxfire class did not have the slightest inkling of the mark that was soon to be made after the first few magazines were published or of the international interest that would arise from publishing a magazine that documented life in Appalachia. The intention was simply to engage students in writing, a teaching style that is analyzed in the bulk of this publication. However, with the intention of primarily documenting the immediate community and culture, the majority of Foxfire's work has been focused in the community where Foxfire originated: Rabun County. The results within this community have been widespread.

With Foxfire's inception came the ability of the people in the community to recognize their own unique cultural characteristics. Within a culture, it is difficult to recognize the defining characteristics of the culture because they are the norm. To illustrate this idea, before ever learning that whittling was a trademark piece of the Southern Appalachian culture, I sat on the front porch steps as a child with my pocket knife, whittling away at whatever branch I could get my hands on, assuming that kids in Atlanta whittled the same as I did. My lack in recognition of my culture stemmed from the innocence of youth. Isolation, on the other hand, is what prevented the Appalachian natives of yesteryear from recognizing the uniqueness of their culture. Folks within the community were able to read the magazine and realize that not everyone in the world made sassafras tea or called ghosts "haints". They realized that their ways differed from the rest of the world.

As a rule, most cultures value their elders. Foxfire has taken this a step further, penning everything that could be learned from old-timers who had survived using knowledge that had been handed down from one generation to another and were happy to share that accumulated knowledge with the newer generations. During the 1960s when Foxfire began, a generation gap had formed. Younger people were flocking toward the city, abandoning the ways of their ancestors for city life. Combating this, Foxfire engaged students in documenting a dying culture and facilitated an environment for students to make connections with older generations.

In so small a place as Rabun County, family histories go way back, as do friendships between families. Most everyone actually knows one another. Foxfire only enhanced these relations. As mentioned previously, rather than students forming bonds with people their age, Foxfire fostered friendships that span generations. These cross-generational influences characterize some of Foxfire's most profound impacts on both the contact and the student. Contacts are able to share their knowledge and sew a seed in students as well as in the lives of everyone who reads their words. Foxfire President Ann Moore described this in the Foxfire 45th Anniversary Book by writing, "Just as my grandparents and parents inspired and influenced me as I grew up here, so have Foxfire's 'contacts' whom you've read so much about in the magazines and books."

Foxfire's mission to document Southern Appalachian culture has accomplished much more than teaching students interviewing and writing skills. The Foxfire method truly changes all those involved in the interviewing and writing process: contact, student, and reader. This cross-generational friendship truly impacts the student. Naturally, high school aged students are concerned primarily with themselves. Foxfire converts this egocentrism through cultural exposure. Each interview brings new knowledge and insight into the meaning young people search for in life. President Ann Moore acknowledged Foxfire's tendency to mold students' lives by writing this in the Foxfire 50th Anniversary Book:

> The lifelong skills, determination, perseverance, and work ethic that my family instilled in me are also the same values that our elders shared, and continue to share, with our students. While interviewing the Foxfire "contacts" for the pages of the magazine and books, our students also learned the skills they needed to be active and participating members in their communities and workplaces. Not only did they learn those life lessons of persevering hardships and difficulties through strong faith from their elders, they also preserved a part of that heritage and culture for future generations.

Ultimately, students emerge from the Foxfire program with a sense of awareness and appreciation of the culture's past and present and the change that Appalachia and its people have experienced.

Furthermore, Foxfire gave the community a sense of purpose. Foxfire and the community were unified by a mission: to preserve the heritage of the region. Along the way, the aforementioned cross-generational bonds were formed. These hills bring together all those who call them home. The desire is to preserve and protect the values and ideals that our precious ancestors held so close to their heart. Foxfire acted as a cohesive, to bring a community together in one accord. While it is true that Foxfire has done a great deal of work in their immediate community, their efforts have not been limited to the boundaries of Rabun County and its neighboring areas.

A high degree of cultural continuity is evident throughout Southern Appalachia. However, it is a large area with a great deal of variability in the culture. On several occasions, Foxfire students have travelled to different parts of these hills to document culture, dedicating entire magazine issues to other areas of Southern Appalachia. In 2009, Foxfire students took a trip north through the Smoky Mountains to Kentucky for several days to conduct interviews with coal miners from the area, giving attention to an area and a people not often considered on a global scale. Again, in the summer of 2012, Foxfire students travelled east into the mountains of Western North Carolina to document Cherokee Indian culture. Much like the Southern Appalachian ways, the Cherokee culture has been diminishing for several decades. Thanks to Foxfire, student were able to assist the efforts of the Cherokee Nation to preserve what was left of the tribe's traditions and stories as well as communicate with a group of people whose culture has greatly influenced their own.

INTRODUCING THE REAL SOUTHERN APPALACHIA TO THE WORLD

It goes without saying that Foxfire's home is a very unique place with even more unique people. As Foxfire began, the students saw value in what their elders could share with younger generations. Only, the effects of passing information touched much more than the lives of the students in the classroom. More than a mere byproduct of the documentation process, Foxfire's efforts stretched beyond Appalachia, reaching a world most students in the original Foxfire class had not given much consideration. Little did they know that their efforts would result in the presentation of the real Southern Appalachia to the outside world.

At the time of Foxfire's beginning, a back-to-the-land movement was taking place all across the United States. Foxfire struck a chord with participants in the movement. With mounds of information on how to live simplistically and independently, Foxfire sold thousands of copies of books and magazines. Change took root in the minds of everyone who read Foxfire's publications. All of a sudden building a log cabin wasn't such a far-fetched idea. Ways of life which had been lost to most of the world reemerged, bringing with them a new perspective on life. With this change of heart, the outsiders began to see the people of Appalachia in a new light.

Anyone who takes the time to know the Southern Appalachian natives understands that they are incredible people. Nevertheless, to this day, stigmas follow the people of this area. Several publications and movies used the people of Appalachia as a scapegoat of their jokes and made it all too easy for people to make assumptions about Appalachia, perceiving hill people as ignorant and useless. Snuffy Smith and Li'l Abner are just two examples of cartoons where stereotypes of mountain people are used for humor. Snuffy Smith was a comic character depicted as a drunken moonshiner, and Li'l Abner was described as a dim-witted hillbilly, both casting a less than desirable perception of Appalachian people. Perhaps the most

well-known derogatory production was the movie Deliverance, which speaks for itself. These erroneous creations portrayed to the world that the people of Appalachia are ignorant, worthless people. In opposition, Foxfire has done a great deal in the way of changing the negative perception of Appalachia, so often cited by Hollywood and others.

With the publishing of the first Foxfire book in 1972, the world took note of a different aspect to these mountain people. One of Foxfire's most famous contacts, Aunt Arie Carpenter, was special to say the least. Walking down Main Street in Franklin, North Carolina, anyone who was not acquainted with her would have seen a "typical" woman of the mountains: a little old lady in an ankle length dress, her hair pulled back, carrying a walking stick. But upon talking to her or reading her words it becomes apparent that that little old lady has more to say than what meets the eye. Thru Aunt Arie, Foxfire was able to express that even though mountain people did not have many earthly possessions, they had bountiful intangible wealth. Aunt Arie was quoted in interview, saying, "They want me t'sell an'move away from here, but I won't do it. It's just home- 'at's all" (*Foxfire Book*, 30). Referring to the land again, "I say I don't want'a sell it, an' they just looked up at me s'funny. Said, 'What would I do with all that money?' You know, I don't care nothin' about money much" (*Foxfire Book*, 27).

Yet another contact that changed how people view Appalachian people was Kenny Runion. Always adorned in what could be considered at the very least unorthodox clothing, Kenny was an odd-looking fellow, easily judged and brushed to the side by "normal" society. But Kenny, full of wisdom and beauty, taught people about what truly matters in life. Mr. Runion taught people all over the world life lessons through quotes like these:

> Me? I'm just goin' through this world th'best I can. Don't bother nobody. Don't bother nobody. I work out what I get; just getting' through the best way I can. I don't claim t'be good, but I'm just doin' th'best I can. 'At's about all anybody can do, aint it? (*Foxfire 2*, 392)

> People ain't thankful no more. They don't 'preciate what they got. And ever'body's in a hurry. Where they goin'? Where they goin'? Back then you could meet an ol'feller with an ol'ox wagon an' he'd stand there half a day if you wanted t'talk. Stand as long as you'd talk. You meet a feller now, he'd run over y'. Where's he goin'? Just ain't got no patience. (*Foxfire 2*, 380)

Since 1973 when Foxfire 2 was published, the world continued to change at a phenomenal pace. In the midst of this chaos, anyone can learn from Kenny's thoughts and see the purity of thought that prevailed in Appalachia.

Further than just showing the world the genuine nature of Appalachian people, Foxfire has made changes within the community to help correct inaccurate stigmas. The Mountaineer Festival has not always been operated by Foxfire. In an effort

to generate more tourism, the Chamber of Commerce, who previously ran the Mountaineer Festival, played up cultural traditions, sometimes at the expense of the pride of natives. Often times the event would have pieces that forthrightly made a mockery of the people of Appalachia. Yet, when Foxfire took over the planning of the Mountaineer Festival, the event became a celebration of the culture as well as a tourist attraction. It began to allow local people to come together and accurately depict the culture, while still attracting visitors from all over the map.

For anyone from this area who leaves their home and mentions where they are from, it is still all too common to bear the brunt of a joke, referencing some inaccurate, preconceived notion about all of the people of Southern Appalachia. Indirectly, Foxfire instills pride in the members of its community. With all that I have gleaned from reading Foxfire's publications, meeting contacts who are truly beautiful people, and being a member of this culture, I understand that my home is very valuable. Foxfire has perpetuated my love for my home and has taught me to defend the honor of Appalachia and its people against the hateful stigmas as I journey out into the world. Foxfire has helped to prove the worth of the people of Appalachia against adversity that began long ago and continues to work diligently to showcase a precious community to the world.

INTRODUCING THE WORLD TO SOUTHERN APPALACHIA

As discussed above, there have been significant efforts by Foxfire's to present Southern Appalachian culture to the global community. Conversely, it is necessary to examine how Foxfire's contact with the rest of the world has influenced Appalachia. With the recognition that accompanied the "Foxfire boom", people flocked to Rabun to see for themselves how this part of the world really was; they wanted to see if people like Aunt Arie Carpenter and Pearl Martin really existed. Sure, by 1966, even here within the enchanted walls of the Southern Appalachian Mountains, the world was becoming more accessible. Homes all over the county had color TV and indoor plumbing. People were farming less and grocery shopping more. But even still, this was an area set in the past, left behind by the rest of the world. This intriguing notion demanded an emic observation of what changes have come from the contact triggered by Foxfire with a world outside these hills. In reality, there are both positive and negative aspects to outside influence on Appalachia, and each deserves their own discussion.

Foxfire has stimulated Rabun County's economy since its beginning through drawing people to the area. With the Foxfire museum came tourism from all over the world, with the intention of coming to know this beautiful place with its fascinating people. Each year Foxfire holds the Mountaineer Festival, attracting people from all over to Clayton, GA and providing local businesses with a small boost in the fall of the year. Then, each spring, Foxfire holds a weekend of Living History Days when hundreds of people are drawn to Black Rock Mountain to glean an idea of the

ways of life of mountain people before the days of modern convenience. Still again, Foxfire holds an annual celebration of folk art, known as Folk on the Mountain, on the museum's mountainside property. Art connoisseurs from a smorgasbord of backgrounds are attracted up the side of Black Rock to examine the folk art that seeks to express Southern Appalachian history.

Folks who take interest in Southern Appalachia come from a variety of different walks of life. On any given day, a diverse population of visitors comes through the Foxfire Museum Gift Shop on their way up the mountain, asking questions about the history of the area and the culture. Tourists bring with them their own culture, showing Foxfire students and members of the community pieces of what lies beyond the home they have always known. Thus, in a way, Foxfire has provided a type of cultural enrichment to members of the community through the audience that it attracts.

The cultural exposure that Foxfire has facilitated also provided a reference for natives. Through contact with other cultures, Appalachian people are more able to appreciate their culture, as with my whittling example earlier. In essence, Foxfire allows members of the community to see the contrast between their own Appalachian culture and other cultures that they are exposed to and thus come to understand the value of their own culture.

There is, however, what can be considered a negative side to the exposure that has made its way into the depths of these hills. Over time, mixing cultures may have caused a loss in cultural characteristics. Examples of these losses have been as basic as dialect. While reading Kenny Runion's words, there are obvious similarities to modern Southern Appalachian dialect. However, there are considerable differences, where the mountain language of old has assimilated in part to Standard American English. Still, more differences are seen in technological advances, where plain living has given way to a modern, fast-paced way of life. Cell phones are as common in Appalachia as anywhere else now, connecting owners with the entire planet and easily reversing the effects of the serene mountain environment and isolation of the past.

In summary, Foxfire has had a localized effect on the community from which it came and a far-reaching impact on the world outside of the walls of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Through introductions made within the culture itself and between Southern Appalachia and the outside world, Foxfire has made a lasting mark on its community, and it isn't finished yet. The Foxfire Magazine is still being published at Rabun County High School, and it continues to document the ever changing ways of life in Appalachia. In addition, a new digital magazine has begun at Rabun County Elementary School, called "Foxfire Today." Featuring interviews with contemporary Appalachians, this magazine is created and edited by fifth and sixth graders. Foxfire began as a small ember, glowing in our little corner of the world, but it has ignited a passion for this culture among our community and beyond. Foxfire still glows!

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SARA G. LAM

10. FROM RABUN COUNTY TO YONJI COUNTY

The Foxfire Approach and Community-Based Education in Rural China

A large white tarp has been raised between two utility poles over the main dirt road that runs through Houjia Zhuang, a village of about five hundred people in central China. At dusk, villagers gather and sit on wooden benches behind the projector. Student speakers from the village elementary school's fifth grade class welcome the villagers and explain the research they have been conducting. They had investigated and collected oral histories about local water – where it comes from, how it is used, and changes over time – and had visited local rivers to observe and record the mechanisms through which water is diverted for industrial usage as well as sources of pollution that are affecting the rivers. They go on to share their findings, using a bamboo pole to point out the diagrams and slides they had created. Some villagers in the audience contributed information or personal stories reflected in the presentation, but still, they leave with new insights. Some learn for the first time how exactly water is brought to the taps in their courtyards, others learn about the different perspectives and water use of people from different generations or from other villages at different points along the local rivers, while still others gain a greater awareness of threats to local water sources and the importance of conservation.

These students have participated in similar projects before as part of an initiative by the Rural China Education Foundation (RCEF) in collaboration with rural teachers to promote learning that is community-based and centered on student inquiry. Our community-based curricular projects consist of community research projects in which students investigate an aspect of the local village community, and service-learning projects in which students investigate an issue of concern to them and take action to address the issue. As a member of RCEF, I led the first community-based education projects with students in the form of an after school club at a rural boarding school,[1] while giving other teachers at the school the opportunity to observe or participate. Later, I joined with teachers of the school to form co-teaching teams in which we collaborated fully in planning and teaching community-based curricular projects. Through this process, a number of partner teachers became committed to this approach to teaching and began to integrate it independently into their own practice. We formed a community of practice that learned through collaborative teaching and through the sharing of independent work. Since then, the teachers

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 73–82.

have led community-based education projects in other area schools and shared their experiences with other rural teachers through professional development workshops and videos of the community-based education process.[2]

We learned about Foxfire early on in our practice of community-based education and discovered that we shared many of the goals and principles of the Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning. A colleague and I had the opportunity to participate in the Foxfire Course for Teachers in the summer of 2008. We were inspired by the case studies shared by teachers who used the Foxfire approach and the core practices provided important guidance to us as we continued to improve our practice.

BRIDGING APPALACHIA AND RURAL CHINA

On the surface, the idea that an educational approach rooted in the specific context of Appalachia in the 1960s would be relevant half a century later to educators on the other side of the globe in China may seem strange. In fact, there are educators around the world, working in vastly different contexts, who share a commitment to democratic education in which students have a significant voice in making decisions about the goals and process of their learning. There are educators both in the U.S. and in China who share common ideals of democratic education, who are responding to similar social problems, and who face similar constraints in the form of testing-centered educational policy.

TRADITIONS OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

The development of democratic education is often attributed to Western education theorists, such as John Dewey, whose work has informed the Foxfire Approach, when in fact, Chinese educators have made important contributions and innovations in democratic education in their own right. Tao Xingzhi is one such educator. Tao is among the most prominent figures in the field of education in China. As a graduate student, he studied under the leading progressive education scholars at Columbia University in the 1910's and became a leader of the progressive Rural Reconstruction Movement in China upon his return. He advocated for mass education that would empower the peasantry to become a conscious force for rural transformation. Many of Dewey's ideas about education are reflected in Tao's work (Kuhn, 1959; Keenan, 1977; Daykin, 2014): the idea of social transformation as a goal of education and the idea that schools should create opportunities for students to learn through engaging in meaningful work that mirrors work and knowledge in society. Tao often builds on Dewey's ideas and takes them further. In addition to preparing students to participate in a democratic society, he also saw students as agents of change who could help bring about such a society. He not only integrated meaningful work and knowledge from society into schools, but saw society as part of the school (Su, 1996). These differences are reflected in the educational practice of Tao, who brought students out

into the community to help facilitate the resolution of conflict between villagers and to serve as "little teachers" who spread literacy among rural adults.

Tao's theory and practice provided a framework for our community-based education from the beginning. As we engaged with Dewey's *Experience and Education* and the Foxfire core practices during the Foxfire course for teachers, we quickly saw the connection between the two traditions and we were able to understand aspects of the core practice from the lens of democratic education in China. The above examples of Tao's practice, for example, are a reflection of the core practice calling for student work to serve audiences beyond the classroom in action in the context of rural China.

THE NEED FOR DEMOCRATIC AND COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION

The context that we worked in and that moved us to pursue a more community-based curriculum is not dissimilar from the context that gave rise to the Foxfire approach. The students of the original Foxfire course have roots in Appalachian culture, which is stereotypically associated with "hillbillies", ignorance and backwardness. Through their work, students discovered and gave voice to the cultural, historical and technological wisdom that elders of their communities hold, thereby disrupting the dominant narrative about their culture. In China, "rural" is similarly equated with "ignorant" and "backward". Rural children and youth are increasingly disconnected from their communities and many view urban culture and lifestyles as superior. This disconnect is often exacerbated by their experiences in school. Many rural students have parents who live and work in far-away cities most of the year. This, coupled with the closing and consolidation of rural schools across the country has led to the rise in numbers of rural students who attend boarding schools. It is not uncommon for students attending rural boarding schools to return home only once or twice a month. This means that many rural children and youth spend nearly all of their time in school and very little time in their communities. Furthermore, school curriculum tends to be oriented towards the urban context and is not culturally relevant for rural students.

If education is to be a powerful part of the solution to the social and economic problems that rural areas in China face, then a major purpose of education should be to cultivate rural students as future leaders in their communities and beyond. The curriculum should be rooted in the realities of rural communities and should give students opportunities to engage with and participate in community life and issues. Our hope is that through community research and service-learning projects, rural students will come to understand, appreciate and see themselves as important members of their communities, while at the same time engaging in rigorous academic learning. Given this goal, the story of the original Foxfire cultural journalism project was very inspiring to us. We have also found the core practices to be a useful guide for integrating community-based education and engagement with academic disciplines.

CONSTRAINTS AND SPACES

The Foxfire Course for Teachers encourages teachers to recognize the constraints under which they must operate, while also identifying available spaces for practicing democratic education. The education system in China is historically exam-centered and education in the U.S. is becoming increasingly so. As practitioners of democratic education, we stand to benefit from sharing experiences in navigating the constraints and spaces of exam-oriented education systems. For example, we have taken advantage of a subject in China's national curriculum called "integrated practice" to implement community-based education. This subject is meant to be multidisciplinary and provide opportunities for applied learning. Most schools do not implement the subject because it takes time away from tested subjects. Nonetheless, we've found that couching what we do in the language of the national curriculum has helped us to connect with administrators and officials who might otherwise be more resistant. It also provides a way for teachers, administrators and officials to take credit for the work as an innovation in an area of the national curriculum that other schools and districts overlook.

The prevalence of boarding schools in rural China has also created new spaces for democratic education. Even at the elementary level, it is not uncommon for students to spend ten hours a day in the classroom, with very little time and space available for anything other than exam-oriented teaching. For students who board at school, there is some time available for community-based education projects outside of school hours which would otherwise be used as independent study time. One teacher that we collaborate with worked for some time as a nanny in a boarding school. She was responsible for caring for the students during time when they were not in the care of their teachers. A group of students opted to spend their after school hours working with her on an inquiry project about snails, which involved field observations, experiments, and internet research. At the end, the group went around to the dorm rooms before bed time, presenting their findings to the other boarding students.

Because of these common goals, needs and constraints, learning about the Foxfire approach to teaching and learning was inspiring, as it introduced us to a wealth of powerful examples of democratic education, and at the same time valuable in a practical sense, as the core practices provided a useful reference for evaluation and goal setting throughout our professional development process. The rest of this chapter will describe the context of RCEF community-based education projects and then share examples from our practice as they reflect specific core practices of the Foxfire approach.

THE FOXFIRE CORE PRACTICES IN ACTION

The examples described below are taken from the experiences of RCEF and our partner teachers in rural schools of Yongji County, which is located in central China.

All of the projects were based in boarding schools with both residential and non-residential students. The schools served primarily agricultural communities. Many of the students' parents live in cities in coastal provinces for most of the year. These students board at school and return home to their grandparents every other weekend. The projects included students from third to fifth grade. Projects that occurred during class time were limited to one grade level, whereas projects that took place during lunch break, afterschool hours and holidays sometimes included mixed-age groups. The length of time devoted to the projects ranged from one or two weeks, to the whole school year. Most of the projects took place during class time. In these cases, a project might take the shape of a unit of a particular subject with which the project most closely aligns with, while others reside in different subject areas at different stages of the project according to the specific activities students are engaged in and the disciplinary methods and concepts associated with those activities.

Our community education projects can be divided into two types: community research and service-learning. In community research projects, students investigate a particular aspect of their community's history, art and culture, natural environment or economic activity. Examples include projects on local architecture, folk art, beekeeping, and changes in rural family structure. These projects sometimes include a practice component, such as growing crops and raising animals as part of agricultural community research projects. In service-learning projects, students investigate a public issue that they are concerned about and take action to address the issue. The issue of focus can range in scope from the school level, such as improving meal options for boarding students in the school, to the village level, such as the smoking cessation campaign, or involve collaborating with students in a different part of the country as in the case of fundraising to support students of a low-resource school in their service-learning project.[3]

The examples shared below are organized around the core practices related to learner choice, community connection, and audience. This chapter does not address all of the core practice because of space limitations, and more importantly, because the purpose for sharing examples is not to provide an exhaustive discussion of the core practices as they relate to our practice, but rather to use a discussion of several core practices to illustrate their relevance and application in the context of Yongji County. Before proceeding, I would like to acknowledge that the core practices are addressed discretely here for the purpose of clarity although they are not as easily separated from one another in practice.

From the beginning, learner choice, design, and revision infuses the work teachers and learners do together.[4]

Making space for learner choice was a challenge for us. The hierarchy that separates teachers from students is generally more rigid in China than it is in the U.S. When working with teachers in China, I encourage teachers to take small steps and gradually expand their comfort zones starting from where they are. I present student choice as a continuum. Classrooms are never completely controlled by the

teacher or by students, and our projects represent a wide range of possibilities in between.

In the selection of a theme or issue, for example, we have done several community-research projects on prominent aspects of local economy and culture, such as a project on sweet potatoes and one about village architecture, in which the theme was solely determined by the teacher. To give an example on the other end of the spectrum, I have taught units that began with a process of student brainstorming and deliberation which led to the goal of the unit. In one such unit, I led the students on a walk around the school and village. The students then brainstormed a list of changes they would like to see. Based on that list, I facilitated a discussion about changes that they most wanted or needed as well as the feasibility of achieving them. The students decided that they wanted to focus on the need for more sports equipment in the school, and then further decided specifically that they would like to build a table tennis table. From there, the students consulted construction workers from the village regarding the materials they would need and the costs of those materials. They created a budget, then planned and implemented a fundraising campaign. After negotiating with the school principal, they identified a suitable location for the table and helped the construction workers to build it out of brick and cement. The table was well used not only by students and teachers, but also by villagers.

Many projects emerged from student interests but were suggested as a topic of study by the teacher. The boys in one teacher's class went through a period of fascination with bees and her classroom was littered with plastic bottles containing dead bees that the students had tried to raise. The teacher suggested that they do a community research project about bees and brought them to interview a local beekeeping household. Although the teacher initiative the project, it became very student driven, with the group of students approaching any teacher who was willing to take them to the beekeepers during lunch breaks. In another case, the students had learned about the negative impacts of smoking in social studies class and were assigned by their social studies teacher to share this information with smoking members of their family. To his surprise, the social studies teacher himself became the target of a persistent smoking cessation campaign! Seeing that students were interested in this topic, we decided to start a project. The project included students from third to sixth grade. A team of teachers collaborated on it, with one teacher working with each grade level. The teachers had differing levels of experience with service-learning and invited varying degrees of student choice. For example, the students conducted a survey of smoking habits in surrounding villages. In some classes, the teacher provided a list of questions for students to ask, whereas the students generated the survey questions in other classes.

When students make significant choices, they must also bear responsibility for those choices, which opens up opportunities for powerful learning moments. I had once worked with a group of students who decided to raise some chickens in the school yard. We bought the baby chicks when they were not old enough for their sex to be determined and ended up with a higher percentage of roosters than we

had hoped for. This led to a lot of aggressive behavior from the roosters when they matured, especially toward the hens. Some of the students were very concerned about this and raised the problem in a meeting. During an intense and difficult deliberation, the students decided to butcher some of the roosters and give them to the cooks so that everyone in the school could share in the meat for dinner. This was a very special occasion because students rarely had the chance to eat chicken. The students had strong reactions as they witnessed, and in some cases assisted in, the butchering of their roosters. The students met again to process their feelings and discuss the ethics of their earlier decision. During the discussions, students were passionately engaged and discussed with nuance the complex factors that went into the decision. Some came to the conclusion that it was unjust to butcher the roosters and decided not to eat the chicken that day. The quality of their deliberation would not have been the same if they were discussing a hypothetical or distant decision, instead of their own decision, the consequences of which they experienced on a visceral level.

The work teachers and students do together enables learners to make connections between the classroom work, the surrounding communities, and the world beyond their communities.

By connecting the curriculum with the communities that students belong to, both the immediate and the broad, we hope that students see the familiar in a new light, form new connections with those around them, and see themselves as part of a much larger world. Many of our community-based units focus on familiar aspects of students' everyday lives. Things that they see each day and may be curious about, but have not had the opportunity to explore deeply. Students are often amazed by the complexities and wonders hiding behind the veneer of familiarity, and come to see things they had taken for granted in a new light. One teacher led a project about local village architecture. Students discovered that architecture in their region is unique, observed and described many interesting details about houses in the village that they had not noticed before and learned about the construction process as well as the science behind specific designs.

Through community-based education, students also come to see people around them in a new light. The wisdom and expertise of rural people is too often dismissed. The community-based education projects purposefully created opportunities for students to interact with community members in ways that would allow them to form new relationships. As part of a project about sweet potatoes, a local staple crop, students interviewed an elderly man in the village. They came to see him not only as Grandpa Hou, but now also as a village historian who told them about the important role that sweet potatoes played in the survival of villagers during the famine of the 1950's. Neighbors assumed the roles of agricultural scientists and engineers as they demonstrated innovative techniques and tools they had developed and provided guidance to students while students undertook their own agricultural projects. Students gained new appreciation for the specialized skill, passed down through generations, that goes into making the sweet potato noodles that are a major

part of the local diet after observing, assisting and interviewing a local family that produces them. Students themselves have the opportunity to assume a new role in the community as they discuss public issues with adults, share knowledge with them and take an active role in improving the community.

Community-based education projects have created opportunities for students to connect with the world beyond their immediate communities in meaningful ways. A group of rural teachers and I led a professional development camp focused on community research and service learning. One participant was inspired by our case studies about agricultural projects to work with his students on raising chickens in their school. He worked in a rural boarding school in one of the poorest provinces in China and saw the project as something students could do to improve their meals at school which were severely lacking in protein. When teachers from another school who had also participated in the camp heard about this, they decided to work with their students on a fundraising project to support the chicken project. In the process, the teachers and students from two very different regions in China had the opportunity to work towards a common goal and learn about each other's lives and situations. In another example, a well-resourced school in California collaborated with our students on a project investigating local water quality. The school in California donated a set of equipment so that students in both schools could conduct the same tests, and then share their processes and findings with each other. Pen-pal projects that connect rural children with people from other parts of the country or beyond are not uncommon. In these arrangements, communication can remain at a superficial level and can be problematic if the pen pals are not sensitive to the wealth and lifestyle differences between them. By grounding the connection in community-based education projects, the students in two countries shared a common experience which provided material for richer conversation. They gained knowledge about an important aspect of their own and each other's' communities.

The work of the classroom serves audiences beyond the teacher, thereby evoking the best efforts by the learners and providing feedback for improving subsequent performances.

Students serve audiences beyond the teacher in the community-based education projects, be it their own classroom community, their villages, or beyond. By working towards goals that involve broader audiences, learning takes on an authentic purpose and students gain the opportunity to engage with diverse perspectives.

When thinking about audience for student work, it is easy to jump to how students might present the results of their inquiry. However, it is the interaction and feedback they receive during the process that has often been most fruitful as students have the chance to immediately adjust their methods and practice again. Many of the community-based education projects we have done involve interviews with adults. This step is challenging for some students. It requires them to interact with adults, some of whom are unfamiliar to them. They need to make clear the purpose of the interview and carry themselves in a confident and polite manner in order to be

taken seriously by the adults, who are not used to being approached by children for interviews. To be successful, students must have a clear idea of the information they hope to gain. While they may prepare initial questions beforehand, they need to think of their feet to follow up with probing questions that will yield interesting and useful insights. After interviews, students debrief with each other and teachers, reflecting on their performance based on the responses of interviewees and the information that was collected before moving on to further interviews.

Broader audiences motivate students not only because students are concerned about how their work will be received by others, but also because students often hope to compel their audience to act or change their thinking in order to reach a goal. This is clearly illustrated in one project where students practiced marketing a product. Our students who raised chickens were delighted to discover that some of their hens laid blue eggs. Students who board at the school each get one hardboiled egg for breakfast in the morning. Because of how unique these eggs were, the students wanted to sell them instead of simply adding them to the school's egg supply. We brought students to the outdoor market in a nearby city to sell their eggs. We had brought art supplies for making posters and students tried different tactics for marketing the eggs to passersby. After some time, a man who had bought some of their eggs returned to give them suggestions for how to better market them. He had brought with him one of their eggs, which he had hardboiled, and pointed out to students the various ways in which their eggs are superior. By incorporating his feedback, students became more effective at communicating with potential customers and were more successful at selling their eggs.

The motivation created by working towards an important goal is particularly salient in service-learning projects, where students strive to understand and address an issue that affects their lives and communities. Because of the public nature of these issues, service-learning projects necessarily involve communicating and collaborating with a broader audience. As part of the smoking cessation project, for example, students went to several surrounding villages and presented on the findings of their survey of smoking habits in those villages, the monetary and health costs of smoking, as well as effective practices and available resources for smoking cessation. After each presentation, the students involved reflected on their effectiveness based on audience responses and made revisions for the next presentation. In another example, students published a feature in the student newspaper about health and nutrition, including a report on opinions about the food served at school for boarding students and school staff. In response, the principal called a meeting with representatives of teachers, students and kitchen staff to recommend changes to the menu.

CONCLUSION

The Foxfire approach to teaching and learning reflects the collective wisdom derived from the practice and reflection of many teachers working in a wide range of settings. This has given rise to an approach that is full of vitality in the sense that

teachers in vastly different contexts can both use and contribute to the approach. The Foxfire approach is far from a cookie-cutter method: practitioners are encouraged to reflect on our own philosophies of education, acknowledge real constraints that operate in our contexts, identify spaces for democratic teaching and learning, and finally create ways to strengthen our practice using the core practice as guidance. This chapter reflects how my colleagues and I have engaged in such a process in rural China. Although the constraints of testing and hierarchical relationships that many democratic educators face are particularly entrenched in this context, we have nonetheless found the approach to be applicable and valuable. Regardless of where our work is rooted, the Foxfire community provides a rich platform for democratic educators with shared visions and challenges to share and critically engage with each other's experiences.

NOTES

[1] Boarding schools are common in rural China. The mass closing and consolidation of rural schools throughout the country has made it unsafe or infeasible for many rural students to travel to and from school each day.

[2] Some of the videos can be accessed with English subtitles at http://www.ruralchina.org/videos

[3] The Rural China Education Foundation has created a handbook to support educators in rural China who are interested in integrating service-learning into their work. An English version of the handbook can be downloaded at http://www.ruralchina.org/sites

[4] The Foxfire approach core practices can be accessed from the Foxfire Approach webpage at www.foxfire.org/teaching

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JAN BULEY

11. FOXFIRE GOES TO UNIVERSITY

The Dance and the Disruptions

This chapter has been like capturing a wonderful spontaneous dance on paper. I have waltzed through Foxfire Course reflections from past participating students, twirled snippets from my journal around and around in my head, and sorted and sifted through perspectives and commentary from conversations I've had with students and colleagues about the Foxfire philosophy within the college setting. It was joyous reading through my journals from Foxfire adventures over the years, and there emerged a common thread in many of the entries: What we do, say and offer in the spaces where we teach and learn should reflect what we believe matters most about teaching and learning. And I will boldly state that although challenging, incorporating the Foxfire Approach in a college or university setting is possible and fulfilling.

So how has the Foxfire Approach become infused into the university courses I offer to student teachers and within the university classes where I teach and learn? How do I model the importance of teachers and learners working together when I am required to submit a course syllabus before meeting the students I will be teaching? How am I to invite collaborative knowledge exchange in massive lecture halls with fixed, tiered seating? How do I model the recursive, spiraling educational experience that is so deeply upheld by the Foxfire approach? And how do I stop colleagues from looking for lobotomy scars on my forehead when I request round tables and comfortable sitting areas in 'my' university classroom? Walking the talk of the Foxfire approach has not always been easy. I want students to question me, offer ideas of areas they would like to explore, question assumptions in themselves and in curriculum documents. And yet, there are many students who shut down completely when they enter a university classroom. Gone is their inquisitiveness. They are consumed with cellphone use as soon as they are in the presence of other human beings, it seems. It is almost as if they are waiting to be told what they need to know. And yet, things are different in the classroom where I teach. We've learned—or should I say unlearned—much of the assumptive ritual of a university classroom. The turning point for this paper really came when I sat down in the empty university classroom where I teach and really pondered the importance of what occurs there.

After years of working through and with the Foxfire Approach, I believe that what matters most is primarily a teaching and learning philosophy founded in the art

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 83–91.

of noticing deeply. Maxine Greene had a lifelong wish that teachers would follow her injunction to 'notice what there is to be noticed' and live is a state of 'wide awakeness' while being fully tuned to the potential and lived lives around us. For me, this means noticing the learning and the learners in our midst, and noticing our own decision-making processes as we offer and extend the learning invitations to each other. The spine of the Foxfire philosophy is constructed of reflective sinew; the bones are the core practices and beliefs. Much of the work of Foxfire is couched in the writings of John Dewey, and Maxine Green was greatly influenced by his thinking. Both saw experiential learning as key to all education, and believed that aesthetic active engagement is where unexpected new learning occurs best.

The space where Foxfire began in Rabun County, North Georgia, is an important place to start in this article. Leave the hustle bustle of Atlanta behind and travel with me up a secluded road, a winding black ribbon of asphalt into the Appalachian forests of northeast Georgia. We are far away from the shopping malls and busy highways, the bank machines and honking horns of rush hour. Eventually, the asphalt becomes a gravel road, bordered with dark mossy forests and flowering roadside weeds, climbing up, up, up into another world. In your mind's eye, imagine now, entering a clearing—what appears to be a pioneer village is ahead of you. This is the Foxfire Centre, home to several historic buildings and hundreds of local artifacts. Many of the students from the Rabun County highschool were instrumental in disassembling and reassembling the buildings at the Foxfire site, and they all have stories to tell.

Off to the right is a building with a covered wagon inside. A tiny building on the left has windows overlooking the porch, and when you peek inside, there is a spinning wheel and cranberry coloured wool visible in a woven basket on the floor. Another building straight ahead of us is surely a mill of some sort. There's an enormous grinding stone propped up outside the wooden porch. Further up the gravel road to the left is a smaller building with a steeple on top, and there's another building on the right that is filled with woodworking tools. Up around a curve in the road are some picnic tables and then a larger wooden building at the end of the gravel road.

We'll stop here, park our car and explore on foot. Walk up the pathway to this building, past the rocking chairs and wooden benches on the porch. A long, warm room with a smooth plank floor greets you. The screens are propped open and there is a slight breeze. Lush deciduous woodland is visible directly outside the windows. Everything is green, it seems, and the songs of birds—cardinals, warblers and wrens—cascade from the mature trees into this room.

A small group of adults is seated at the far end of the room. Their conversation is punctuated with sporadic laughter as they sip tea and exchange ideas. They have papers spread at their feet and one of them has a book in his hand. Someone is writing on a large piece of paper with a colored marker. This is a meeting of Foxfire participants. They are gathered together on the second-last day of a week's immersion Foxfire course. They have come to grow, listen and savor the beauty

of the space and the teaching profession with new eyes. Most importantly, they have come to acquire new understandings of the Foxfire approach and reflect on the intersections with their own practice. Participants spend the week living at the Foxfire Centre together, actively collaborating, deliberating and reflecting on themselves as teachers and as learners. Together, we plan the week's agenda, framed around some collectively-agreed upon 'givens' such as readings, starting and ending times. All of the participants interviewed as part of this article enrolled in the Foxfire course through Piedmont College, and many of them drive great distances to attend. There is a palpable air of anticipation, worry and excitement as we gather for the first time together. Sitting in a circle, the eighteen adults share their names and speak of their hopes for the course. They have chosen their accommodations and there is much chatter about the rustic bedrooms and simple beauty of the place. They are removed from what they know and all vulnerable. They are invited to raise questions about teacher identity, analyze personal beliefs about learning and teaching, and revisit aspects of democratic education within Dewey's framework. Essentially, we are all disrupted questioners.

I fondly recall a participant from a course four years ago. Shannon (pseudonym) needed no invitation to write in her journal, and her addiction for capturing her thinking was evident on day one. She was often seen scribbling things down all day long, and at the end of the course, she kindly offered me some of her perspectives:

> *Sunday arrived and I didn't know where the heck I was going. Up, up, up this long road towards Blackrock Mountain. Got here to the Foxfire Centre, checked in and met some other teachers. We went out for supper in town and laughed a lot, but I can tell that everyone's as nervous as I am. And now it's Monday morning and I didn't sleep at all last night. What? No course outline? We're planning this week together? I was surprised how quickly things came together though. And everyone had a say in what we hoped to do. Jan made a big chart on paper on the floor and then Tanya, one of the teachers started to fill in our ideas. Not all of it was filled in. There didn't seem to be any rush, but we got some of the readings figured out with groups and we know when the day is going to end.*
>
> *Strange, but I kind of like this group decision making stuff, and I can't believe I'm actually saying that because I used to like being told what to do. That's what I grew up knowing, I guess. It's new to me. So many decisions that I've never really had to make as a student. Take a deep breath. This is obviously a course like no other. And what? Today we found out that at the end, we're going to each do some kind of deliverable project or something? Help! Just tell me what you want. A poster? A paper? What format? APA or ML…just tell me what to do so I can get on with it okay? Well it didn't happen. Jan said not to worry and that it would come together… that the focus would be on our thinking and processing from the week, not some product like a big paper or proving anything.*

Jan refers to herself as a facilitator and it makes me think of how bossy I sometimes am as a teacher. Always in charge and making the decisions for the kids in my classroom. And is it my classroom or our classroom? It's only Tuesday and this course has really got me thinking about me. A lot about me and my place in the classroom. What is my role? I kind of like that guide on the side idea that Rob talked about. And thinking about what it means to be the teacher and what it means to be the learner. I'm thinking about that a lot. Is there any difference really?

What did she say? Now we're going to put these reaction posters up for everyone else to write on? Hey. I worked hard on this with my partner. But hold on, here is that active learning thing that was mentioned yesterday. I get to participate and write my opinions on the posters of others. Wow. I guess I can say I am the expert sort of. I get to connect with what another person said. And we're all going to be buzzing around writing on each other's reading reaction poster. I can be as creative as I like and I can see what the other groups came up with in their discussions about the Dewey text. Can any of this work in my own classroom in September? Can I 'get' my students to 'govern' themselves responsibly?

It is only Wednesday! What? I feel like I have been here forever…well not really…we have just accomplished SO MUCH! The magazine students are here… IT is raining…guess the tour of all of the Foxfire buildings is cancelled. SAD. Oh, wait…the democratic process in place….we can restructure our day…magazine in morning…tour in afternoon. It's going to be a Good day! Shift things around as we need to. Nothing locked in. Jeremy just said something that I really like: "When you get a good answer, maybe you asked a good question." I like that…….so when I get that DUH look, maybe I didn't ask a very good question. ☺ *Back to the co-planning idea again. I've got that list of core practices in front of me on the table. When the magazine'kids' showed up early, we, as a class, made the CHOICE to REVISE the plan and still keep the task on the table and work toward completion of our learning objective. NUMBER 2 …got this one…almost EVERYTHING the class does needs to be done with purpose and intention so that it becomes INFUSED into our being and is as natural as breathing. NUMBER 3 …how does what happens in a classroom transfer to the community around? I like what Jan said about inviting the community to be a resource for our learning invitations. When Nathan's dog got hit by that truck, he had lots of questions about the surgery his dog had to have. We invited the vet into the class and it was so awesome. Then some of the kids drew pictures and we ended up making a picturebook out of the illustrations…the kids wrote the story of what happened when Nathan's dog was hit. So much learning for them and then we took the book to the vet clinic for people to read while they sat in the waiting room. All of a sudden,*

spelling and telling the story mattered. A couple of the kids said "hey! We should translate this story into Spanish 'cause there's lots of Spanish-speaking people in our town!" Bingo! Extending learning out into the community. Expanding learner audience. NUMBER 4….yep….burn the podium! Active participation with facilitator…level the learning ground with collaboration… everyone learns….children teach too! NUMBER 5….engaged learning occurs when everyone is invited to be a part of the experience. NUMBER 6 and 7… we got that Creative thing going when we SURPRISE the group and there is NEVER an I in TEAMWORK. NUMBER 8. AUDIENCE—really? I thought the WHOLE WORLD was watching every single thing that happens in a classroom—OH. …probably doesn't mean the administration for this one…. barricade the door ……the audience needed is supportive and in collaboration with the learners ……Set up a booth at the Relay for Life and let the class show what they know. They can organize it. AMAZING to watch….Work it out for the math class to participate in the planning of the new "addition" to the school grounds the next time landscaping is being done or a walkway is being poured. How much cement is needed to go between two buildings? How much lumber do you think the garden shed will require? What's the angle of that roof and what difference does it make? NUMBER 9……this is continuous as the group moves from one space to another with open opportunities to ask questions and build on experience. NUMBER 10,……ALWAYS REVISING…… THIS IS A JOURNEY NOT A DESTINATION……..stop and watch the classroom garden BLOOM!

As a facilitator and educator for the course, I am always eager to be with participants at the Foxfire Centre. After seven days together, a final sharing always happens towards the end of the week. These sharings can take many forms, but all participants focus on this question: "What are you taking away from our Foxfire week together, and what are you thinking about as you get ready to return to the classroom in September? How has Foxfire affirmed or disrupted your thinking?" As part of these presentations, I recognized that I also needed to model my willingness to share. I needed to be vulnerable too. I needed to walk through my uncertainty about disrupting the assumptions of the learners in my university classes and talk about the kinds of invitations I would test out through the Foxfire Approach. I smiled as I thought about the Foxfire Core Practices, strategically framed above my office desk at the university back home in Canada:

1. The work teachers and learners do together is infused from the beginning with learner choice, design, and revision.
2. The role of the teacher is that of facilitator and collaborator.
3. The academic integrity of the work teachers and learners do together is clear.
4. The work is characterized by active learning.

5. Peer teaching, small group work, and teamwork are all consistent features of classroom activities.
6. Connections between the classroom work, the surrounding communities, and the world beyond the community are clear.
7. There is an audience beyond the teacher for learner work.
8. New activities spiral gracefully out of the old, incorporating lessons learned from past experiences, building on skills and understandings that can now be amplified.
9. Imagination and creativity are encouraged in the completion of learning activities.
10. Reflection is an essential activity that takes place at key points throughout the work.
11. The work teachers and learners do together includes rigorous, ongoing assessment and evaluation (Starnes, Paris, & Stevens, 1999).

To begin, I knew that I would have to model the Foxfire Approaches through my actions in the classroom. I needed to fully walk the walk of a teacher-learner, and trust the process. I had to be willing to offer a learning environment that clearly spoke of active participation and one where learning from each other was valued and honoured. I knew that I needed to create a physical space where conversations could happen easily and where I could model alongside student teachers. I wanted to instill a sense that we are all teachers of each other, and that, although I may be the perceived 'expert' in the room, we all bring tremendous insights to the learning from lived experiences. I hoped to show that when people come together to exchange ideas and construct meaning together, new understandings spiral out of the old, and new connections, understandings and relationships emerge. I wanted them to clearly see that the experiences and activities in the course would be relevant and purposeful to their field experiences as student teachers, and that the skills, knowledge and ideas we explored together would be needed, useful and worth doing. I recognized the need to invite choice in some form throughout 'my' course syllabus, and that revisions with discussion and debate would be considered and welcomed. I wanted them to know that there was an audience beyond the perceived 'expert' teacher and classroom at the university. Learning the skills of teamwork, collaboration and negotiation would also be central to what we do together, recognizing that becoming better at collaborating involves failure and frustration sometimes as well. I needed them to know that meaning making with me would require a healthy use of imagination and creativity. I also wanted them to know that thinking about who we are as teachers and as learners will shape all that we do and invite others to do. Building on learning through reflection on where we have been and what we have come to know would also be central to our learning together.

So what does Foxfire look like in my university classes? How do I integrate some of the approach and core practices and what are the challenges? One 'given' within the university setting where I work is the required submission of a course

outline to be printed and ultimately distributed to the students in the classes I teach. I have left several 'holes' in the course outline for choice of how an assignment is completed, the criteria for the assignment and in some cases, the value placed on the assignment. I have also begun with offering choices in options for placement-based teaching and learning. For example, we have a writing partnership with a local high school, and if students opt to participate in that program, they can exchange this experience for another class option. Similarly, we partner with the local city police department, offering drama education workshops around bullying, safe cyber-use, cellphone etiquette and healthy relationships. If students are keen to participate in this program, they can negotiate an alternative form of evaluation for the course I teach. I have also invited full ownership of rubric creation and self reflection as part of the courses I offer, and each student has a reading/writing portfolio as 'evidence' of the self selected pieces they choose to share. In group work, each student is invited to contribute a personal assessment of the process and product, thus providing a more honest insight into each member's contribution to the overall experience. I listened to the concerns from students who said that there were often instances when stronger students had to 'cover' for less capable students and there was resentment about a group mark. The individual assessment, while not a perfect solution, has helped to alleviate some dissatisfaction with marking and grading. Ensuring students that I am listening to their concerns and am open to discussions and considerations is important.

There are a number of opportunities for peer-teaching, co-learning and collaborative inquiry, and this speaks to a really important aspect of the Foxfire Approach. In all of the classes I offer, students are invited to share orally, discuss critical readings in small and large groups and react and respond to written journal reflections. Often, an observation or connection that I overlooked is raised when small-group discussions occur. We all read and prepare responses to various professional articles or texts, and rarely are things viewed in the same way. Students learn to read critically—something that they have rarely done before reaching their final year in teacher's college. They learn the art of tactfully critiquing the viewpoints of each other and they acquire the art of deeper questioning. We all are accountable to each other, and we are all invited to offer our opinions and ideas freely. Each class begins with world news discussions, and then students are invited to announce initiatives that matter to them. Sharing for world news is invitational, and we all discover things about each other from these presentations. Recently, an Indigenous student brought in an editorial about racist and derogatory Hallowe'en costumes that were being sold in a local themed costume store. This sharing spiraled into a marvelously heated conversation around issues of human dignity, stereotypes, degradation of a culture, exploitation and power. A group of students was so angered by the costumes being sold, that they wrote a letter to the local paper. Another student contacted the store headquarters in Toronto and spoke to the purchasing agent for the costumes. These kinds of 'teachable moments' were not on my agenda, but they are the fabric of true and authentic learning—learning that is action-oriented, purposeful and lasting.

Someone else might be organizing a coat drive for an organization that serves the homeless. Another student might want to switch his novel study choice and this dilemma is placed into the community for solving. I pose the question to the group, asking them to step back as a classroom teacher and assess what the next best step might be. A guest speaker coming to talk about transgender student success ideas has been confirmed and a date, time and location will be shared. I frequently toss opportunities for ownership of classroom agenda into the hands of the students. Of course, given the crammed timetables and the room availability on any campus, assisting with these plans is sometimes necessary, and I help when needed.

Essentially, the Foxfire Approach is about opening doors and windows for all learners to enter when they are ready. Students who are shy to join into discussions initially 'find their way' and eventually voice their ideas with a partner or in a small group. By second term, the quieter students often feel comfortable enough to contribute ideas to a whole class discussion, and this is always an exciting observation for me. Confidence takes time to build and is closely linked to a perception of 'fitting in' and being received within a community. What's important is to keep noticing 'who is in' and 'who is not' and continue to offer encouragement, one on one interaction and a welcoming smile. Knowing the students' names by the end of week three or four is an enormous goal for me each year, but this aids in establishing a welcoming space. And the teaching and learning space, in my opinion, is key to the success of implementing much of what is being discussed here. There are ten round tables in the classroom, with four chairs at each table for easy personal interaction. The walls are filled with student work—quotations that they really liked from our professional readings, quotations from their reflective journals, comments made by guest speakers, cartoons, poetry, news articles, letters, websites and photos. On one bulletin board, there is a collage of 'recommended reading' that began with my invitation of some YA novel titles and has since become a wild array of book suggestions. A fire was lit! With a simply invitation, the bulletin board was quickly claimed by the students, and just last week, a custodian in our building recently added a title to the display. The university students have also reflected a great deal about their experiences with me:

> *I totally get the importance of choice and learning invitations, Jan. I knew that I could choose something that interested me in our literacy course this year and that motivated me completely.*
>
> *It made me feel like my opinion mattered when you asked us what we thought. Then you really listened.*
>
> *I discovered that I could offer my opinion without fear of judgement from you or other university students.*
>
> *I learned that it's not just my job to make a classroom safe and welcoming. It takes everyone to grow a community together.*

I never thought that a university class could be like this. I have learned so much about me and my place in the classroom and in the learning. Most of all, I've learned to step back and recognize the young teachers around me.

In my next practice teaching time, I'm going to try to let go a bit more. I plan, plan, plan all the time for my kids and I need to allow them to choose how to learn with me more.

I really liked what we did when we talked about making the learning meaningful for individuals. Not all of the peaches ripen at the same time. And I so believe in the 'just try' idea. We need to focus more on process with the students in our classes and less on product, that's for sure!

Because of what you've shared in our class about Foxfire, I have learned that choice can happen within boundaries. I like the idea of working with some 'givens' and offering choice around those.

Without a doubt, the greatest moments in my Foxfire work have occurred informally through these comments gleaned from university student journals. It is these 'ah-ha' moments that I carry inside me in my university learning invitations. Educators who invite alternative learning experiences with students help to foster emerging relationships between how the positions of learner and teacher might be portrayed, examined and imagined (Loughran, 2006). The students affirm what I am attempting to do, as I celebrate and model the Foxfire approach, infusing it into the university classroom setting while pushing me to reassess my role each and every day.

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EDD DIDEN

12. ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT FOR THE FOXFIRE APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING

Controversy has swirled around the performance of public schools in America for more than thirty years with widespread agreement that improvements are needed. As schools face increased pressure to change, educators have been bombarded with top-down initiatives that claim to be the cure for the ills of public education. As a 39 year veteran of public education, I've experienced an abundance of initiatives and strategies to improve PreK-12 outcomes. H. L. Mencken once said, "*For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong.*" And so goes the history of school reform in America. With limited thought and planning, new programs have been initiated to solve very complex issues related to improvement educational outcomes. Such a climate is not conducive to the collaborative efforts of teachers, administrators, and parents and families to meet the needs of students.

Twenty five of my 39 year career in education were devoted to administration. I had the unique opportunity to serve as a high school principal (13 years), central office supervisor of instruction (1 year), and Director of Schools (11 years). My first fourteen years included classroom teaching experience at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Although a fairly traditional classroom teacher, I searched for innovative learning activities that would motivate my students. After becoming a secondary principal, I quickly learned of the complex nature of assisting teachers with improvements in pedagogy that would stimulate the engagement of students in the learning process. For several years, I closely examined the theory and practice of the learner-centered Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning (Foxfire Fund, Inc., 2015) and the complementary place-based principles advocated by the Rural School and Community Trust (Rural School and Community Trust, 2015). This continuous search for methods for school improvement as a school administrator convinced me that the crux of the matter of educational reform is the engagement of students in meaningful learning experiences. Students ultimately control their own learning by the most basic of decisions that is choosing to engage or to disengage. Educators must seek to inspire students to choose to engage (Starnes & Parris, 2000). This learner-centered (pedagogy of place) provides the means to maximize student engagement in learning.

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 93–100.

TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS: PARTNERS FOR IMPROVED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Amid the clamor for school reform, the classroom teacher's role in student engagement is often overlooked. A growing body of research indicates that the most significant factor in student achievement is teacher knowledge and experience (Ferguson, 1991; Armour-Thomas, Clay, Domanico, Bruno, & Allen, 1989). Deborah Meier (1995) states that *"the kinds of changes required by today's agenda can only be the work of thoughtful teachers"* (p. 108). Teacher knowledge of both content and instructional strategies make a profound difference in what students are able to learn (Darling-Hammond, 1992).

The "old school" administrator often operated under the assumption that classrooms must be quiet and orderly. Keeping students quiet and orderly was the crowning achievement of the good teacher. Learning is sometimes messy and noisy. Theobald (1992) argues that the active resistance and disengagement of students is escalated in schools characterized by *"bland, text-driven curricula and authoritarian teaching"* (p. 7). An instructional approach that only utilizes textbooks, an endless array of worksheets, lecture, and standardized tests will do little to maximize student engagement. There can be balance between engagement and structure. Application of the Foxfire Core Practices is not a license for students do whatever they choose. Students are given the opportunity to be involved in the design of their own learning in collaboration with the teacher and other students. Teachers can encourage principals to make frequent visits to their classrooms to observe the learner-center instructional approaches that are being utilized. Principals generally respond positively to students who are obviously excited about their own learning.

All educators especially principals must give some attention to standardized assessment results. Teachers should be prepared to explain how curriculum standards (the "givens") are embedded within the project-based work of their learner-centered classroom. Teachers can also explain the need for a broad range of assessments to fully evaluate the performance of students. Reluctant principals can also be encouraged to critically examine the current research regarding learner-centered methods.

Students receive the most benefit from the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders in the educational process. The partnership of teachers and administrators is critical to the development of a rich learning environment within a school. Many educators (administrators and teachers) have a desire to cultivate a more learner-centered approach in their daily practice. When facing the realities of current reform, how does a principal or district supervisor lead and support other educators in the implementation of a learner-centered approach such as the Foxfire Approach?

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

For administrators who would consider leading their schools in the Foxfire Approach, I offer some suggestions. Do not be deceived by the difficulty of such a process. First and foremost, accept the fact that people in general including educators are resistant to change. Educators have also been immobilized by cycles of mandated, ill-conceived programs that are usually not supported by solid research. These factors increase educator feelings of ineffectiveness. In this atmosphere, educators often express chronic pessimism and negativity toward any new initiative.

Many school reforms of the past 30 years are based upon "high stakes" test accountability and "drill and kill" instruction. The artistry of teachers is stifled by these standardized pressures. In the face of these school reforms, the classic liberal purpose of education seems to have been forgotten. Learning is about the interaction between student, teacher, curriculum, and community (Dewey, 1938; Starnes & Parris, 2000). Standardization of curriculum and national tests sever schools from their local communities. Rich curriculum resources such as local people, history, and environment are neglected. In the words of Alfie Kohn, *"the tail of testing is wagging the educational dog"* (p. 35). Many educators also believe that reforms have placed a floor underneath the standards. Davies (2001) asks, *"Will schools be given the freedom to explore the 'ceiling' of achievement or will they keep responding to increased targets (the floor) in the basic skills to the neglect of broader educational outcomes and achievement?"* (p. 4). In a mad rush to establish minimum standards, the floor becomes the ceiling. High expectations for learners cannot be achieved by simply focusing on minimum standards.

Another challenge is that the traditional public concept of school administration hinges on control. From a historical perspective, the focus of traditional school in an industrial age was attendance and compliance. In this 21st century context, effective living requires high order thinking and learning. The emphasis shifts to the engagement of the student and his/her attention and commitment to the learning task at hand (Schlechty, 2005). This compliance versus engagement conundrum is a serious challenge for students and educators. One student only wants to know what he/she must do to get an A while another simply wants to do the minimum to pass the course. One could argue that there is not much difference in the engagement of these two students in the learning process. Schlechty explains, *"...students who are engaged learn differently from those who are only compliant. Engagement comes into existence in response to students' desire for meaning and for relevance to their own values"* (p. 11). Engagement for both educators and students involves a depth of commitment and purpose in the learning process. Daniel Pink (2009) speaks to this pervasive challenge: *"In our offices and our classrooms we have way too much compliance and way too little engagement. The former will get you through the day, but only the latter will get you through the night"* (p. 78). The ultimate goal would

be for teachers to create classroom cultures where students could take charge of their learning. Obviously, student choice is significant to such a process.

The old southern proverb seems to be applicable – *"You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink."* In fact, an administrative mandate for teachers to adopt Foxfire violates a key tenet of the approach – choice. Core Practice one – *"From the beginning, learner choice, design, and revision infuses the work teachers and learners do together"* (Foxfire Fund, Inc., 2015). The principle of choice would certainly be applicable to educators considering a learner-centered approach such as Foxfire. Educational leaders can provide the means for administrators and teachers to receive training, and a system of follow-up to nurture the continued professional growth as new techniques are applied to classroom instruction. Most educators will accept the need for changes in pedagogy if its use can be demonstrated to be of benefit to students. Administrator support is important as the teacher's acceptance of a learner-centered approach to teaching and learning places oneself in the position of swimming upstream against the contemporary current of a legislated accountability system based upon standardized testing. Such teachers may also experience opposition or criticism from colleagues or parents who don't understand the ultimate purpose of the Foxfire Approach. An administrator can serve as an advocate for Foxfire teachers act as a buffer for such pressures.

LEADING COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL CULTURES OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Administrative support is critical to the success of any school improvement effort. Administrators must strive to create collaborative schools of continuous learning for educators and students. The Foxfire Core Practices support the development of such school cultures. In such a context, the traditional paradigm of control paradigm yields to collaboration and empowerment. School leaders must guide educators through a re-examination of personal philosophy regarding the goals and purposes of education. To lead others in this process, school leaders must venture into the arena first. A change in philosophy does not occur without personal beliefs that support learner-centered theory and practice.

Administrators must seek to create a school climate that is conducive to change thus the move to focus on collaboration, empowerment, and continuous learning. School improvement is about people improvement (DuFour, 1992). Teachers, support staff, and administrators are continually learning to improve their results with students. Principals can lead teachers in asking themselves the following two questions: What is the role of education in our society? How should children be educated? (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). Educators must be nurtured to formulate a very personal conceptual framework that supports such work. Through staff development, the following fundamental questions can be re-examined:

- What are we currently teaching?
- What should be taught?
- What is the connection of our current curriculum with standards?
- How can skills be taught in a community-connected manner?
- How are we promoting democratic principles in our school and classrooms?
- What are the best methods of instruction and assessment?

As a high school principal, I was able to work with district leaders to provide on-going staff development for teachers around such topics. In some cases, this effort required external funding which was acquired through grants. As teachers learned new instructional strategies, they became mentors for other colleagues which nurtured a school climate of shared leadership. The challenges of 21st century learning for our students cannot be met without joint responsibility that comes through shared leadership.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC) (Dufour et al., 2006) is an approach that promotes shared leadership in individual schools and school districts. Professional Learning Communities assist in the creation of a school culture where the Foxfire Approach to Teaching Learning is more likely to take root and flourish. The PLC approach is based upon the following beliefs:

- All students can learn at high levels.
- Helping all students learn requires a collaborative effort.
- A focus on results – evidence of student learning – to improve professional practice and respond to students who need intervention or enrichment.

In my most recent role as a superintendent, I led the school district in the implementation of a professional learning community approach. Principals, assistant principals, and central office supervisors were provided training. In turn, the principal was expected to create a school leadership team who would facilitate the work of the faculty through teams. As a district, we also organized system-wide grade level and content teams. A teacher facilitator was trained to lead each group. Each team created shared norms for their work. These groups worked on curriculum, instruction, and assessment topics for their specific areas. For the purposes of fidelity of implementation, administrators observed these system-wide teams and provided coaching and other direct assistance. School level administrators were encouraged to use a similar process to organize the important instructional work of the faculty in their respective schools. The PLC shared beliefs and capacity building through teams create a foundation conducive to the creation of collaborative school cultures for continuous learning. In such a context, Foxfire is more likely to be successful.

In the formal and information evaluation of teachers, school administrators have the opportunity and obligation to assist each teacher with improved content and methodology. It seems that novice teachers are much stronger in content than

pedagogy. After completing observation of teachers, the evaluator can utilize a variety of reflective questions. Why did you choose this particular strategy? Where your students engaged? How do you know? Is there a better way to engage all students? If so, how would you change for the next lesson? School leaders can nurture a reflective practice among teachers – a self analysis of classroom practice with the goal of becoming more effective in maximizing student engagement in learning.

THE CLASH OF THEORY AND PRACTICE (WHAT, HOW, AND WHY)

The Foxfire Core Practices provide a solid philosophical foundation for other learner-centered approaches as place-based learning (often used synonymously with Foxfire), project-based learning, personalization of learning, and community learning theory. The successful implementation of such an approach requires clarity in understanding the need for balance in educational theory and practice.

In regard to the implementation of a new school innovation, the "what and how overwhelm why." This phrase speaks to the conflict between theory and practice. The focus of practice is "what and how." The heart of theory is the "why." All educators must achieve a balance in "what, how, and why." Practitioners are often inundated with waves of instructional remedies to treat the ailments of their students and schools. In the hectic pace of the typical school schedule, the practitioner's most immediate need is to know "what" is expected and "how" do I get it done. Practitioners desperately need the time to evaluate "why" the new remedy is better than current practice. Understanding "why" is more likely to ingrain the new method or program into daily practice. Without balancing these three elements, any innovation is doomed for failure (Diden, 2007).

Higher education also has a role to play in this process. The focus of most college and university professors is on the theories ("why") of educational improvement. In considering a new instructional process, professors can assist practitioners with understanding the theoretical basis for a change. But, they must also give attention to the practitioner's concern with "how." Otherwise, the practicalities of implementation are neglected and failure again looms on the horizon. This difficult balancing act is crucial to meeting the challenges for education in the future.

In my experience as an administrator, the Foxfire Approach bridges the gap between theory and practice. A thorough comprehension of the Core Practices equips educators with the knowledge, skill, and conceptual understanding to truly engage students in the learning process.

CONCLUSION

This era of rapid change creates stark choices for teachers and administrators. There is criticism of public education at every turn. Educators are suffering from "change overload" created by a profusion of mandated initiatives that are not grounded in a

credible philosophy of learning. The present culture of standardized curriculum and assessment and scripted pedagogy creates an inner philosophical turmoil for those educators who refused to accept "high stakes" assessment as the sole measure of their success. The impact of current top-down school reform on teacher pedagogy is strangely reminiscent of the Chinese proverb that says, *"They lower their heads to pull the cart instead of raising their heads to look at the road."* In Southern Appalachia, we would say, "we can't see the forest for the trees." In terms of the classical view of an educated person, we have lost our way. David Orr (1992) maintains that education should prepare a student to *"live life to the fullest"* (p. 100). Wholeness requires the integration of the personhood of the student including the analytic mind and feelings, intellect and manual competence (Orr, 1992). In such a context, education often lacks relevance to the world. When wholeness is neglected, a society is created where people tend to become *"thinkers who cannot do and doers who cannot think"* (Orr, p. 100). Postman (1996) states that schooling should be more about how to make a life than how to make a living. The Foxfire Approach provides an alternative for educators who are seeking a credible philosophy of learning to lead their students to engage in meaningful learning experiences and to continue to grow in their professional practice.

The Foxfire Approach allows educators to develop a well-ground theoretical practice unique to content, style, and school and community context. When teachers and administrators work in collaboration to develop an engaged community of learners, they can create an oasis of exciting learning opportunities for students within a desert of school reform uncertainty.

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KIEL HARELL

13. THE FOXFIRE COURSE FOR TEACHERS

A Description of How It Works

> *Just in taking this class, I have been able to work with at least six different people on an extended basis, face-to-face in a way that never would have happened otherwise. I mean, there are just too many other things dragging our schedules in different ways. And, to be able to sit down with Renae for two hours yesterday and talk about her action plan and work on each other's projects; that would never be possible in another format… And the reading groups where we come up in the afternoon and just sit on the porch and just work through the text. Those are great things that can only happen in this kind of format…The other perspective is, as a teacher, we're going to spend 180 hours over the next ten months with a group of thirty kids. And so, anything we can do to practice consensus building skills, that community negotiation, all that stuff, any practice we can get with doing things like that is just good stuff.*

The above quotation comes from an interview with Harvey, a middle school social studies teacher, who was participating in the Foxfire Course for Teachers with fourteen others from around the state of Georgia. He was sitting in a rocking chair on the porch of the Guest House at the Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center explaining the unique experience of spending a week with other teachers reflecting together on their classrooms, the work of John Dewey and the Foxfire Approach. Earlier in the evening, he had been joined on the porch by two other teachers. Together they took turns reading aloud a chapter in *Experience and Education* by John Dewey, stopping periodically to ask questions, clarify meaning, and most importantly, relate the text to their myriad experiences as classroom teachers. In other corners of the Foxfire Center, similar groups of teachers were engaging with the same ideas in different ways.

Harvey, like the majority of the other participants, was taking the course for credit toward his master's degree in education. He explained that he chose Foxfire as an elective because he was starting at a new school in the fall and was looking for ways to improve his approach to teaching history. As a white teacher preparing to teach at a school with a majority non-white student population, he believed that the Foxfire Approach would help him come up with ideas about how to create more interest and ownership over the state's history. By the end of the week, Harvey presented an action plan to his peers that outlined a unit in which his new students would research

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 101–113.

individuals from different social classes and backgrounds during different historical periods as a way to supplement the history provided by the course's textbook. The other participants presented their own action plans that were similar in the sense that they were inspired by the Foxfire Approach but unique in that they were rooted in their classroom contexts and the goals they brought with them to the course. As Harvey indicated in the opening quotation, these action plans were the result of deep reflection among groups of teachers made possible by the unique format of the Foxfire Course for Teachers.

In this chapter, the experiences of Harvey and other teachers who have participated in the Foxfire Course for Teachers are viewed through the lens of reflective teaching. In the first section of this chapter, an overview of the literature on reflective teaching is provided. This section pays particular attention to John Dewey's early writing on this topic as well as the work of Donald Schon. Then, Ken Zeichner's writing on reflective teaching is used to provide criteria for authentic professional development. This section is followed by a brief overview of the structure of the Foxfire Course for Teachers and the spaces it provides for teachers to reflect on their practice. Finally, the chapter concludes with an analysis of teachers' reflective experiences[1] against the criteria outlined for authentic development of teachers.

REFLECTIVE TEACHING AS AUTHENTIC DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

Reflective teaching has been a prominent agenda item both in teacher education research and the goals of teacher education programs for decades. To an outsider, this may seem like a confusing phenomenon. Viewed one way, some level of reflection is required for any task. In fact, people cannot help but reflect upon their actions. On the other hand, reflection can mean something much more robust. It can refer to systematic interrogation of both the means and ends of action; the setting aside of time and effort for investigating routines, traditions and outcomes. Many researchers and teacher educators have employed the term "reflection" in ways that preserve this expansive continuum. For the past thirty-five years, however, teacher educators working in the progressive and critical traditions have spilled much ink in their efforts to clarify this more robust vision of reflective teaching, often linking the idea of reflective teaching to the concepts of democratic education and teacher professionalism. From this perspective, promoting reflection among teachers is crucial, particularly among in-service teachers, like the participants in the Foxfire Course for Teachers, as they are ultimately responsible for much of the direction in their professional development and growth.

John Dewey's Reflective Action

Reflective teaching has deep roots in educational research dating back at least to the time of John Dewey's early education writing in the beginning of the twentieth century. While he certainly wrote about reflection in his earliest work

on education (Dewey, 1904) and promoted a form of it at his laboratory school in Chicago (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936), his definitive account on reflection was *How We Think* (Dewey, 1933). In this work, Dewey provides his most commonly cited definition of reflection. He describes it as an "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (Dewey, 1933, p. 6). Dewey distinguished between routine action and reflective action. While the former is dictated by tradition, authority, and technical considerations, the latter involves active investigation through the process of both identifying problems and developing solutions to them. Dewey's five step model of reflective action started with the apprehension of a problem and then, through an iterative process of inquiry, terminated in a provisional solution that could then be tested in further action. Describing Dewey's concept of reflective thought, Hatton and Smith (1995) write:

> Reflection may be seen as an active and deliberative cognitive process, involving sequences of interconnected ideas which take account of underlying beliefs and knowledge. Reflective thinking generally addresses practical problems, allowing for doubt and perplexity before possible solutions are reached. (p. 34)

This quotation reiterates several important aspects of Dewey's reflective thinking. For Dewey, reflection is a process of interrogating prior beliefs in order to reach a provisional solution to a practical problem that can be tested out and fed back into the process of inquiry.

Reflective Teaching in the 1980s

Despite these early roots in education, reflective teaching did not receive a tremendous amount of attention until a revival in the 1980s (see, for example, Carr & Kemmis, 1983; Beyer, 1984; Tom, 1985; Zeichner, 1987; Tanner, 1988; Munby & Russell, 1989). Valli (1992) explains this reemergence as the result of a number of converging factors.[2] In addition to a shift toward cognitive psychology and away from behavioral psychology, there was a broader interest in teacher thinking and understanding "local meaning" that is associated with interpretive research genres (Borko, Whitcomb, & Byrnes, 2007). This research emphasis was also bolstered by the work of critical, feminist and multicultural researchers whose work helped legitimize ethnographic and other naturalistic research methodologies and helped renew attention to the moral basis of education (Valli, 1992). From these perspectives, education is a moral pursuit and not strictly a technical one. When taking the moral components of education seriously, it is worthwhile to investigate how teachers think about their actions in a classroom.

Second only to John Dewey in the literature about reflective action, Donald Schon helped reinvigorate the discussion of reflective teaching with the

publication of his influential text *The Reflective Practitioner* in 1983. Schon's view of reflection was both informed by Dewey's work and extended it by drawing a distinction between types of reflection employed by professionals in various fields. For Schon, it is relevant to consider when the reflection is happening in relation to professional practice. Reflection-on-action is the systematic thinking that occurs either *before or after* action. In the realm of teaching, reflection-on-action would include the thought processes that go into planning units and lessons as well as the reflective debriefing that should occur after implementing plans. Reflection-in-action, on the other hand, refers to thinking that occurs *during* action as the practitioner attempts to frame and solve problems in real time. This too is familiar to educators who practice reflection-in-action when they adjust their lesson plans to accommodate unforeseen difficulties with content or an unanticipated but relevant question posed by a student.

Importantly, Schon's contributions to the development of reflective teaching do not only discriminate along temporal lines, but also make meaningful distinctions between the types of knowledge practitioners are employing when they are reflecting-on-action and reflecting-in-action. As a critique of technical rationality which promotes hard and fast lines between theory and practice, Schon's view blurs these lines and places value on tacit understanding (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). For Schon, practitioners are not simply translating theory and "best practice" that originate with researchers in universities to their classroom context. Instead, teachers develop knowledge-in-action as they "think on their feet" and begin to answer many of the thorny practical problems that arise in their day-to-day work. This knowledge-in-action accumulates and mixes with traditional theories and forms into practical theories about teaching. The process of reflection (both *in* and *on* action) subjects the teacher's knowledge and practical theories to criticism. Through the iterative process of thinking and acting, teachers are able to develop in ways that help them better realize their educational values.

As should be evident from the above discussion of theory and practice, those using the language of reflective teaching in this era were largely in opposition to top-down reforms that were being pursued in education that promoted the view of teacher-as-technician. The idea of reflective teaching was seen as standing in opposition to conservative trends and promoted the development of teachers as professionals who create and use their own knowledge and act with relative autonomy to serve their students and communities. For these reasons, reflective teaching became attached to many teacher education programs around the country and the world. Despite the shared goals, even before the end of the 1980s reflective teaching had become an attenuated and disarticulated idea that masked a tremendous variety of conceptual commitments (Calderhead, 1989). While there was great variation within the meanings, reflective teaching became ubiquitous throughout teacher education research, programs, and materials (Feiman-Nemser, 1990).

Zeichner's Reflection for Authentic Development of Teachers

Following up on the prevalence of ambiguous work being done in the name of reflective teaching throughout the 1980s, Zeichner (1993) systematically investigated the work of teacher education programs that claimed to foreground reflective practice. During this study he found that many of the programs were employing a usage of the term that undercut the genuine development of teachers as professionals. He criticized the programs along two lines. The first category of criticism related to the oft-cited theory and practice divide in education. He found that, instead of being empowering and creating a dialogic exchange of both theory and practice between teachers and universities, the teachers in these programs were being asked to reflect on how to better implement the curriculum and instruction developed at the university. While the idea of reflective teaching was supposed to interrupt the idea of teacher-as-technician, by employing it in such a narrow sense, these programs were reinforcing it and thus undermining the nuanced view of knowledge generation promoted by Schon and others. Zeichner also found that these programs limited reflection to issues of practice. In essence, teachers were encouraged to reflect on the *means* of education, while leaving the *ends* to schools of education and professional researchers.

The other category of Zeichner's criticism involves what he called the "individualist bias" (1993, p. 8). He found that the programs that employed the language of reflective teaching routinely conceived of reflection as an individual practice. First of all, teachers were encouraged to reflect on their own classrooms at the neglect of the larger systems their classroom were situated within. Much like the aims of education, the social context of schooling was placed out-of-bounds for teacher reflection in these programs. Secondly, reflection was promoted as an individual activity instead of one to be pursued in a community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Zeichner's critiques about the generation of knowledge in many programs claiming to promote reflective teaching were prefigured in Schon's criticism of technical rationality. Zeichner's "individualist bias" critiques, on the other hand, apply to Schon's view of reflection. Despite his progressive contributions to the generative work of teaching practice, Schon conceived of reflection as a largely solitary task. Further developing the critique over a decade later, Liston and Zeichner (1996) write, "Apart from the context of mentoring, reflection is portrayed by Schon as largely a solitary process involving a teacher and his or her situation, and not as a social process taking place within a learning community" (p. 18). Interestingly, while Schon furthered much of the work of Dewey in relation to reflective teaching, he did not adopt his emphasize on the social aspect of inquiry. According to Carol Rodgers (2002), "Dewey knew that merely to think without ever having to express what one thought is an incomplete act. He recognized that having to express oneself to others, so that others truly understand one's ideas, reveals both the strengths and the holes in one's thinking" (p. 856).

Schon's conception of reflection also fails to consider the social aspect of reflection as it pertains to the social context of schools. By failing to encourage practitioners to consider the larger institutional contexts that shape the teaching profession and instead focus inwardly on their individual practice, "Schon is encouraging a submissive response to the institutional conditions and roles in which teachers find themselves" (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 19). Instead, Zeichner and Liston argue that "teachers should be encouraged to focus both internally on their own practices, and externally on the social conditions of their practice, and that their actions plans should involve efforts to improve both individual practice and their situations" (ibid). This view is much more consistent with teaching as a traditional profession in which teachers are not simply agents of the state, but rather have a responsibility to consider the context of schools as a whole. It also echoes the commitments of critical educators who are not only worried about the students in their classrooms, but also struggle to interrupt the reproduction of inequalities in schools and view education as having a role in the social reconstruction of society.

Zeichner's criticism of how reflective teaching has been implemented in some schools of education is useful because it provides evaluative criteria for reflective teaching that promotes authentic professional development of teachers. In many ways the Foxfire Course for Teachers is well designed for supporting teachers as they strive for the types of reflection described by Zeichner. In the remainder of this chapter, the structure of the Foxfire Course for Teachers is described and then followed by teachers' descriptions of their experiences participating in it. Their reflective experiences are analyzed against the criteria for authentic professional development, namely that reflection be a generative and social process and that the targets of their reflection go beyond their classrooms to include the aims of education as well as the social context of schooling.

The Foxfire Course for Teachers

The Foxfire Course for Teachers is designed to promote deep engagement with the Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning. According to the Foxfire Fund website,

> The Foxfire Course for Teachers is an in-depth examination of each of the [Foxfire] Core Practices and their applications. During the Course, teachers will identify their existing perceptions of the relationships between teachers, learners, and the curriculum. Those perceptions will be challenged, and the teachers will begin to redefine their own teaching philosophies to include the Core Practices and merge them back into their own teaching practices. (www.foxfire.org/teaching)

During the weeklong residential course at the Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center, approximately fifteen participants and two facilitators work together to critically engage with the Foxfire Core Practices. Most of the participants are

working teachers pursuing their master's degrees at Piedmont College who are taking the course as an elective during the summer. Each week of the course attracts participants from different schools, different grade levels and different subject areas.

The Foxfire Course for Teachers has three "givens" that the participants must complete during their week together at the Foxfire Center. The first two givens of the course require students to "critically engage" with the *Foxfire Course Book* and *Experience and Education* by John Dewey. The *Foxfire Course Book* is organized around the ten Foxfire Core Practices and includes many teacher narratives about their experiences using and contributing to the Foxfire Approach. Whereas this text grew directly out of teachers experimenting in their classrooms, *Experience and Education* predates Foxfire by fifty years. Dewey's work did not inspire the original program, but rather affirmed much of the work that was already being done by teachers in the Foxfire Teacher Networks. As such, the text became a central element of the Foxfire Course for Teachers. Finally, the last given requires each participant to present an action plan to their peers that explains how they will integrate aspects of the Foxfire Approach into their teaching. In this way, each participant is required to translate insights gained through their collective engagement to action plans specific to their classrooms.

The Foxfire Course for Teachers is structured to allow the participants to experience the Foxfire Approach and gain insights into what it feels like to be a student in this type of learning environment. As such, only a few unilateral decisions are set before participants arrive at the Foxfire Center, leaving the majority of the time for them to deliberate about and experiment with different instructional approaches. As a result of the open structure of the course, each iteration takes a shape of its own as a result of the unique mix of participants and their goals and interests. Beyond the course texts, many of the participants report gaining deep insights into the Foxfire Approach by experiencing the push and pull of a group trying to make decisions together about their education. In this way the participants are able to better understand how to teach using the Foxfire Approach because they have experienced it as a student.

REFLECTION IN THE FOXFIRE COURSE FOR TEACHERS

Generative Reflection

The Foxfire Approach is an exemplar of teacher-created knowledge. From the original project up through the Teacher Networks and the development of the Foxfire Core Practices, the theory and practice of Foxfire has been teacher generated. This attitude toward the Foxfire Approach is also present in the design of the Foxfire Course for Teachers. Facilitators explain that "critical engagement" with the texts require participants to interrogate the ideas as opposed to blindly accepting them. One facilitator explained this aspect of the course during the first day,

> Don't look at the Core Practices as if they came down from some mountain and are to be accepted as absolute truth. As a matter of fact, the version of the Core Practices that you have now in front of you was developed in 2009. And the feedback element into the revision of them was comments from people in this course and from practitioners doing this stuff in classrooms. We're probably on the threshold of another revision, so your critical engagement could well assist with that. You're responsible for keeping this thing dynamic and responsive.

By emphasizing the participants' role in contributing to the Foxfire Approach through their critical engagement during the week and ultimately through their experimentation with it in their classroom later on, the facilitator highlighted the generative nature of reflection in the Foxfire Course for Teachers.

Another aspect of the Foxfire Course for Teachers that encourages generative reflection is the requirement to develop an action plan to bring the Foxfire Approach to their individual classrooms. During the week, there is often disagreement about what is possible in the classroom due in part to differing constraints and levels of comfort with experiential teaching approaches; however, participants come to realize that the Foxfire Approach can look different in different settings. A second year kindergarten teacher explained this back and forth like this,

> Everybody has different opinions about how things are going to work especially when we teach in such different schools. Like Donna teaches at a school where, you know, almost all of her children are defiant. They come from bad situations and then you have a lot of these people from Forsythe, I mean, they're wealthier. They have a lot more resources available. It's totally different circumstances everywhere you go. People are going to butt heads and have different, you know, teaching methods. What works in one classroom is not going to work for another. And people have spoken out and said, 'Well, that's not going to work. That's not practical for me.' But that's what the facilitators have kept trying to point out to us. Just because it works for you doesn't mean it's going to work for somebody else. We're trying to find ways to make things work for everyone's situation.

Part of the process of developing the action plan requires participants to inventory their teaching contexts and look for opportunities to bring in elements of the Foxfire Approach. Participants are not mandated to incorporate all of the Core Practices into their action plans. Instead they are encouraged to start small and create an opening in their teaching with the goal of incorporating more over time. Because of this, participants generate action plans that vary widely in terms of scope and focus. For instance, one action plan might focus on classroom management and inviting students to participate in collectively setting norms in the elementary classroom, whereas another action plan might be the redesign of a unit in a physics course to include more group work and student choice. In this way, participants are generating new applications of the Foxfire Approach based on their situations.

Social Reflection

One of the most striking things about the participants' responses to the course is the way in which relationships develop over the week and contribute to the learning experiences. As Harvey indicated in the opening quotation, participants become close and have extended opportunities to reflect together on their experiences and work collectively on their action plans. Many of the participants in this study reported similar experiences to Harvey's. One participant explained it like this, "It feels like we've known people a lot longer than two days. I mean, has it really only been two days that we've all been together? That seems to happen a lot faster in this setting." Despite only knowing two colleagues from her middle school when she arrived, this participant felt strong social bonds after only a few days. By the end of the week, she expressed that the community building that occurred during the week contributed most to her reflecting on the Foxfire Approach.

Other participants described the quick development of relationships as being the result of the stress of the deliberative format of the course coupled with the relative isolation of being at the Foxfire Center for a week. In an interview conducted on the third day of the course, one participant described a stressful moment that contributed to group bonding,

> Last night I came out to do my reading and a few of the teachers were interacting. I walked in while there were tears flowing and sort of this crisis moment that was both teaching and personal. And it's one of those things. It's like true bonding. And I found that really meaningful. You know, just sharing personal experiences and talking about different things that we've gone through. And that's the sort of thing that I like about being in these places. Where things kind of bubble up to the surface when you are no longer distracted by everything in your regular life. Just a truly meaningful and important moment. Where people who are more-or-less strangers kind of break down in front of each other because of that freedom.

Other participants described similar experiences happening in the evening, away from the large group, as playing an important role in the course. During the second half of the week, the students become more comfortable with each other and their deliberation over instructional decisions improves. Many participants felt this group development was the result of the residential format where participants had opportunities to interact informally. One participant described it like this,

> I think the more people interact outside of the official large group space and the more they can talk openly and freely about what they're feeling, the easier it is to voice your issues and concerns and opinions.

Despite the opportunities for participants to socialize outside the formal large group discussion sessions, many of the participants were surprised to report that their engagement with the Foxfire Approach often permeated the entire week, including

evenings, early mornings and meal times. A veteran 3rd grade teacher explained this as a function of bringing teachers together in a residential setting,

> Teachers never leave teaching, we always talk about it. It's like we don't leave it at school and talk about other stuff. It always ties back into teaching. Like at dinner time, the discussion was still basically teaching.

Another participant who anticipated having free time during the week was shocked that discussions were continuing late into the evenings,

> Last night, it was eleven o'clock and it wasn't over. I've seen different small groups and I've talked with different people. And it's not just about life and different things; that's included because that is a part of learning. It's about what we're doing here and our projects. It's like class isn't ending. It's just continuing until bedtime and that's just amazing that I'm still just taking it all in.

She went on to explain that the conversations that were occurring throughout the week were characterized by sharing of experiences and ideas about teaching,

> Whatever we're doing, it's not just one person talking or one person sharing their ideas. It leaps from this to that and that's how it is in my head all the time. But it's *my* ideas and that's through *my* personal experience and this has allowed it to be through eighteen other people sharing their ideas and their experiences in life and their journeys. And it's shaping the way I think and I hope the way others are thinking.

She found this to be one of the primary virtues of the Foxfire Course for Teachers because it allowed everyone to share in the collective expertise of the group. By reflecting together on the course texts, the structure of the course itself and their own teaching experiences, the group was able to gain deeper insights into the Foxfire Approach and the ways in which it might impact their future teaching.

Reflection about the Aims of Education and Social Context of Schooling

Finally, aspects of the Foxfire Course for Teachers encourage participants to go beyond immediate classroom concerns and reflect upon larger issues in education, such as the aims of education and the social context of schooling. In particular, the heterogeneity of the group pushes discussions in ways that would otherwise not occur. Because participants come from around the state (and in some cases from other states and even other countries), they have the chance to hear and discuss other schools and their shared constraints. For example, during the course, it is common for participants to engage in critical discussions about larger reform agendas in education such as the rise of charter schools and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. During one week of the course, for instance, the participants engaged in an extended discussion about the Common Core and how it was impacting the

ability of teachers to allow for student choice in the classroom. Teachers of English language arts argued that it was conducive to the Foxfire Approach because it does not mandate specific readings, whereas math teachers argued that it constrained them in their teaching by mandating specific methods for mathematics. Through these conversations, participants gained a deeper understanding of standards on the differential impacts on teaching practice.

Overall, the heterogeneity of the group in terms of subjects taught pushed conversations beyond the narrow concerns of a given discipline resulting in participants having conversations that reached bigger issues in education. Early on during her week at the Foxfire Center, a middle school math teacher lamented the fact that the group was not composed of only math teachers; however, she came to see a value in the mixture as the week unfolded. She explained her experience like this,

> Part of me wants it to be with more middle school math people because we have a shared experience and shared goals. And just expectations on us and what we do in our classrooms, but I don't think it would be as interesting. And I don't think I would get so many out-of-the-box ideas. And I say that because...in my math group, in my PLC, we're very objective-driven. What lesson are we going to teach today? What resources do we have? You know, there is an agenda for the day and we're going to map out our plans for this week. I get so used to that goal-orientedness, that we don't ever have that time to just explore possibilities and discuss or think of the more creative solution. When you get a group of people together that don't have the same goals and the same standards, you can't talk about those specifics so you have to think big picture.

She went on to explain that the mixed group of participants required her to either teach her classmates about her subject or translate her concerns to broader issues that would be relevant to all teachers. As a result, her group was able to talk about larger ethical issues in education that often get overlooked for more narrowly technical ones as well as generate more creative solutions to problems she was encountering in her math teaching.

The goal of discussing the aims of education and the social context of schooling is also aided by the presence of *Experience and Education* in the required texts for the course. Most participants described being familiar with Dewey's ideas from foundations courses in their undergraduate education programs; however, only a few of them had read any of his writing and none of them had read an entire book by him. Because the text deals with more abstract concepts, participants are tasked with finding the relationship between them and the Foxfire Approach. For instance, *Experience and Education* addresses issues such as freedom and social control. These complex issues at the heart of democratic education become translated into practical discussions about the degree of student choice you should allow when using the Foxfire Approach and the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning.

These broader discussions about education prompted by *Experience and Education* also become more accessible because of the collective knowledge and understanding brought to them by the mixed group of participants. Many of the participants described struggling with the text when reading alone; however, they were able to access it during their extended group discussions. An experienced paraprofessional pursuing her initial certification master's degree described her struggles with the text and eventual understanding like this,

> Even if it's an easy book, I probably struggle more than most people would. But talking about our ideas and sharing the experiences about the certain topics, I have a clearer understanding than anything I could have ever read in that book. And it doesn't only just give me an understanding, then it brings it into me and points me back out into all these different directions that I can take it in. And I can see it in other aspects of my life. As far as my child. My job. The students that I might teach. I'm able to take it all in and then spray it back out. Most people might can do that from reading. I can't. I mean, I can take it in and highlight things and say, 'yes, that's amazing' but I'm not seeing it like how I'm seeing it here.

Many other participants described similar experiences with coming to understand the difficult concepts in *Experience and Education*. For instance, a small group charged with facilitating a discussion about social control led the group through an experiential simulation in which the large group was charged with creating a game and playing it. The point of the activity was to animate the concept of social control as it pertains to social activities. A child playing a game does not feel their freedom being impinged upon simply because the game has rules. On the contrary, the game is defined by its rules. After experiencing this activity, several participants remarked that this helped them better understand the role of social control in democratic teaching and the need for certain boundaries to be placed on freedom in the classroom. Without the presence of *Experience and Education* in the course, these deeper understandings about student choice would not have been reached.

CONCLUSION

The Foxfire Course for Teachers provides a unique space for in-service teachers to deeply reflect upon their teaching philosophy and practice. The types of reflective experiences available to participants in the course are best understood in relation to the history of reflective teaching. As has been argued in this brief chapter, the design of the Foxfire Course for Teachers promotes genuine professional development by supporting reflection that is generative, social and conscious of the aims of education and the social context of schooling. Teacher educators and facilitators of professional development who are interested in supporting deep reflection should look to the Foxfire Course for Teachers as a model of how to support teachers on this path.

NOTES

[1] This chapter employs data collected from my dissertation research which examines the role of reflective teaching and deliberative democracy in the Foxfire Course for Teachers. The observation and interview data comes from three separate iterations of the course that occurred in the summer of 2013.

[2] Elsewhere this convergence of factors is conceived of as a shift away from "teacher education as a training problem" to "teacher education as a learning problem" (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005).

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JANET E. RECHTMAN

14. FROM ACTIVE LEARNING TO ACTIVIST LEARNING

Foxfire and the Bridge from Classroom to Community

I start with the Foxfire question: *What has been your most memorable learning experience?*

My answer is my weeklong experience of the Foxfire for College Professors. I already knew about Foxfire because they were a client of my consulting firm and I helped them write their strategic plan. Later I joined the board of directors, which I chaired in 2008–2009 For all that, I did not connect directly with the educational approach until I became a Senior Fellow at J. W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development and a professional leadership educator at the age of 58.

So, in summer 2008, I attended the Foxfire for College Professors workshop, under the tutelage of Cynthia McDermott and Hilton Smith. There I discovered that my considerable skills as a consultant and facilitator of strategic plans and organizational development were not sufficient to *teach* in a classroom setting. Instead, my early classes were marked by circular discussions and theatrical pirouettes on the part of the teacher (me). Foxfire helped me recognize that taking on the role of facilitator was one way to teach; still, absent content – what Foxfire calls givens – the resulting experience is an entertaining bull session that, hit or miss, may enlighten some as much as it may confuse others. So, first and foremost, Foxfire helped me sharpen my chops in the classroom. Secondly, it led me to discern the gap between active learning and community activism that is characteristic of Foxfire, and given my professional interests, instilled a desire to build a bridge from one to the other.

FOXFIRE & COMMUNITY

Foxfire has deep roots in community-centered movements of the 1960's and 70's (Oliver, 2011). As a pedagogy focused on democratic empowerment of learners (Wood, 1986, pp. 239–240), Foxfire embraced culture, an empowering sense of place, and appreciation for heritage and family. The pedagogical practices affirm for the community of students that what they do counts, that their work matters, and that the product they produce is above all their own. The approach helps learners see they can and should make a difference in this world and fosters a willingness of "each student to move beyond himself and his new understandings, finally, into an active,

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 115–120.

caring relationship with others; to … make the world a better place in which to live" (Wood, 1986, p. 249).

Academic sources confirm the strong connection between Foxfire and its community. In his critical review of its first twenty years, John Puckett (1989) describes Foxfire as an "extraordinary union of school and community (p. 49) which had a discernable impact on community based economic development through land purchases on Highway 441 and Foxfire's strength as a brand, drawing visitors to Rabun County's varied attractions. Similarly, Julie Oliver (2011) observed that Foxfire occurred at the same time as a wave of political and cultural developments such as the Civil Rights movement, progressive education, and back to the land efforts as embodied by the Whole Earth Catalog and Mother Earth magazine. However, the decidedly non-political focus of Foxfire magazines and books belied a direct connection with social change efforts, such as these. Instead, Foxfire's social agenda was to chronicle, uplift and share Southern Appalachian culture (Oliver, p. 19).

The road not taken was teaching through activist learning by engagement with the contemporary community. Such engagement moves learning outside the classroom, in the form of individual and collective efforts to identify and address issues of common concern. For example, there is plentiful evidence that the natural resources of Rabun County were systematically exploited by the formation of Ga. Power lakes and the influx of outsiders who are part time residents and never vote:

Today, approximately 63% of the land in Rabun County is owned by the Federal government another 20% by Georgia Power (Rabun County Government, 2010; Rabun County Online 2010) and less than 20% is in private hands, a significant percentage of that being out-of-county second home owners and/or retirees. All of this lessens the political influence that the average Rabun County resident has through the power of his/her vote (Oliver, p. 47).

While such access to outside wealth may have created unique opportunities for educators in the community, it also increased the distance between these resources and longtime residents who, for generations, have enjoyed a unique culture and quality of life in Rabun County, GA.

Imagine the alternatives: What would happen, for example, if Foxfire students had chosen to study the Georgia Power Company or taken oral histories from the individuals who built second homes on land that once belonged to their grandparents? What if Foxfire had invested its money in local banks and partnered with local government and chamber of commerce to stimulate economic development? What have been the consequences (intended and unintended) of Foxfire's use of community history as the vehicle for active learning in the classroom instead of using contemporary opportunities and challenges in the community as a vehicle for activist learning?

Foxfire practice has occasionally bridged the boundary between active learning and activist learning. Puckett mentions several such projects in the early days of the program. In the mid 70's, the MABARLA project, (named for the three Foxfire

graduates Barbara Taylor, Mary Thomas and Laurie Brunson) worked for a full year investigating community problems and issues, published as two articles in the *Foxfire Magazine*. The first explored changes resulting from James Dickey's novel *Deliverance*, and the movie of the same name, especially the environmental effects and portrayal of local people as more animal than human as "foil for civilized society". The second documented the impact of change on Betty's Creek Valley. The authors concluded that growth in Rabun County was neither adequately planned nor restricted by zoning ordinances and foresaw the overdevelopment and misuse of land …" in the future (p. 45). Puckett notes that "subsequent Foxfire students have never matched the sustained involvement in current social issues of the MABARLA group" (p. 45).

In 1979, Foxfire aligned its pedagogy with a national movement around the theme of "empowerment" of students. Foxfire saw the increased potential for community engagement as an opportunity to "help students master the information they must have to be able to take their destinies into their own hands …" (Puckett, p. 112). The result was a twelve week class designed to create in students an awareness of change – why and how it occurs, what its political mechanisms are and how individual citizens can participate effectively in public decision making about change." To learn about change, students focused on real communities with real problems. Again, Puckett notes, "… ultimately this class remained a one shot effort and Foxfire did not offer any further social action courses" (Puckett, p. 114).

In 1981, Foxfire undertook an initiative known as the Mountain City Project which involved efforts to start a Community Development Corporation (CDC) to facilitate economic development and create jobs for local inhabitants of Foxfire's home community along with Rabun County. Foundations that had supported Foxfire's educational efforts declined to fund this project because Foxfire had a sizable (at that time) $500k endowment. Feasibility studies suggested best bet was refocusing on strategies for marketing and retailing Foxfire products (p. 117) rather than joining with local partners for more general economic development. The result was Foxfire Press, a publishing house for Foxfire materials in partnership with E. P. Dutton. Dutton also helped Foxfire set up a mail order business in RC that employed local people. While the Press had some success, the CDC idea foundered, in part due to lack of collaboration with local government and private sector partners. Collaboration among arts organizations was more positive, including the Southern Regional Catalog Marketing Conference on 1984, which led to a marketing collaborative called The Mountain Collection. So while there were partners in that effort, the benefits centered Foxfire's brand and core business, rather than a more generalized community engagement. Ultimately, Foxfire's governing board decided to discontinue the Mountain City Project in 1984[1] (Puckett, 1989).

Longevity is another indicator of Foxfire's engagement with community in activism that has sustained the Foxfire enterprise over the past 50 years. Numerous community members volunteer to support Foxfire activities, including the Foxfire classroom at Rabun County High School, special events like the Foxfire Mountaineer

Festival, and activities on the 106 acre Foxfire property, known familiarly as "The Land." Former students have settled in the vicinity to work and raise families. Finally, researchers at Emory University have found that knowing one's family history is a key contributor to resiliency (Feiler, 2013): people who have living connection to stories from their past are better able to handle life's setbacks than those who have little or no roots in history. In that way Foxfire's collection of interviews, photographs, music, artifacts and buildings serves as a memory bank for people who live in the North Georgia Mountains. Foxfire contributes to a sense of identity and rootedness in a rapidly homogenizing world (Rechtman, 2015).

The central avenue for community partnership for Foxfire students and their families is participation on the Foxfire Community Board and its governing board. While the two boards operate independently, they collaborate on most major decisions regarding disposition of the archives. For example, with the advent of the internet, Foxfire has an opportunity to share the primary research (transcripts, tape recordings, photos) created by the students on a larger scale. At the same time, community members are concerned about how such information would be used and whether the prejudices and practices of the elders might be used to discredit Appalachian life. Through a sometimes contentious discussion over approximately 12–16 months, the two boards resolved these issues (a) through an orientation to oral history ethics conducted by Dr. Cliff Kuhn, then Executive Director of the Oral History Association; (b) through the creation of a process for institutional review to consider requests for the data as part of the work of the Archives Committee; and (c) through a revision to Foxfire's informed consent document to include uses such as the internet (author's personal recollection). One result of this conversation is the posting of selected Foxfire archives on the Digital Library of Georgia website, part of the Digital Library of America (http://blog.dlg.galileo.usg.edu).

Whether responding to crisis or handling more routine concerns, Foxfire has consistently maintained a commitment to consensus decision making that considers community input into organizational policies and governance. The resulting process may be inefficient and at times uncomfortable: the obligations entailed in this process are likely contributors to Foxfire's long term survival by strengthening relationships with the community of interested stakeholders.

Engagement Beyond the Classroom

Activism is at once the best practice for and the acid test of engaged learning. This perspective situates engagement as a form of self-expression, or personal agency, as well as a set of operational activities. Engaging one's *self* with the purpose and intention requires application which begins in the formal setting and extends beyond to the activist-learner's way of being in, with and for the world he or she inhabits. Through trial, error, failure, almost-dids and outright success in real world settings, the learner builds the capacity to apply lessons learned in one context to other diverse and challenging contexts. Given that, the pressing question is: *how might Foxfire*

build a bridge from active learning to activism? At this point, I have more questions than answers. Here are just a few:

1. The classroom is an essentially private space where the teacher can undertake controlled experiments that facilitate learning. What happens for the teacher (as well as the learner) when such space becomes public? From the practicalities of workload management to potential for censure (especially in today's litigious environment), what training, support and incentives can help teachers and students move their learning into the real world?
2. Activism entails real risks for activists and the communities they serve. Yet a sense of safety is critical to taking risks in the interests of learning. What is the safety net for activist learners? How do they find time and guidance for reflection, for recovery from failed experiments, and celebration of success? What ethical concerns arise?
3. Activists build networks of likeminded associates, adherents, and trusted allies (called social capital) to advance their work in community. In the permanent record world of Facebook and Instagram, how do activist learners create a credible resume that serves job and career aspirations without alienating potential employers who disagree with positions they espoused during their school years?
4. Education is a public good (at least so far it is), with accountability to parents, tax payers, elected officials and professional administrators. Further the education process itself is a prime concern for activist learners and their teachers. Yet these diverse stakeholders rarely agree on how education should be done. How do all these stakeholders navigate these stormy seas? What happens when hopes collide? In a world where even well known facts are subject to debate, how do the varied stakeholders find ways to work and learn together? How do they distinguish signal from static, wisdom from witlessness, and achievement from almost-happened?
5. Bridging from active learning to activist learning by definition dissolves boundaries. Further, each student will have his or her own best way of learning, family context, and personal expectations. Finally, much content is given. How do we discern which givens and boundaries are worth keeping? Which to discard? Which elements lend themselves to activist learning? Which do not?
6. Frequently after school programs like 4-H, scouts, and interest groups like debate and science club help k-12 students experiment with activism and learn more about their own values, issues, and concerns. Student government, model legislatures, and internships provide applied leadership opportunities for young people. What might Foxfire bring to these programs that could create to a richer learning experience for participants?

So, in keeping with the Foxfire core practices, my reflection on the path from active learning to activist learning has spiraled into a more questions than answers. And, in the spirit of Foxfire, I invite colleagues to join this conversation. Just be prepared for the long haul, since we've been talking about this for nearly 50 years.

NOTE

[1] Joe Haban, staffer hired to support the CDC and raise money, continued to work with a consultant and Rabun County to launch a housing rehab program and other initiatives that could "with proper leadership and support of local government, grow into a bona fide county development office" that could be a conduit for state and federal grants for diverse projects (Puckett, 1989). This also was stillborn, raising questions that persist to this day about interest in and capacity to sustain collaborative community development in Rabun County.

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KEITH PHILLIPS

15. PROJECT BASED LEARNING, A CENTER FOR DESIGN CLASS AND FOXFIRE

Efforts to create successful opportunities for our students have taken many forms. This chapter will review three: Problem Based learning (PBL), a Center for Design and Technology (CDAT) high school and Foxfire. As you read this chapter, keep in mind the Core Practices and how they are connected to PBL and CDAT.

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING (PBL)

Project-based learning, or PBL, is an approach being implemented by schools across the United States (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; Boss, 2012; Expeditionary Learning Schools, 2009; Ravitz et al., 2010). This is not the first time PBL has had momentum in the United States and it has evolved and today is promoted by the Buck Institute of Education (BIE), a non-profit organization. It is designed as a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an engaging and complex question, problem, or challenge.

Unlike earlier implementations, PBL today is organized around state standards that students are expected to master (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Boss, 2011; Boss, 2013; Buck Institute of Education (BIE), 2015; Ravitz, 2008; Thomas, 2000). The current evolution of PBL by the BIE includes 8 Design Elements for Gold Standard PBL (2015a); as well as an added framework for Project Based Teaching Practices for Gold Standard PBL (2015b).

PBL allows teachers to differentiate instruction and assessment by allowing students to explore and show their understanding through the medium of their choice (Boss, 2013; Haddock, 2013; Thomas, 2000). It is important to note that PBL uses various instructional methods simultaneously and does not only rely only on the project phase for student learning. Students show their level of understanding of the content through projects and by allowing students to show their understanding through a medium of their choosing. Researchers have found the PBL method has the ability to help students achieve academic success (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Hernandez-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009; Holm, 2011; Moeller, 2005; Ravitz et al., 2010; Ravitz et al., 2012; Thomas, 2000). When implemented properly PBL has shown that students were able to acquire basic content knowledge with a deep understanding of concepts respective to the disciplines involved and has helped students develop 21st century skills.

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 121–127.

Teacher resistance was found to have an influence on whether PBL would be successful (Beneke & Ostrosky, 2008; Hertzog, 2007). There are many differences between traditional education and PBL requiring teachers to shift their mindset. Teachers in PBL change from the director of information to the facilitator of learning (Boss, 2013; Thomas, 2000) and by relinquishing control, allow students to find out how they learn best and how they would like to show their understanding of the content (Boss, 2011; Thomas, 2000). Giving students a choice and making sure their voices are heard is one area where the Foxfire Approach is visible in PBL.

THE CENTER FOR DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY (CDAT)

In 2010 the Lanier High School created a center (CDAT) which uses strategies and practices somewhat similar to Foxfire. Begun as a place for STEM support, it was designed as a model of cooperation with local participants, state industry and higher education in an environment that directly connects 21st century skills and student choice with district and state standards. Their mission states:

Students will become partners, to improve their own learning on their pace, with a focus on their creative interests as the connection to science, technology and communication.

- Entrepreneurship and creativity will be cornerstones; students today want reality, and we will support them in genuine efforts with a genuine community and business focus.
- Teachers will truly be professional educators, always evaluating and reflecting on optimizing pedagogical practices.

CDAT is based on the 3 principles of Authenticity, Creativity and Efficiency.

- Authenticity – making real connections for students, regarding skills and opportunities. We use industry-level softwares, and push students to pursue contests and entrepreneurial opportunities while developing genuine portfolios.
- Creativity – our students are encouraged to find their method of expression, and to use their dreams and visions to express their learning. The overlap of the creative and technological worlds are in high demand, and CDAT students will be very prepared for it.
- Efficiency – not every student needs an hour for every subject, so we support the student at the level they need. In addition, CDAT students learn the power of teamwork and communication in our project-based learning world, understanding that it's much more efficient to work and plan together.

This is an evolving, organic effort. There is no final answer, just good change. CDAT will evolve and continue to improve, but will always have the primary focus of maximum learning, both in subject matter and in 21st century skills (http://cdat.lanierhs.org/vision *Retrieved 2-7-16).

Connecting students to the community may be one of CDAT's greatest strengths. One of the first things CDAT did was create an advisory board made up of local businesses and community members. The board offers their expertise and connections to locate individuals who would like to come speak to students or evaluate student projects. Having community members engage in the classroom throughout the year helps make the projects authentic and gives the students a sense of purpose to their work. Some projects may even be a real project for a local business that truly provides a real audience for the students. Reading teacher feedback in conjunction with feedback from professionals helps the students reflect on their project and how to improve. The relationship with our community has grown since CDAT first started and now includes a project showcase each semester. During the project showcase, parents and members of the community come to see and evaluate student projects. Last year the project fair helped connect a group of sophomores with a businessman who helped the students get a patent for the product they created for a CDAT project. Opening the doors and involving the community has brought numerous opportunities for all the students, either through internships, field trips, resources, guest speaking, or simply connections to other individuals interested in helping our students. After they complete their project, students will take the same unit, county, and state exams as their peers.

Throughout its first four years CDAT has experienced academic success and achievement in the "real world." During the first year all but two students met or exceeded the Language Arts End of Course Test (EOCT), which was a state exam. In its second year, every CDAT freshmen passed the Language Arts EOCT with 40% exceeding. The addition of math to the freshmen program was difficult, but students still outperformed their peers in their school and county on the Math EOCT. The sophomore class had every student meet or exceed the Language Arts EOCT. The sophomore program added AP World History and had a higher passing rate on the AP Exam than the control group who were taught in a more traditional setting by the same AP World History teacher. The CDAT program did not incorporate science in its program, but despite this, CDAT students had a greater number of students pass the Science Gateway and obtain "exceeds" than their peers.

Due to the student achievement on the science exams, in CDAT's third year the freshmen program switched from math to biology and the sophomore program switched from AP world history to chemistry. The CDAT program continued its success on language arts assessments as every student passed their respective grade level's EOCT. Students had a higher passing rate on the Biology EOCT. The sophomore program saw a dramatic difference in scores as the CDAT program's failure rate on the Science Gateway, a county exam, was more than two-times less than the school's. The junior CDAT program enjoyed success on the U.S. History EOCT as all students passed the exam and had 20% more students achieve "Exceeds Standards" than the school's. CDAT Seniors set a school record for testing as they all passed the Economics EOCT and 78% of them exceeded standards! CDAT also

had their first student take the Autodesk Inventor User Certification Test and passed easily. Within the first three years CDAT students received numerous awards and recognition outside the classroom. For a detailed list please visit cdat.lanierhs.org.

Developing the CDAT program has been a learning experience for those involved. They have learned what works for them and their students. One of the biggest contributors to the success of CDAT has been student choice. Not only do students choose to be in the program, but they are given the freedom to explore and create through their interest. Allowing students to explore their interest has led to many creative solutions to real world problems (as evidenced by the patent the sophomore students received last year). Students also feel invested in the program as they have a voice in how the program functions. Students' desire to include science instead of math in the projects caused the CDAT program to switch from math to science in its third year. Designing real projects for the students has also contributed to CDAT's success as students are learning the skills necessary to work in a collaborative environment and how the attributes of each academic discipline are used together in the real world. An often overlooked role in education is that of its community. CDAT's success would not have been possible without the strong connection it has with our local community. The collaboration between students, teachers, parents, and community members has proved to be instrumental in CDAT's success.

This past semester I was reminded of the importance of the Core Practices and particularly student choice. I had several students sign up for my Digital Media & Film class because they have a passion for film. Throughout the fall semester I noticed they were not invested in the projects we were working on. They were sitting quietly and were unengaged in what we were doing. As a result I did not see the returns I expected from such talented individuals. Writing this chapter on the Foxfire approach helped me recognize what was wrong and led me to understand the difference between PBL and the Foxfire Approach. Even though the students were working on real projects and were given creative freedom with how to approach the project, they were not invested. They were not invested because the project itself was not their choice. After students returned from Christmas break I made a decision to dive into the Foxfire approach and spoke with these students to get a better idea of what they wanted to get from class and why they were not engaged during the fall semester. Their response was what I expected; the overall project was not their choice. Instead of starting with the standards and developing a project, I reversed it and started with what the students wanted to create and aligned the standards to what they wanted to produce. Although we are only a month into the semester the returns have surpassed the fall semester tenfold. Now these same students are engaged in my class and are stepping up as leaders in the classroom and have begun tutoring their peers, all without my instruction to do so. To help them maintain their momentum I have committed to my new role as collaborator. Instead of working over them, I am now working alongside them as their partner helping them develop a plan of action and only helping them when they ask and even then I do not always assist if I think it is a problem they need to solve. Collaborating with your students

is not an easy change for most, and it does not happen overnight. If you would like to scaffold your training then I recommend you follow the PBL format until you are more comfortable with the Foxfire Approach.

In the beginning of PBL the teacher takes on a more traditional role as they use various instructional strategies to introduce concepts students must understand for the county and state exams. Using pre-assessments before introducing content has proved to be a vital strategy for CDAT teachers. Pre-assessments help teachers see which key concepts they can touch on and which concepts will need a more in-depth explanation based off where each student is. This allows teachers to use their limited time more efficiently leaving more time for the project phase. After the introduction of the key concepts students are assessed just as they are in traditional classrooms. The results of these assessments are used by teachers to identify students who need more individualized instruction, because not every student needs an hour for every subject. Many times this is where you will identify your highfliers and adapt your role to more of a collaborator with those students allowing them to explore the content during the project phase. While your highfliers are working on the project you are freed up to help students who are struggling with the content. Your highfliers remain engaged as they are exploring the content, and your other students are receiving the individualized instruction they need to succeed on the assessments. When students do well on the assessments they are free to enter into the project phase. When all your students reach the project phase your role transitions into that of a facilitator, or coach, helping guide students throughout the project phase of the unit.

During this phase the teachers help students learn what it takes to become an active learner diving deep into the content. Active Learners are exploring the content by conducting further research or evaluating different ways to solve a problem. While students are focused on developing their project the teacher has time to speak with students to continuously evaluate individual progress. Any student who fails to meet the demands of the teacher is simply pulled for remediation until the student shows he understands the concept to continue. Students are also free to think for themselves as the teacher is not over their shoulder telling them exactly what to do. Throughout the project phase students are working together developing the 21st Century skills employers are looking for. While students work on the project they always need to reflect and revise on how well the product is coming along, as well as how well the group dynamics are working. Revision is often overlooked in today's education due to time; however, it is vital to the learning process. When students are given the chance to reflect and revise their work they will often see their misconceptions and can learn from their mistakes leading to a better understanding of the content. When the hard work is finished teachers, parents, and community members come see what the students developed and some groups will continue to develop their product or idea further. During the project showcase students get to experience presenting their ideas to professionals and how to handle constructive feedback of their ideas.

In order to meet the needs of a changing world, business leaders are declaring that there are not enough workers with the 21st century skills they desire (Alliance for

Excellent Education, 2011; Gallop, 2013). The strategies of increasing the rigor of the curriculum, homework, standardized testing, access to education, and increasing spending have been common throughout our educational history. Sadly, when there is a call for education reform our policy-makers have applied the same strategies with the full expectation the strategy would work this time. Schools are feeling enormous pressure to meet new demands, having their funding and resources tied to their success (Burke-Adams, 2007). Students are overwhelmed by the amount of testing they have to do and their voices are not heard. All this has created an environment where teachers and schools are afraid to implement new instructional methods to try and adapt to the modern world (Rettner, 2011).

The Foxfire Approach has been around for fifty years because it is consistent with the needs of the 21st century skill set. It has been durable because it has listened to the community it serves. If businesses choose not to listen to their customers they fade away and if politicians do not listen to their constituents they will no longer be in office. If the purpose of education is to prepare students to become democratic citizens as Thomas Jefferson intended, should we not make sure student voices are heard during their foundational years? Utilizing approaches that provide for student success is central. Foxfire's work continues to be poised to do so and PBL and CDAT both are on the road to providing choice for students as they incorporate the essential elements of Foxfire.

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J. CYNTHIA MCDERMOTT

16. FOXFIRE AS A NEED-SATISFYING, NON-COERCIVE PROCESS

Several years ago I listened to a group of students talk about a project that they had completed. Their language was full of "shoulds" and "had tos" and the language of coercion. The project was wonderful but I was not surprised about the coercive nature of the experience. The teacher had chosen the project, set the parameters for completion and evaluated the students based on an external rubric that she created. Coercion is not explicitly addressed in the Core Practices in Foxfire but I will argue that it needs to be addressed. Since we have all been raised in a system that used coercion and force to get people to do what we want, a look at this is helpful in order to support the Core Practices. A student centered approach is what Foxfire is about and when the process becomes a coercive one, as many school activities become, then the center becomes focused on the teacher and not the student. Here is the definition for our review. Coercion means to force or act or think in a given way by pressure, threats or intimidation; compel.

Here is a story that might help describe the differences. When I was a child I lived on a dead-end street in Philadelphia and many of the neighbors were friends. The most memorable event was community snow shoveling. Our little street had a treacherous summit right smack in the middle, and unless all of the snow was gone, each and every member of the neighborhood was stuck. And because we were on a dead-end street the city trash trucks, which became snow plows in winter, were unable to navigate the narrow turn at the end of the street. So we never got plowed. Many snowy days found everyone armed with shovels of various hues and shaped, tackling the snow mountain together. Afterwards there was always cookies and hot chocolate for the workers.

This story serves as a constant reminder to me about a place where I felt safe, accepted and responsible. The children had fun and freedom, felt they belonged and had the power to do what they could. No one shouted directions and there were many ways to conquer the snow. We were not evaluated by how much snow we shoveled or how quickly we worked. Everyone set their own standard and did a quality job by their own definition because we all had a stake in its success. During that community experience we were able to transcend the usual limitations; we shared in a task equitably in spite of the lack of equality amongst us. The usual limitations were changed. Children, the aged, and the healthy adults all had important talents,

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energy and experience to contribute. We were equally respected even if it lasted only for that experience.

When I ask my own children about moments—shining moments—that were similar to my snow-shoveling experience, they remember our camping trips or summer camp. They have never had such moments in school and in fact, when I poll my university students who are soon-to-be teachers, they agree. In fact, some of them have had no such experience in life. They have never learned that they can make choices. They have been taught to be sheep.

What were the elements at work during those snow shoveling adventures? There are three that are important. First, there was no fear of failure and consequently no fear of punishment. Second, all of the participants established their own standard of achievement. There was no evaluation of anyone else's participation. Third, individuals participated because they wanted to, and for each the purpose was unique. Each individual participated to satisfy his or her own needs. People chose to engage in the behavior because they needed something. They needed to feel useful and competent and there was no manipulation.

I've been using words like "need satisfying," fun, freedom and belonging. These are terms associated with beliefs I've come to embrace through the work of Dr. William Glasser (Glasser, 1998). Opposing the popular stimulus-response (S-R) model, Glasser believes that we choose our behaviors in order to fulfill needs and to feel competent (in contrast, the S-R model believes that we only respond to outside stimuli). He calls this model Choice Theory, which is based on cognitive psychology rather than behaviorism.

The four basic psychological needs are love and belonging, power (being listened to), fun, and freedom. We choose our behaviors to feel competent and to get our needs met. During the snow shoveling I felt like a contributing member of our community so felt competent. A need satisfying classroom resembles the snow shoveling experience and if you look at the Core Practices they indeed are supportive of a cognitive model.

Glasser made a discovery years ago when he was introduced to the work of W. Edwards Deming, the father of the quality movement. After WWII, Deming was asked to go to Japan to help them improve their production methods. After studying he made the recommendation that the workers make decisions about improving the quality of their work. In an even bolder step, he stated that no human being should ever evaluate another human being. Therefore, TQM emphasizes self-evaluation as part of a continuous improvement process. The Japanese embraced his system perspective and after a short period of time, the quality of the materials and goods produced was greatly improved. The evidence is clear that Japanese products were very competitive. Glasser recognized that Deming was using a cognitive approach in his work.

But what does TQM have to do with Foxfire? As you read the chapters in this book, you will see example after example of the Core Practices at work. Student choice, self-evaluation, competence, freedom, power, a sense of belonging are fully

evident in each and every tale. I use a shortcut to help my students think about this model. First I ask them to share their Foxfire based memorable moments from their K-12 school experience. Once we have completed that, I ask them which of the needs were being met. It is not surprising that in each situation, most of the needs were in evidence. Then I ask if any of them are dog lovers. For those who say yes I ask how they train a dog.

The usual responswe attempt to treat our students as though they are dogs, giving them rewards and punishments fast and furiously and on a daily basis. They resist and rebel and shut down as they struggle to maintain their "catness" while being treated the way we treat our dogs.

Foxfire is a remedy for the over use of doglike behavior, of teacher centered rewards and punishments and testing and standardization. The Core practices have at their center a recognition that students will be competent when they make choices, have freedom, make decisions and work as a community to accomplish a meaningful task. Engaging students in the core practices is consistent with what we know about learning theory and the latest research on neuroscience. Our brain likes to make decisions and to understand the stories of our lives. Creating space for what is now being called 21st century skills is rather simple. Being a competent member of our community of citizens begins with making choices, understanding problems and working well with others. Foxfire has been encouraging that kind of behavior for 50 years. Join us in putting these "cat like" behaviors in place.

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FRANK MARGONIS

17. ELIOT WIGGINTON'S RELATIONAL PRAGMATISM

The project pedagogy developed by Eliot Wigginton and his students offers an exciting example of John Dewey's philosophy in motion. Students are given significant responsibility to carry out the production of a magazine, and in the process, they must routinely pose and solve the problems they encounter along the way. However, it's also clear that Wigginton's pedagogy surpassed Dewey's philosophy in ways that I find most profound. For the portrait Wigginton offers us of the creation of the *Foxfire* pedagogy involves more than the development of a new curriculum: the students and Wigginton had to forge new ways of interacting with one another, displacing sometimes dysfunctional relationships with educationally rich and meaningful exchanges. And it's this story of the importance of relationships as a vehicle for learning and knowing that one cannot find in Dewey's works.

Wigginton's willingness to set out educational goals for his English class and pursue them—the bold experimental spirit which Dewey admires—led to the creation of an educational program that Wigginton only later described and theorized. Following his pedagogical intuition, and specifically, his sense that the students and he should work together to create the pedagogy for their English class, Wigginton steered students through the process of making critical decisions and the process of negotiating with one another in pleasing and educative ways. This essay will focus upon two themes in Wigginton's pedagogical work: he utilizes an open-ended problem-solving orientation, like that recommended by Dewey, both as a way of creating a new pedagogy and as a way of teaching; and he also attends to the quality of the relationships he has with students and the students have with one another, viewing them as sites of learning and knowledge creation, and as sources of support and sustenance.

Wigginton's attentiveness to relationships can help teachers develop an awareness of the some fruitful relational practices, and it can help us locate key relational strategies that might be adapted to other educational events. I would like to draw attention to several relational practices that Wigginton's pedagogy embodies: he seeks to open pathways of communication with students, and he successfully deepens those relationships by eschewing the teacherly tendency to talk down to students, and instead relates to them as responsible and able people. Throughout the narrative Wigginton provides, he "tends" his relationships with students, seeking to keep them them trusting, meaningful, and rich. The organizational structure Wigginton

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and the students created to run the English class and publish the magazine further structured their educational interactions and gives them the continuity needed for a group of students to surpass an individualistic orientation and lose themselves in the intersubjective play of a collective enterprise.

ACTIVE STUDENTS SOLVING PROBLEMS

When Wigginton turned to John Dewey's philosophy, he found a good deal of confirmation for the directions his pedagogy had already assumed, and appropriately so: the researching, writing, and publishing of the magazine, *Foxfire*, stands as a remarkable example of the sort of project pedagogies that Dewey's philosophy inspired. The overlap between Dewey's and Wigginton's perspectives is significant: both men think broadly about the processes of education; in Wigginton's words, he seeks pedagogies which foster "students who have an insatiable curiosity about life and the way the world works, and who will go on learning independently and eagerly long after they have left our classrooms behind, just as they did before they entered them" (Wigginton, 1985, p. 202). This broad way of thinking about education places a premium on active student engagement. Pedagogies which do not successfully engage youth can actually discourage youth from developing a lifetime commitment to learning, in contrast with pedagogies that enlist their full concentration—calling upon them to make big judgments about what they want to achieve and what they need to do to carry out their ambitions. Both men also believe that pursuit of one's ambitions is best carried out by employing the scientific method, which Dewey described as a process in which knowers or students define the problems that confront them, seek hypotheses that might allow them to solve their problems, experiment by implementing the most promising hypotheses, and then observe the results to determine if the hypothesis indeed was confirmed (Dewey, 1980, p. 157).

Dewey's version of the scientific method is both an epistemology and a theory of learning, and in both the student and the knower are deemed to be highly active. Just as Dewey's epistemology critiqued what he called the "spectator conception of truth," his theory of learning critiqued any teaching method which placed students in a passive position (Dewey, 1988, p. 144). Dewey thought philosophical portraits of knowers as passive recipients of incoming stimuli, such as that provided by John Locke, had misled educators into putting students in desks and asking them to absorb knowledge handed to them by the teacher and the textbook:

> The fallacy consists in supposing that we can begin with ready-made subject matter of arithmetic or geography, or whatever, irrespective of some direct personal experience of a situation….But the first stage of contact with any new material, at whatever age of maturity, must inevitably be of the trial and error sort. An individual must actually try, in play or work, to do something

> with material in carrying out his own impulsive activity, and then note the interaction of his energy and that of the material employed. (Dewey, 1980, p. 160)

Dewey portrayed learning as one step in the active process of living, because he followed the Darwin-inspired assumption that humans are one more organism struggling to control their environment in the struggle to survive (Dewey, 1910). Motivation to learn occurs when individuals are unable to have their needs met or when their environment presents them with puzzling or threatening information, and educators should rely upon the ways in which humans are motivated by the resulting disequilibrium in their situations; problems which arise out of students' situations call forth the students' full concentration and a concerted effort to set things right. Both learning and knowledge, for Dewey, come about in the active process whereby individuals and groups of individuals seek to formulate the problems they face and seek to solve those problems. What Dewey refers to as the process of "trial and error" might be viewed as an early stage of the scientific method, where individuals grope—sometimes clumsily—to get an initial understanding of their situation and the possible responses they might enact en route to restoring their equilibrium. Dewey thinks the process of trial and error enlists all the individual's abilities: perceptual and physical abilities are joined with reflective efforts to pose hypotheses and test them.

Subject-matter pedagogies, which call upon students to assimilate already-organized information, often ignore the need to enlist what educators sometimes refer to as "the whole child," and—in the process—expect youth to assertively assimilate already-organized knowledge without having experienced the disruption of their situations that would lead them to pay attention. As a consequence, Dewey often complains that subject matter pedagogies teach youth to have a "divided attention":

> As a consequence of the absence of the materials and occupations which generate real problems, the pupil's problems are not his; or, rather, they are his only as a pupil, not as a human being….A pupil has a problem, but it is the problem of meeting the peculiar requirements set by the teacher. His problem becomes that of finding out what the teacher wants….Relationship to subject matter is no longer direct. (Dewey, 1980, pp. 162–163)

Consequently, Dewey often tells educators to make sure that the problem a student focuses upon is indeed *the student's* problem. Dewey asks, "Is the experience a personal thing of such a nature as inherently to stimulate and direct observation of the connections involved, and to lead to inference and its testing? Or, is it imposed from without, and is the pupil's problem simply to meet the external requirement?" (Dewey 1980, p. 162).

Wigginton likewise complains of teachers who seek to motivate students by offering extrinsic motivations, such as, the threat of a low grade, and consequently,

he relies upon something like Dewey's conception of the scientific method for exactly the same reasons Dewey advises: he wants students to be actively involved in framing and solving their own problems, problems that matter to them (Wigginton, 1985, p. 202). Moreover, Wigginton and the students developed group processes of solving problems where the problems of the group were shared by individuals. Wigginton appears especially pleased with the pedagogy of *Foxfire* at the point that individual problems and individual motivation come to be fused in the cooperative efforts of students to accomplish their shared objectives (Wigginton, 1985, pp. 105, 115).

EXPERIMENTING WITH SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, CREATING NEW PEDAGOGICAL GAMES

Some of the most profound aspects of Wigginton's pedagogy can only partially be theorized using Dewey's conception of an active student, for Wigginton's practice involved a great deal of attentiveness to the quality of the relationships students had with one another and with Wigginton.[1] He provides rich descriptions of his pedagogical relationships, in an effort to come to grips with the strengths and weaknesses of the relationships: do they allow substantive exchange of ideas? Do they facilitate learning? Do they allow for productive critique and correction? In the narrative Wigginton relates, Dewey's problem-posing orientation guides both the effort to create the magazine *Foxfire* and the relational aspects of jointly running the English class. In the discussions surrounding Dewey's pragmatic conception of truth, commentators generally expect problems to be framed somewhat narrowly, with a focus upon explaining a natural or social phenomenon, such as, why does water boil, or why does segregation develop in cities? Wigginton extends the pragmatic method beyond the tasks of seeking knowledge: it also becomes a way of seeking pedagogical answers and mediating social relationships. As a consequence, the pedagogy Wigginton describes in *Sometimes a Shining Moment* has the unique trait of exemplifying a group process which makes the quality of social interactions themselves an ongoing part of the investigation.

Sometimes a Shining Moment begins with a careful documentation of the breakdown of productive educational relationships in Wigginton's classrooms. Utilizing a rich style of description and an attunement to the mood of the classroom, Wigginton traces the social, economic, and political dynamics that led some class sessions to "spin crazily out of control" (Wigginton, 1985, p. 31). In Wigginton's words, "the friendlier I was in class…, believing that would generate cooperation, the more liberties the students took and the harder it became to accomplish anything" (Wigginton, 1985, p. 31). Even though Wigginton is sometimes offended by how students act, he does not hold them personally responsible, and he does not locate the problem in their individual character, but instead, he continually focuses upon how the larger context—including the students' relationships with him—leads to

the frustrating behavior. Notice in the following passage how he explains both the students' actions and his own as part of a larger social dynamic. He says that when his classrooms spun out of control,

> I'd crack down, kicking students out of class for several days at a time, or using my grade book and my power to fail them as a retaliatory weapon ("one more word out of you and I'll give you a zero for the day"), and the mood would turn sullen and resentful and no sharing and learning would take place. They would be captives, praying for the bell to ring….It was impossible. I began to regard them collectively as the enemy—and I became the prisoner—not they. (Wigginton, 1985, p. 31)

In this passage, the students' actions and Wigginton's actions appear to be part of a dance, where the moves of each member are in response to the other party. Wigginton renders this unflattering self description, with a degree of objectivity, because he is focused on understanding the relationships with students and their limitations. He says that the "mood" turned "sullen and resentful," so no "sharing and learning" took place. Wigginton describes the patterns of exchange he and the students are caught up in as if he must yield to the power of these relationships, either adapting to what they give him, or seeking to redefine the relationship due to the limitations of the ones of which he is apart.

The friendly relationships he and the students had developed worked to *open* the pathways of communication between the students and himself, and this is an important achievement, because many student-teacher exchanges in high school remain skeletal and superficial, that is, students often respond to teachers self-defensively, sharing as little information as possible. Such superficial exchanges are often the result of hierarchies teachers establish in classrooms. Because Wigginton sought to get along with the students from the very beginning, he learned a good deal about the youth with which he was working; for example, he learned that some of the students really did not care about English class: "Lots of them will never leave this area of the country except perhaps to go to war—they will never read or write—they will help with a gas station and love it—that's all they need" (Wigginton, 1985, p. 26). Such information was surely daunting to a teacher hoping to convince youth of the importance of appreciating poetry, moreover, the friendly patterns of exchange that led youth to share such sensitive information with Wigginton gave him no authority to require that students read poetry, or do the many difficult things that classroom events require; this was neither Wigginton's decision nor the students' decisions, but the rules they inherited from their society for friendly interactions. Because Wigginton had no authority to require that students do things they found onerous, they had to seek out new relationships that would keep the pathways of communication open while developing new ways for Wigginton or students to exercise the authority required to get students to work.

This humble view of relationships—which acknowledges their power over us and the ways they make some events possible and others impossible—led Wigginton to turn to his students in exasperation and ask for help in retrieving their faltering class. When Wigginton posed the question to his class—which was in effect, "how do we make this English class work for the rest of the year?"—they all knew the relationships they were enacting could not be sustained in a way that would lead to learning, and they had to search for new relationships, new rules of exchange (Wigginton, 1985, p. 32). In contrast to Deweyan descriptions of the scientific method, the problem Wigginton posed for the students was remarkably broad: it encompassed a question about how they could meet the obligations of an English class, "teaching students to write grammatically correct, forceful prose, and poetry" (Wigginton, 1985, p. 48); it included the sense they may need to dream up novel methods, since schooling often did not work for the students; it included the desires and the social proclivities of the people in the room. In effect, Wigginton asked the students, "how can we do English well, given who we are and the situations of our lives?" This involved the students and Wigginton envisioning writing activities they might learn from and enjoy, as well as the relationships with their peers and Wigginton that would be productive; once those possibilities were envisioned, the students would enact them, assess the consequences, and revise their approach. Wigginton makes it clear that this process of relational experimentation is a inherent aspect of the pedagogy's success, not simply the route by which they reached a desirable end, that is, Wigginton represents the process of relational experimentation as never ending:

> The process of examining ourselves, English and what it's for, school and what it's for and sampling activities went on all year. In fact, ten years later at Rabun Gap, I and new students were still at it—still tearing things apart and putting them back together in different ways. Still experimenting. Still talking. Still testing. (Wigginton, 1985, p. 32)

Wigginton says that when he first posed the problem of the class to the students, they had very little to say (Wigginton, 1985, p. 32). Moreover, he says they spent months of class time in discussions concerning possible approaches for the English class; even though this trial-and-error period might have been described as floundering in many teachers' eyes, it is the sort of searching that Dewey associates with real learning. The discussions the students and Wigginton engaged in built upon the communicative openings they had already achieved. By posing the question of the class to the students, Wigginton paved the way for a deepening of their relationships, because he addressed them as able and responsible people, whose help he needed.[2] The pragmatic approach he adopted with the group granted students real power to envision possibilities, argue for them, and then try them out, in way that Dewey would fully approve.[3] He trusted them to honor his concerns when he said the class would need to teach them English, and he showed students that he was willing to take on even their most cynical criticisms about

schooling by assigning them an essay to say what they liked, and did not like, in their school experiences. When the students self-defensively refused to fully share their perspectives, he solicited similar essays from older students who were not in his class, and then gave his students excerpts from the older students' essays to help prime the discussion, and that worked: students vocalized the many ways they had felt insulted in schools, and they articulated practices that had worked for them (Wigginton, 1985, pp. 32–36). By stumbling around, looking for examples of schooling done well, they were hoping to gain a handle on those activities which might facilitate a well-run class.

At one point, while the students and Wigginton were working on the *Foxfire* pedagogy, Wigginton learned the power of addressing youth as responsible and strong people; when a student taught him how to plant ginseng beds, he learned a basic lesson which combined ontological considerations (concerning the character of the students and himself), with ethical aspects (concerning the ways in which teachers and students ought to treat one another). Wigginton's lesson occurred when he was treated to a day in the woods with his student, where the student acted as an exemplary teacher: he taught Wigginton how to recognize and dig up the plant, ginseng, and then he gave Wigginton room to carry out the instructions; he was pragmatically complimentary when Wigginton performed well, and he feed Wigginton's curiosity by sharing his knowledge of the woods. Wigginton says, "there was absolutely no arrogance about his manner. Just an easy self-confidence and assurance and a resulting gentleness (Wigginton, 1985, p. 72) As a result of this experience, Wigginton sensed there was a new parity between the student and himself, and it appears as though his new level of appreciation offered him an ethical standard that would influence his efforts to work with students. In short, he had learned a new sense of student-teacher equity: "He had his area of knowledge and ignorance, and I had mine, and in that respect we were equal, each potentially able to share something with the other, to the enrichment of both" (Wigginton, 1985, p. 72). Moreover, Wigginton credits this experience with a student stalking ginseng for his growing awareness of student abilities, which in turn, led him to relinquish classroom authority over to students whenever possible, which again involves reasoning that Wigginton and his students are part of a larger social dynamic, where a decrease in his effort will be matched by an increase in the students' efforts (Wigginton, 1985, p. 94).

Wigginton's embrace of an egalitarian ethic, and his earlier efforts to lure his students into a difficult conversation, where they would need to feel safe while criticizing the school, might both be considered aspects of what it takes to *tend the gaps* between students and teachers. Beginning with an existentialist conception of humans, Gert Biesta (2006, pp. 29, 48, 51) argues that learning occurs in the spaces between people and that these places of conversation and intersubjective engagement are fragile and must be carefully maintained. Throughout the narrative Wigginton provides, he shows an acute sensitivity to the spaces between his students

and himself; he seeks to make it likely that students will want to talk with him about educationally-rich topics. He shows this tendency to tend the gaps when he seeks out informal, friendly relationships with students; he shows it again with his strategy of exposing them to commentaries older students had of schools, which emboldens them to add their own criticisms of schools. By learning to view students as equals, Wigginton renders the gaps between students and himself more robust, for as students become responsible to carry out their jointly shared pedagogy, they have need to initiate a good many comments as they become aware of what needs to be done.

Building upon the ongoing and informed flow of communication amongst Wigginton and the students, the group developed a organizational structure for the English course, which appears to have accomplished multiple goals: all the participants are given a structure which brought them together to carry out literacy related tasks; group discussions and decisionmaking come to be organized by the structure; and responsibility for carrying out the tasks of the magazine came to be diffused. The students and Wigginton decided there would be a rotating group of class officers, who had responsibilities including the planning of class activities, representing student perspectives, and running class every Friday. The organizational structure of the class included a bulletin board, which would allow students to decide on a theme and post pictures, poems, or whatever they wanted to express the theme (Wigginton, 1985, p. 44). Once they decided to carry out the magazine idea, this project gave them multiple communicative and educative events, such as, determining a name for the magazine, writing letters to solicit submissions from students in other high schools, and experimenting with poetry—the best poems qualifying to be placed in the magazine. The projects brought urgency and meaning to the communicative events, and made it far more likely that students would approach their English endeavors with interest and focus.

As Wigginton and the students began to get more interested in the local history and lore section of the magazine, a class project of superstition called out performances from students and community members alike:

> Community students asked members of their families for help, while dorm students bedeviled community adults on the campus farm or in the school's kitchen. Each time a new superstition was brought in, it was posed with the others on the bulletin board, signed by the student who had collected it, creating a master list that included, "if you kill a toad, your cow will go dray," or …. (Wigginton, 1985, p. 53)

As Wigginton, the students, and community members became progressively excited by the *Foxfire* magazine's focus on local stories, knowledge, and crafts, they discovered that there was something very special about regionally-based understandings, for a good many people found these ideas intrinsically interesting. By learning about their roots, Wigginton said the students sometimes experienced,

a "peculiar, almost mystic kind of resonance that comes—and vibrates in one's soul like a guitar string—with an understanding of family—who I am and where I'm from and the fact that I'm part of a long continuum of hope and prayer and celebration of life that I must carry forward" (Wigginton, 1985, p. 75). Such profound layers of meanings are the fruits of intergenerational relationships, and they found these rich layers of meaning through the process of trial and error extoled by Dewey.

CONCLUSION

The wealth of meaning and understanding that Wigginton's project pedagogy set in motion was indeed made possible by the task of creating a magazine, and indeed, this ambitious aim set the students and Wigginton on uncharted paths of exploration. Yet, that exploration only took a fruitful and engaging direction because the students and Wigginton attended to the quality of their interactions with one another; surely, the many powerful interviews, conversations, planning sessions, and lessons constituted the bulk of the learning and knowledge that occurred. If Dewey's scientific method was primarily designed to help reach truth, we might say that Wigginton's educational intuitions drew him less toward truth and more toward meaning, and the importance of productive relationships in creating meaning for his students and himself. When it comes to fostering intrinsically interesting educational experiences, meaning is probably more important than truth.

Wigginton definitely showed that a pragmatic approach to pedagogy is greatly strengthened by his attentiveness to the quality and depth of relationships. It is also worth asking whether his relational sensitivities would strengthen pragmatic approaches to epistemology.

NOTES

[1] Dewey largely ignored the pedagogical character of student-to-student relationships and student-to-teacher relationships. His momentary references to student-teacher relationships clues us that he was not considering the possibilities that students would rebel against a teacher due to ethical, cultural, or political concerns. When Dewey does talk about relationships, he often assumes that the relationships between students and teachers are benign and that the student will wish to please her teacher. See, for example, Dewey, 1980, pp. 183–184.

[2] Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997) shows the power contained in the "address" educators employ in relation to students. By addressing students as able and responsible, Wigginton increased the likelihood that such qualities would be called out of them.

[3] Dewey (1988, pp. 134–135; 1980, pp. 185–186) complained that, all to often, education was viewed as preparation for life and not as life itself, and consequently, he argued that students ought to be given real responsibilities.

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STEVEN R. WILLIAMS AND WILMA HUTCHESON-WILLIAMS

18. RESEARCH

How Do We Know Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning Works?

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT FOXFIRE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

I know why you are here. You've gotten this far in the book and you can see the value in the Foxfire Approach (fn) for your teaching. But you are concerned. Will your principal and colleagues at your school buy it? Will you be criticized if your students' standardized test scores don't go up? You've turned to this chapter for some assurance that Foxfire will make a difference in your students' learning outcomes.

As a student-centered approach to learning, Foxfire is a radical departure from traditional classrooms with which most educators are familiar and comfortable. It should come as no surprise then that many teachers and administrators are reluctant to adopt such an approach without convincing evidence that Foxfire "works". As a Foxfire practitioner, Kugelmass (1995) has recognized "Few will disagree that any educational approach must demonstrate effectiveness" (p. 552). In the modern era of school reform this has been expressed frequently as the need to demonstrate that an approach is "researched-based". But the phrase "research-based" has been often simply a talisman used as a shield to protect favored practices or as a weapon to destroy disfavored ones, without regard to character or significance of the research.

As Alfie Kohn (2006) has warned:

> How we make use of data also matters. It's important to distinguish well-conducted from poorly conducted research and to understand the outcome variables in a given investigation. For example, if someone were to announce that studies have shown traditional classroom discipline techniques are "effective" our immediate response should be to ask, "Effective at what? Promoting meaningful learning? Concern for others? Or merely eliciting short-term obedience?" Empirical findings can come from rigorously conducted scientific studies but still be limited of value; everything depends on the objectives that informed the research. (p. 10)

With regard to assessing the utility of Foxfire, we must begin with the same questions Kohn has asked as to our objectives. What student outcomes do we expect the Foxfire Approach to address? Standardized test scores? Durable learning? Critical thinking skills? Creativity? Obedience to school rules? Motivation? Engagement

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with the subject matter? More broadly put, in what ways can we reasonably expect the Foxfire Approach to make a difference in student learning?

OBSTACLES TO RESEARCH

The good news is there is plenty of evidence that Foxfire will make a positive difference in students' academic performance. It just may not be represented in academic performance as measured by a standardized test or in peer reviewed quantitative research. It must be conceded that there is no peer reviewed quantitative research that correlates the Foxfire Approach, as an integrated whole, to increased scores on standardized tests. On the other hand, there is no research that indicates the Foxfire Approach is deleterious to such learning.

This dearth of quantitative research on Foxfire can be traced in part to the nature of the Foxfire Approach which has been described as "a way of thinking that guides the teachers' development and implementation of classroom strategies and methods rather than a way of doing" (Paris, Combs, Wooten, & Moore, 2005, p. 1). As such, it presents significant challenges to researchers to capture and quantify when and how teachers think about instructional planning and practices and how that thinking impacts student learning.

Another obstacle to such research is the limited number of practitioners employing Foxfire in their classrooms. In her exhaustive review of what she referred to as the "Foxfire Cultural Journalism Program", Oliver (2011) concluded that the heyday of Foxfire was in the past, referring to the national buzz about Foxfire in educational circles throughout the 1970s and early 80s. She identified the back to basics school reform movement of the mid- 80s, with the introduction of explicit, detailed standards and standardized tests, as confronting Foxfire with significant headwinds that discouraged many teachers from implementing Foxfire in their classrooms. Oliver concluded that the emphasis on standardized testing created disincentives to teachers considering the adoption of the Foxfire Approach.

This presented educators with the classic "chicken and egg" dilemma. They wanted convincing evidence that the Foxfire Approach worked before they tried it, but until they did, it was difficult to produce such evidence. Moreover, what was sought most often was evidence that Foxfire helped students score higher on standardized tests, an objective that was not in view when Foxfire was originally conceived in 1966.

EVIDENCE OF THE POWER OF FOXFIRE CORE PRACTICES

Although there are few studies of the Foxfire Approach taken as a whole, there are a plethora of studies, both quantitative and qualitative on many of the Foxfire Core Practices, taken individually. These studies and numerous anecdotal reports from Foxfire practitioners present evidence that the Foxfire Approach leads to increased student motivation and engagement, improved academic performance, and more

durable learning than more traditional approaches. For example, Core Practice 1 frequently described as "student choice" is supported by a mountain of evidence that student choice increases student motivation and engagement, academic performance and creativity (Kohn, 1993; Starnes & Paris, 2000; Nordgren, 2013).

Connecting student learning and classroom work to the community and the world beyond (Core Practice 3), has been found to lead to increased student interest and purpose. It can also result in positive effects on student learning (Bartosh, Ferguson, Tudor, & Taylor, 2009; Gautreau & Binns, 2012; McInerney, Smyth, & Down, 2011). Lieberman and Hardy (1998) concluded that "When educators use elements of the real world as focal points for learning and teaching" (p. 11) students strengthen academic skills and develop a deeper understanding of concepts.

Teachers acting as facilitators (Core Practice 4) promoted increased student interest and increased academic and behavioral outcomes (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1998). In Core Practice 5, classroom activities are characterized by active or experiential learning. Studies have demonstrated that such active learning results in increased motivation and engagement (Shemilt, 1980), higher comprehension and increased student success in learning content (Secules, Cotton, Bray, & Miller, 1997), and significant gains in creativity (Bredderman, 1983; Chuoke & Eyman, 1997; Zacklod, 1996). The use of students' imagination and creativity is encouraged in the Foxfire Approach (Core Practice 6). Children can learn to be more creative "only if teachers employ instructional strategies that are consistent with the complex nature of creativity and not based singly on the execution of a series of trials" (Antonietti, 1997, p. 75). He also noted that when instructional strategies were used, learners were found to have increased creativity, enthusiasm, and attention to school tasks. Other studies have found that presentation or publication of student work to an audience beyond the teacher as advocated by Core Practice 8 leads to increased learning and academic performance (Gordon, 1998; Lieberman & Hoody, 1998; Secules, Cotton, Bray, & Miller, 1997). Research has also confirmed that student reflection as prescribed in Core Practice 10 leads to improved learning (Andre & Anderson, 1979; Starns, 1988; Beane et al., 1986).

FOXFIRE IS WELL ALIGNED TO 21ST CENTURY LEARNING

The Foxfire Approach, as set forth in earlier chapters in this book, was not created or developed over time to improve student scores on standardized tests. Rather, its raison d'etre has been to increase student engagement, encourage collaborative learning, practice problem solving, develop critical thinking skills, encourage creativity, improve communication skills, and foster appreciation for and connection with the surrounding community and the world beyond. Although as noted there are many studies supporting the individual components of the Core Practices of Foxfire, there are not many research studies that focus on any of these outcomes as of a result of the Foxfire Approach as an integrated whole (Ensminger & Dangel, 1992). Moreover, the goals that Foxfire has been created to achieve are not measured by and

may not be reflected in standardized test scores. Nonetheless, these goals have been recognized by various educational, governmental, and business organizations as the most important skills and learning objectives for 21st century students (P21, 2002).

In 2002, a consortium of business, governmental, and educational groups came together to form the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. They developed a framework for 21st century learning, highlighting 18 different skills students would need to succeed in college and as a citizen in the 21st century. Sixteen states subsequently signed on to P21 and agreed to build 21st century outcomes into their standards, professional development, and assessments. These 18 skills were subsequently boiled down to four super skills, identified as the 4Cs:

- collaboration
- communication
- critical thinking
- creativity (Kivunja, 2015).

In 2010, the American Manufacturers Association Critical Skills survey found that 3 out of 4 (75.7%) executives believe the 4Cs will become more important to their organization in the next 3–5 years. These business executives also identified critical thinking as a priority for employee development, talent management, and succession planning.

Foxfire is uniquely positioned to develop these 21st Century skills in students. These four super skills are woven throughout the Foxfire Core Practices. Foxfire teachers have been teaching and their students have been learning these skills for the past 50 years. The Foxfire Core Practices integrate each of the 4Cs in an approach that is student centered and which is designed to foster and maintain student engagement and motivation.

COLLABORATION

An integral part of any iteration of 21st century skills is the ability to work with others to solve a problem or reach a goal (P21, 2011). Such collaboration between students and between students and teachers is built into the Core Practices. Core Practice 4 specifically defines the role of the teacher as that of facilitator and collaborator. Core Practice 7 prescribes that classroom work include peer teaching, small group work, and teamwork. The Foxfire Approach affords students frequent and regular opportunities to work collaboratively with the teacher and other students to identify how learning objectives will be met, problems will be solved, or questions will be explored.

There is abundant research to show that programs which provide collaborative learning experiences positively impact students creativity, independence, attitudes towards teachers and students, mental ability, and curiosity (Giaconia & Hedges, 1982) (a synthesis of 153 studies of cooperative learning). Moreover, cooperative learning leads to deeper learning and increased critical thinking (Secules, Cotton,

Bray, & Miller, 1997; Millis, 2010). Collaborative work not only enhances academic learning, it helps students learn and practice how to work together, a critical skill needed for the 21st century (Hammar-Chiriac, 2014).There is strong evidence that collaborative work in the classroom promotes both academic achievement and collaborative abilities (Baines, Blanchard, & Chowne, 2007; Gilles & Boyle, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Johnson, 2004). Gilles and Boyle (2011) found that when working with others, students learn to inquire, share ideas, clarify differences, solve problems, and construct new understandings. This research provides strong evidence that collaborative learning such as practiced in the Foxfire Approach, improves students' communication and critical thinking skills and creativity as well.

COMMUNICATION

Another 21st century skill that is included in the 4Cs is communication which is defined as the sharing of "thoughts, questions, ideas, and solutions" (Piascik, 2015). Trilling and Fadel (2009) have identified precisely how students should be able to communicate:

- Articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written, and non-verbal communication skills,
- listen effectively, to decipher meaning, including knowledge, values, attitude and intentions, use communication to inform, instruct, motivate and persuade,
- utilize multiple media and technologies, communicate effectively in diverse environments (p. 205).

The Foxfire Approach is well suited to provide students with an abundance of opportunity to learn and practice these communication skills. First, the collaborative nature of the Foxfire Approach as set forth above requires communication skills which begin with the initial learner choice and which are infused throughout the learning experience. Throughout a Foxfire activity, the student encounters multiple audiences and purposes for communication including e.g., the teacher, other students, and the outside community.

For example, in the original Foxfire project in 1966, students first met in class meetings and brainstormed to determine how they would learn Language Arts, an example of the application of Foxfire Core Practice #1. These class meetings and brainstorming sessions were more than simply mechanisms for determining student choice. They provided the teacher with "teachable moments" to refine and practice students' communication skills, particularly those of listening and speaking persuasively, all at a time when student motivation and engagement was heightened (Wiggington, 1985).

As the project progressed, students continually collaborated with the teacher and other students to develop strategies for interviewing community members. The process of preparing for and conducting the interviews gave students numerous opportunities to learn and practice communication skills. Core Practice 8 includes

the notion that student work should be presented to audiences beyond the teacher. Not only does this practice enhance student motivation and engagement, it affords the students another opportunity to hone their communication skills in an authentic setting. Finally, consistent with Core Practice 9 and 10 mandated that teachers and students engage in regular ongoing assessment and evaluation throughout the project which required frequent reflection in both the progress of the work and the process. Once again, these Core Practices provide opportunity for teaching and practice of communication skills.

While not every Foxfire work will contain all the same elements as the original Foxfire project, the Core Practices explicitly provide a framework that integrates similar opportunities for teachers and students to practice and enhance their communication skills, no matter the project or lesson.

CRITICAL THINKING

A third super skill identified as part of the 21st century learning is critical thinking. Critical thinking encompasses the higher order thinking set forth in Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), including problem solving, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Kivunga, 2015). The innovations in the information technology of the late 20th century has put at our fingertips a wealth of facts, data, and opinions. To be an effective citizen and worker in the 21st century, an individual must be able to analyze and evaluate this information.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills identified critical thinking and problem solving as skills which "separate students who are prepared for increasingly complex life and work environment…..and those who are not" (P21, 2011). The partnership further defined critical thinking as "looking at problems in a new way, linking learning across subjects and disciplines" (P21, 2015, p. 1) (emphasis added). Core Practice #3 specifically addresses this element of critical thinking:…" learning experiences assist individuals in discovering the value and potential of the subject matter, including connections to other disciplines" (Foxfire, 2013).

Although the term "critical thinking" is defined in many ways, the definitions frequently refer to problem solving as a major component, often linking the two concepts together (Kivanga, 2015). Problem solving is at the heart of the Foxfire Core Practices. Core Practice #1 is explicit in placing problem solving in a central role in the process: "Most problems that arise during classroom activity are solved in collaboration with learners, as learners develop their ability to solve problems and accept responsibility" (Foxfire, 2013). Core Practice #5 prescribes that "classroom activities will be characterized by active learning, where teachers and learners manage the process. Pose and solve problems, create products, and build understanding" (Foxfire, 2013).

Analysis and evaluation are two other important components of critical thinking. Opportunities to learn and practice the higher order thinking skills of analysis and evaluation are woven throughout the Foxfire Approach. In the initial process of

selecting a subject or method of study (Core Practice #1), students and the teacher must engage in analysis and evaluation of possible choices. Then as work commences and continues to its conclusion, students in collaboration with the teacher continually analyze and evaluate their efforts. Thus, Core Practice #9 provides that teachers and learners together engage in "challenging, *ongoing* assessment and evaluation of the work" (Foxfire, 2013) (emphasis added). Foxfire Core Practice #10 provides that students then regularly reflect on the product and process, giving "rise to revisions, refinements, and new teachable moments" (Foxfire, 2013).

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Creativity and innovation are often used to refer to conscious exploration of "new ideas or new uses of old ideas, to add social or economic value" (IBSA, 2009, p. 1). There is no doubt that creativity is the most important human resource of all. Without creativity, there would be no progress, and we would be forced repeating the same patterns (DeBono, 1995). Creativity has been called the "lifeblood for innovation and economic progress in the United States" (Batchelor & Bintz, 2013, p. 3). Others have referred to it as America's secret weapon (Zhao, 2006). While many educators seem to recognize the importance of creativity in theory, they are apprehensive and often hostile to it in the classroom (Cropley, 2010). Not surprisingly, creativity scores for elementary students have declined significantly since 1990 (Bronson & Merryman, 2010). A recent study of elementary children found that the ratio of skill instruction to creative thinking in their classrooms was 10:1 (Gallagher, 2009).

The Foxfire Approach directly addresses this deficiency in traditional education by including innovation and creativity as one of the 10 core practices. Foxfire Core Practice 6 explicitly calls for the learning process to embrace imagination and creativity. A classroom climate that "supports unusual ideas, provides freedom of thought and freedom of choice is conducive to creative achievement" (Sak, 2004).

In the Foxfire Course Book (2005), teachers are encouraged to develop a classroom climate in which there is freedom of choice and in which risk-taking is encouraged and mistakes are analyzed and used as learning opportunities (p. 167). Such strategies are crucial to allow students the opportunity to practice and expand their creative thinking skills (Batchelor & Bintz, 2013). Finally, collaboration with competition, promotes creativity (Collins & Amabile, 1999). As we have already seen, such collaborative work is integrated throughout the Foxfire Core Practices. Foxfire educator teaches, nourishes, and celebrates creativity and imagination in the classroom.

FOXFIRE PROMOTES STUDENT MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

With respect to the 21st Century super skills recently identified by business, governmental and education leaders, Foxfire checks all of the boxes. Do you want

your students to learn and excel in these critical skills? Then Foxfire is a way of thinking about your teaching that you may find very productive.

Not only do the Foxfire Core Practices align well with the learning objectives set forth by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, they also provide a comprehensive design for instilling and maintaining student motivation and engagement. Student motivation and engagement is "a robust predictor of student learning, grades, achievement test scores, retention, and graduation" (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012, p. 21).

From its beginnings, Foxfire has been driven by the concept of learner choice, which, in the words of Core Practice #1, "infuses the work that teachers and learners do together" (Foxfire, 2013). There is a wealth of evidence supporting the notion that providing students with choice in what and how they will learn increases student interest, motivation, and academic achievement. Alfie Kohn (1993) called that evidence"….so compelling that it is frankly difficult to understand how anyone can talk about school reform without immediately addressing the question of how students can be given more say about what goes on in their classes" (p. 12). Recent research has confirmed the extraordinary value of empowering children to take some control over their learning (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Simmons & Page, 2010; Parsons, Nuland, & Parsons, 2014). Foxfire, through its student centered approach to learning, provides a powerful response to this imperative. The idea is so powerful and well recognized that some states have incorporated student choice or student centered learning into their teacher effectiveness assessments. For example, the Georgia Department of Education evaluates its teachers on 10 performance standards. One of those standards is titled "Academically Challenging Environment" which is described as: "a *student-centered*, academic environment in which teaching and learning occur at a *high level* and students are self-directed learners" (GADOE, 2014, p. 2).

Providing students with some choice and control over their learning is one way that Foxfire enhances student engagement. It is not the only way that Foxfire motivates students to do their best and persist in their learning. Foundational to Foxfire is the idea that the work done connects students to their surrounding community and the outside world.(Foxfire Core Practice #4, 2013). By connecting learning to the community and the outside world, Foxfire gives real world purpose to the work that students do. Purpose has been identified as one of the three principles driving intrinsic motivation (Pink, 2009). Another principle,autonomy, is met by Foxfire's student choice. Oliver (2011) found that the Foxfire magazine gave students a real world purpose that energized their learning. She noted that many students were so motivated by the project that they devoted many after school hours working on the magazine and in some cases travelling across country to explain to others the Foxfire Approach. In summarizing her interviews with many Foxfire students, Oliver said "the informants with which I spoke… were deeply committed supporters of either the Foxfire and/or the school at Rabun Gap and their special programs…..I venture to speculate that very few curricula could generate such a fan base as the one that evolved on behalf of the [Foxfire] Program……(t)hat feature alone is enough

to make the case for Foxfire as an original American Educational Program with distinctive features. …" (p. 214).

Finally, research confirms that asking students to publish or perform their work to others besides their classmates and teacher enhances student motivation and engagement (Goodson & Skillen, 2010). Foxfire Core Practice #8 specifies that "the work of the classroom serves audiences beyond the teacher, thereby evoking the best efforts by the learners…when students understand that the work is intended for and will be displayed or presented to others besides their teacher, they are motivated to do their best and persist in their learning" (Foxfire, 2013). The Foxfire Approach kindles student motivation in a number of ways that foster student engagement throughout an assignment, project or unit of study.

FOXFIRE IS A TAPESTRY

The Foxfire Approach is like a tapestry that is woven from many threads. We can tease out the individual threads and there is persuasive evidence to indicate the value of each. But there is a paucity of research on the tapestry that is the Foxfire Approach taken as an integrated way of thinking about teaching and learning. Nonetheless, educators who have adopted the Foxfire Approach contend that, like tapestry, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Clearly, more research needs to be done to demonstrate the full power of the Foxfire Approach in meeting students' learning needs. But there is plenty of evidence that Foxfire can motivate students, increase student engagement, improve critical skills, and connect students to the community and world beyond the school walls. All these attributes are crucial to empower students to take control of their own learning and to empower students to face the challenges of the 21st Century.

You may now be convinced of Foxfire's utility, but remain concerned about how to implement it in the standards-based milieu in which you must teach. A standards-based curriculum is not antithetical to the Foxfire Approach. While the standards-based material provided may prescribe the content and skills to be learned, they do not prescribe how you teach and how students learn. The Foxfire Approach is all about how students learn and it can be applied to any subject, standard, grade level, or student demographic.

Do you want your students to improve their communication skills, develop more creativity in their thinking, enhance their critical thinking and ability to solve problems, and learn how to work with others? If these are goals that are important to you, Foxfire is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that will help you on your quest.

The good news is, if you're a classroom teacher, you don't have to dive into the deep end of the pool – wade in slowly, try out one of the Core Practices at a time. Core Practice 1 is a good place to start. Give your students some choice in how they will learn a particular subject or standard. Give it a chance and see if you notice a difference in your students' attitudes toward their learning. Record your

observations and compare your students' behavior and academic performance to their previous performance and their peers. As Foxfire practitioners have discovered time and again over the past 50 years, you too may experience "sometimes a shining moment" (Wiggington, 1985).

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GEORGE WOOD

19. SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Reading through this collection of essays I was struck by three things:

- How widely applicable the Foxfire Core Practices are;
- The impact these practices have had on both teachers and students;
- That it was over 30 years ago that I first stumbled on the Foxfire approach as a professional.

Let's start with the applicability of the Core Practices. I first ran into them while sitting in Wig's Rabun Gap classroom watching him direct the magazine class. He was at his finest, moving from group to group of students, guiding their work, asking questions, pressing them to think and work harder. After checking in with the various teams, he called three students to the back of the room. They were about to benefit from one of his famous mini-lessons.

Turns out these three had been having on-going struggles with some piece of grammar that the class had worked on several times. Following the best of the Core Practices (while they had not been fleshed out in writing yet, they were easy to find in the classroom) Wig had been working on this grammar rule as it had come up in student writing. There had been an all class lesson using examples from the magazine articles students had written, and then a couple of whole group follow ups with more examples. But these three were still making the same error.

Time for some direct teaching. Wig had revised a series of sentences from the stories on which the class was working, so each demonstrated a way a grammar mistake had been made. Together they worked on these, one at a time, until he was convinced everyone had it. Off they went, back to work, equipped with one more writing skill.

I share this example because it illustrates something that goes through all of the Core Practices and can inform every classroom. Simply put, learners learn by making their own errors on work that they care about and are willing to correct those errors, even practice not making them, when the reward is high enough – as in, seeing your work in print.

This is why I believe the Core Practices are so applicable. At the time, some 30-plus years ago, Georgia was one of the first states to mandate state standards in content areas and mandate that teachers teach them. It was a sample of what was to come nation-wide. But even in the face of these state mandates – a set of standards that Wig had actually put on chart paper and put on the wall, checking each off as the

H. Smith & J. C. McDermott (Eds.), The Foxfire Approach, 155–157.

class mastered them (note that I did not say after the teacher taught them) – he stayed true to the Core Practices of Foxfire.

What I am getting at is that good teaching, teaching along the lines of the Foxfire Core Practices, trumps all else. In any setting, these practices work as demonstrated in the Foxfire Teacher Networks led by Hilton Smith. And under any regulatory system, be it mandated testing for graduation, promotion, or teacher pay, these principles light the way to student achievement. Beyond student success, the Core Practices have a profound effect on the lives of teachers and students.

I want to start with teachers, as they are often overlooked when we talk about schools. Outside of student socio-economic status, nothing is more important when it comes to student learning than the quality of the teachers they have. Amazingly this is a lesson seemingly unknown by most education reformers for the past thirty years. While they have tried to improve the overall quality of American public education by tinkering with testing, charter schools, and mandated curricula, these so-called reformers have ignored this fact.

Back in the 1970s when Ted Sizer, John Goodlad, and Ernest Boyer led the national Study of Schools, the evidence was overwhelming: Good teachers equal good results. Foxfire gets that. Look at the Core Practices, filled with demands that teachers be excellent as facilitators, collaborators, active learning, project learning, and real audiences. But there is something more here. When you put teachers in this role you empower them to be experts, to be masters of their own destiny, to feel a genuine sense of agency in their own classrooms.

Teaching via the Core Practices is not done by following a textbook or handing out worksheets. It is done through first knowing your content backwards and forwards. I remember reading the section of Wig's *Sometimes a Shining Moment* book where he admonished those interested in his approach to start with something they knew well and use the Foxfire approach there. Why, because just as John Dewey knew, teachers must have content at their fingertips so that their attention can be on the learner, not finding content.

That is the second demand the Core Practices put on teachers: knowing their students, the children in their room. Foxfire moves from student interest to content and skills, not the other way around. It is one of the purest models of Ted Sizer's notion of "student as working, teacher as coach". Again, this empowers teachers to use their own judgment in the classroom, based on knowing the children who sit around them.

In classrooms where teachers have control of content and know their children you will have powerful and skilled teachers. And you will have children engaged in learning.

The effect on learners is so clearly laid out by the essays in this book by Joy Phillips, Katie Lunsford, and Lacy Hunter Nix it seems unnecessarily repetitive to go over them again. I must say I loved Nix's description of herself as a student, with "almost stereotypical teenage hubris" focused on her work and ignoring all the hoopla that went on at that time around Foxfire. The ability of Nix and her compatriots to

see so vividly what their engagement with Foxfire meant to them is evidence that children benefited from classrooms where Foxfire and its many cousins (such as the Coalition of Essential Schools, Expeditionary Learning, Outdoor education) was practiced. Teachers and schools made a difference in their lives.

As pointed out in this volume, clearly these approaches connect to good test scores. But there is so much more. Children in learning communities such as these go on with confidence and an engaged mind—confidence to take on the roles of citizen, learner, community member with a mind nimble and thoughtful enough to guide them through the challenges and joys of life. This is what really matters in school, making a difference in the lives of our children, and the Core Principles of Foxfire increase drastically the chances that educators can make that difference.

Applicability. Impact. Now a word about longevity. The biographical note at the beginning of this essay was a reminder to myself of how long ago, but how recently it seems that Wig's *Sometimes a Shining Moment* was published. And it was twenty years before that that the first Foxfire magazine appeared. Fifty years, half a century, of tried and true practices that help children learn to use their minds well.

So many things have come and gone during these five decades. Fads such as Learning Activity Packages (LAPs, remember those?) and programs such as the federally funded Reading First; Channel One and Nation at Risk; small schools, schools without walls, charter schools, and Teach for America. We have an appetite, we Americans, for the shiny new object that is the key to fixing all our educational woes. Foxfire has lasted through all of these: growing, struggling, continuing, and now, while somewhat out of the national spotlight, thriving.

Why? Because it draws from the deep tradition of progressivism, with roots back to John Dewey, Ella Flag Young, George Counts and the Eight Year Study: an approach to teaching and learning that is based on the understanding that we all learn best from experience, that those experiences can be ordered and structured by a teacher who understands his/her students into a curriculum that will expand the child's mind and abilities. Foxfire builds on and adds to that tradition, with the Core Practices setting out a guideline for any progressive teacher or school to follow.

Beyond that, Foxfire lasts in the hearts and minds of those who have experienced it: Teachers whose professional lives have been vastly improved due to the new found respect they find in an approach that honors their wisdom, experience, and skill as a teacher; students who have found a sense of self-respect and empowerment when they see their words (or photos or art or some other project) set forth for public consumption; families who see children flourish when given the chance to be an active learner rather than a passive recipient of curriculum; and communities who are able to join in the education of their children by providing an area in which children can learn not only skills but can apply those skills for the good of all.

Foxfire and its Core Practices, as the essays in this volume demonstrate, are applicable in every school and classroom, can have a dramatic effect on both teachers and learners, and have withstood the test of time. So what are you waiting for? Dive in and find your own shining moment.

CONTRIBUTORS

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