Self-directed learning with friends: Communities of Practice
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Running shoes are not required, yet we are in training for a marathon. In this course we’re enhancing our knowledgebase, toolbox, mindset and resilience as we take up a contest unprecedented in human history: inclusive and just sustainability. Part race against the clock, part design challenge and part performance test, Team Humanity needs all of us to be informed, prepared, and in the game. Having teammates to train with nudges us to keep going as we learn with partners, communities and action leaders in this grand challenge.
Claim: Self-directed learning plus communities of practice are apt teaching strategies for transformation.

What’s needed?
Current reality

Sought-after reality
8 actions needed by 2030

1. Increase solar and wind capacity 3.5 times, to 500 gigawatts

2. Eliminate most electricity generation from coal

3. Maintain current natural gas generating capacity for reliability

4. Increase zero-emission vehicle sales share to 50%

5. Increase sales share of building heat pumps to 50%

6. All new buildings and appliances meet strict energy efficiency goals

7. R&D for carbon capture, sequestration, and carbon-neutral fuels

Illustration and Agenda by Sam Bradd
Donella (Dana) Meadows

Systems scholar, MacArthur Fellow “Genius” award recipient
Pew Scholar in Conservation and Environment
Nominated for a Pulitzer Prize
Author/coauthor of influential works.
12 Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System

- The structure of information flows
- The rules of the system
- The power to add, change, evolve, or self-organize system structure
- The goals of the system
- The mindset or paradigm out of which a system arises-its goals, structure, rules, parameters

LEVER OF GREATEST IMPACT =
- The power to transcend paradigms
At the time of Dana Meadow’s death in 2001, she and two of the original co-authors of Limits to Growth, Dennis Meadows and Jørgen Randers, were at work on a 30-year update; it was published in 2004.
Chapter 8 Tools for the Transition to Sustainability

• Visioning
• Networking
• Truth-Telling
• Learning
• Loving

... these five tools are not optional; they are essential characteristics for any society that hopes to survive over the long term
Context

Curriculum in Adult & Lifelong Learning & educational mentoring program
While the adult learning curriculum is sited within *Global Development*, our courses draw undergrad + grad students (& staff) from all 7 colleges & schools comprising Cornell.
- 4 courses, taught as studios and/or seminars
- Most are 4-credit courses, one is a 3-credit course
- All have university designation as community-engaged learning; one has university designation as a sustainability course.
Adult & Lifelong Learning

Learning Partnerships for Mutual Growth of Employees & Students

Community Learning & Service Partnerships, CLASP
CLASP began in 1989-1990

A social justice, reciprocal education program CLASP was started by:

- Al Davidoff, then union local chapter president, of the relatively new UAW Local 2300,
- Human Ecology students
How it works: Learning Partnerships = 1 student + 1 adult, both focusing on the adult’s learning goals

- Acting as educational mentors, the students applies what they study in class to support their adult partners working toward goals selected by the employee

- The intent is to work together and learn from one another

- Learning Partners meet together once a week for 7-9 weeks.
In mentoring program, staff and students learn from each other
Student Jack Strougo and his learning partner Leila Ellis, at the CLASP recognition ceremony May 11.
At left, Dave Nelson, CLASP’s program liaison, congratulates LaVern Davis, custodian at the Vet School, for his work in CLASP.
Program has won numerous awards, including the Perkins Prize for Interracial and Intercultural Peace and Harmony

Perkins Prize, new awards celebrate learning across difference
Learning Partnership meetings look a little different now during Covid: on zoom, outside or in masks
Case Course

With self-directed learning projects & Communities of practice
Example course journey

COURSE JOURNEY AT A GLANCE

1. Getting started with adults: what do I need to know?
2. Learning to learn entails what?
3. What key ideas inform facilitative teaching?
4. How do we apply design thinking to workshop- & lesson planning?
5. The ubiquitous nature of lifelong learning
Four elements of example course, Intro to Adult Learning

- Participatory studio course in adult learning
- Learning Partnership: educational mentoring of adult
- Self-directed learning project, SDL
- SDL with friends: Communities of Practice CoP
Self-directed learning

Definition

- In 1975, Malcolm Knowles defined self-directed learning as a “process in which individuals take initiative,
- with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their own learning needs,
- formulating goals, identifying human and material resources for
- learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning
- strategies and evaluating learning outcomes.”
Self-directed learning

- Promotes the development of self-confidence, initiative, perseverance and life satisfaction.

- Provides opportunities to pursue a wide range of interests.

- Can encourage collaboration among peers.
SDL with Friends

What is a community of Practice?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b89B4bIXEGw&ab_channel=AnfppProgram
PMI Interviews Etienne Wenger, 4 min.
Origins of Communities of Practice

The term community of practice was coined to refer to the learning community that serves as a living curriculum for the members.

Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger (1991)
Communities of Practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something that they do and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better.

Wenger (1998)
Characteristics/Attributes

- **Domain:** a shared interest or concern
- **Community:** building relationships, supporting one another’s SDL work and learning from each other and the group
- **Practice:** accumulate experience & build knowledge, facilitate purposeful activities in the group, reflect, share ideas

Wenger (1998)
AN EXAMPLE

An international group of community builders & learning city~locality activists interested in the roles & contributions of faith & spirituality for humane and just post-pandemic recovery.

As a CoP,

- Meet online monthly
- Take turns leading structured activities
- Engaging together in action research
- Visit one another in person as opportunities arise
- Produce publications and webinars together for adult educators & others

Shared with my students
HOW WE CAPTURE INSIGHTS AND KEEP TRACK

Running Notes
Active social journaling
Archiving designs of the structure activities we facilitate in our group
Create a rhythm for the community

- Draft a format for your meetings (a pattern do you want to follow)
- Decide if you’ll take turns facilitating or use other mode for leading
- Consider simple avenues or platforms for sharing resources & ideas
- If you could wave a magic wand, what bigger picture question might you like this CoP to explore?
- Discuss if you’d like to agree on group norms
Comments

If your CoP has influenced your SDL, how so?
I learned a lot about who I am as teacher and leader, as well as where I need to grow. I've gained knowledge in how to approach certain areas of teaching that I didn't ever think I'd get towards. Lastly, I feel much more confident in my abilities to teach!

- I believe that my SDL has benefited a lot from being in a Community of Practice. My original SDL proposal had a general idea behind its goal (being a better student advisor and leader in life), but the overall plan and structure of how to get there seemed unclear. Having the input and perspectives of my peers has helped me carve out a clearer path and see a distinctive start, middle, and end to my learning project.

- My CoP has been helpful in giving encouragement and helping keep me on track with my project. Two of my fellow group mates are also doing similar projects, and it's helpful to hear updates from them. It's also just nice to hear about what other projects people are pursuing, and their commitment to their self-directed learning encourages me to be even more enthusiastic about my own.
• The most helpful aspect so far for me has been to have this shared experience and frustration getting things off the ground! Just the human aspect and connections have allowed me to push past the discomfort and be okay with being in that optimal learning situation between comfort and alarm.

• I had reached the point where I might have fallen into the pits of despair because trumpet wasn't fun anymore, and I didn't feel like I was making progress. My community of practice was very encouraging and provided personal stories of learning a new instrument, reminding me to be patient with myself especially since I'm accustomed to woodwinds rather than brass.

• There's such a spirit of encouragement and helpfulness between us, and it provides a lot of positive encouragement for me. Art is very difficult for me to keep up while school is in session because it gets drowned out by everything else going on, even when art is something that is super important to me. . . it's been a super positive experience to bond with and encourage people facing the same things.
Thank you!

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References


