



Learning in and for community

A Discussion Paper

Introduction

This discussion paper is an invitation for CCEDNet members to join a conversation about using learning for social outcomes within your organization, neighbourhood or community.

This paper is the first peer learning tool within CCEDNet's national project on Community Development Service Learning. The project aims to:

- ❑ Situate people as citizens within their learning experience
- ❑ Connect individual and community learning to social change

The paper discusses theory about learning for social outcomes. This paper also shares some of the questions we hold about learning for social outcomes. The paper gives some examples of how learning for social outcomes is being facilitated within CED work across Canada. We believe that CED provides an excellent container for fostering civic engagement and using learning as a tool to realize CED goals. If this concept interests you then please read this paper and join some of our peer learning strategies to discuss and debate theories as well as share practices about learning for social outcomes and the relationship between learning in the community and CED.

This paper was written by practitioners. This paper shares our understanding of learning theories, offers questions we often ask ourselves as we attempt to link theory and practice, and describes ways we, and others, have put these theories in to action in order to create change in our local neighbourhood or community.

What is this paper about?

This discussion paper is the first peer learning tool within the CCEDNet national project, the Community Development Service Learning Initiative. The purpose of this projects is to strengthen service learning opportunities in CED organizations for students, build youth engagement in CED, and facilitate effective experiential learning partnerships between community organizations, educational institutions/organizations and youth. *For more information on the project refer to the ["CCEDNet News"](#) section on the home page of the CCEDNet website or contact the project coordinator, Kerri Klein.*

This discussion paper is organized in to three sections. The first section describes theory and principles around learning for social outcomes. The second section describes an experiential form of learning called Community Development Service Learning and the third section highlights how learning is being used for social outcomes locally, regionally and at the national policy level. Each section will be the topic for a tele-learning series. The first tele learning call will be hosted in February 2008.

This paper is a tool for peer learning among the CCEDNet membership. We invite you to read each section and consider how you are using learning for social outcomes at the local, regional or policy level. The tele-learning sessions will be an opportunity for members to learn with and from each other. It will deepen our understanding of local needs and local opportunities for learning to be transformative for individuals and groups.

The dialogue that emerges during the tele-learning sessions along with feedback about the content of this paper will be integrated within the content of our workshop on Community Development Service Learning. This workshop will be offered at the University of Victoria's Community-University Exposition and CCEDNet's national conference. Both events are held in May 2008.

What is the intent of this paper?

The intent of this discussion paper is to stress how important learning, particularly informal education, is to Community Economic Development. And, to generate thoughts, opinions, ideas and eventually a plan for action on how the Canadian Community Economic Development Network will continue to support local organizations to use learning as tool for social and economic change.

The paper focuses on informal education and three key aspects (conversation, informed action, reflective practice) of this educational approach that ensure participation from people in neighbourhoods and communities that may be disadvantaged and excluded from contributing solutions to local, regional and national issues. CED has a particular focus on such neighbourhoods and, therefore, requires an educational component to support community and neighbourhood members to increase their capacity to take action on local solutions.

How this paper is organized?

This paper is organized in to three sections:

Section One describes a context for learning in community.

Section Two describes two forms of experiential learning that connect service to community with learning for social outcomes. This section also highlights the differences between service learning and community development service learning

Section Three describes four different situations where an organization is using learning to create change either locally, regionally or at the national policy level.

Section One: Living and working in community

Across Canada communities are organizing their work within comprehensive frameworks because they recognize that economic, environmental and social challenges are interdependent, complex and ever-changing. To be effective, solutions must be rooted in local knowledge and led by community members. This approach is known as Community Economic Development (CED). CED promotes holistic approaches, addressing individual, community and regional levels, recognizing that these levels are interconnected. CED has emerged as an alternative to conventional approaches to economic development. It is founded on the belief that problems facing communities - unemployment, poverty, job loss, environmental degradation and loss of community control - need to be addressed in a holistic and participatory way¹. In our work, we are always asking ourselves how we can include more community members in the thinking, questioning and decision making around local control. *We wonder if this is true for you in your work and/or neighbourhood?*

Collaborative acts and partnerships are at the core of community economic development work. Partners, at the local level, are offering their labour, use of facilities and equipment, their knowledge and many other resources in order to draw people into participating as citizens reaching for the public good. These acts and partnerships rarely emerge simply because someone's idea was good or that collaboration was a more efficient and effective use of resources. In fact there are many projects that are good ideas and efficient and effective yet they don't get off the ground. It is becoming widely recognized that projects that do not move to action fail when time or effort is not put into building the relationships necessary to sustain the movement of these ideas into action. However, we often struggle to take the time to build these relationships – sometimes because we are nervous or concerned about the difficulty of such work and other times because we just don't have the resources to support this and we are already "maxed out" in what we do. *We'd like to know if you take the time to build relationships before project work begins? And, if so how do you manage this? If not, why don't you build these relationships?*

As human beings we are born into social relationships and we live in relationship with others for the rest of our lives. Our sense of self and a sense of community are formed through interaction with others. Through our conversations, and our reciprocal exchanges, we develop relationships with others. These relationships in turn help us create a sense of attachment, a sense of belonging and a sense of communion with others. Like dropping a pebble into a pond, there is a rippling affect that broadens out the sense of community and our participation in it, person-by-person, interaction-by-interaction, relationship-by-relationship. These direct and informal relationships create a level of trust that is essential to creating the norms of reciprocity and building of social networks that lead to acts of collaboration. Trust and reciprocity are the pillars of any sound partnership. These qualities enable us to take risks and deal with the uncertainty that is inherent in community economic development efforts². We live and work in a remote-rural community. The reality is that we often know "too much" about each other. Our sense of self and our sense of community is very much shaped by interactions. Sometimes these interactions have been painful and so our sense of self is weakened. We find we

¹ www.cednet-rcdec.ca

² Storytellers' Foundation (1998) *Learning Happens Everywhere*. A Final Report to the Office of Learning Technologies. Hazelton

must take a lot of time to foster relationships of care, kindness and love. When we do this we all grow and our confidence to create change in community grows too. *We wonder what it is like for others? Do you recognize a need to relate as humans working together in community? Or is your work more removed and focused on goals and objectives? Do you work to foster “communion” with colleagues or do you focus more on products than human process?*

James Coleman and Robert Putnam have studied the importance of relationships to the quality of life in communities. Robert Putnam uses the term social capital to refer to “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In this sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue”. The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.”³ Coleman, in turn, talks about the importance of social capital to the development of human capital. Human capital is the skills and capacities of each member of society. Coleman argues that people’s ability to develop skills and capacities that allow them to act in new ways is supported where trust is exercised by the mutual acceptance of obligations, there is an open exchange of ideas and information and where norms and sanctions encourage people to work for a common good. In our work we call this “validating rural lifestyles” and yet we know that these relationships exist in urban areas. It is the interaction between human and social capital that creates the dynamic for the emergence of a learning community.

Finding ways to enhance the quality of these relationships and networks is at the core of work “in community”. The fundamental purpose of such work is to create the conditions that let reciprocity, honesty, trust, ideas, shared action and a sense of communion emerge from the community so that in the words of John Dewey, “people can build a shared life together.” The quality of life in the community is dependent upon the quality and nature of our relationships with others. We firmly believe that if we didn’t have the closeness of relationships with colleagues and neighbours we wouldn’t be able to sustain the work we do. We, like many others in community learning and CED, aren’t paid professional wages, volunteer as much as we perform paid work, and continue with our work regardless of whether there is project funds or not. We can do this because we support each other in profound ways, emotionally and physically. *What relationships do you have in your work? How do they sustain you through the difficulties of struggling for justice? When do these relationships help your work? And, when do they hinder your work? How do your relationships influence the quality of your community’s life?*

Working in relationship is a critical component of community economic development. In CED we want to build a “shared life together”. This requires relationships that are inclusive – we want each individual within a community or neighbourhood to build both their human and social capital. To ensure this happens CED requires an educational component so that all community members have the capacity to contribute. This educational component demands that we learn with and from each other, regardless of social or economic circumstance. This educational component requires process and conversation rather than curriculum to highlight the knowledge that is held locally so that the ideas and action for change come from local people. This approach to education is known as informal education or popular education. Three key elements to this approach include; the space for conversation between people so that ideas, thoughts and opinions are animated and shared; informed action where it is the ideas and knowledge generated by conversation in the community that inform social and economic action; reflection so that experience becomes a teacher, it is through the progressive stages of reflection that an individual can learn from within and use experiences to increase personal and interpersonal power. Informal educators believe that these three elements need to be fostered for transformative change (that is change that comes from within rather than from outside of an individual or group) to happen. *What do you think of this theory? Do you agree that, for transformative change to happen, conversation, informed action and reflection must be part of a process? Can you think of*

³ Putnam, Robert. (2000) *Bowling Alone. The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon and Schuster. P. 19

examples from your own work experience where conversation, action or reflection has played an important role?

Paulo Freire may be the most well known of popular educators. His book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*⁴, highlights the contrasts between education approaches that treat people as objects (the banking approach) rather than subjects (experiential approach) and describes education as cultural action. He describes the three key elements to this educational approach as:

1. Dialogical. It is conversation rather than curriculum that drives the learning activities.
2. Praxis. Through conversation comes informed activity. The activity is linked to both theory and action.
3. Conscientization⁵. By engaging in conversation people share an understanding of ideas. People begin to recognize that they hold power. In turn, this understanding leads to actions that contribute to transformative change.

In this educational approach the action is drawn from the lived experience of the participants. This is known as experiential education. Experiential education is a natural approach for CED participants. It is participatory and grounded in local needs and opportunities. By using experience rather than curriculum for learning we can work with each other rather than working “for” others. And we can learn with and from each other, rather than only “teach” others.

This approach creates opportunity for people to learn what they need when they need in a way that serves their level of understanding. There is a process in place, locally, to ensure that those who aren’t engaging in public life have support to do so. It is a system that nurtures and promotes citizen curiosity, reflection and informed action. It requires local control and decisions start locally and are then supported by further removed decision makers. It demands flexible and open systems for learning. *What processes are you part of that allow you and others to learn when you need to in a way that serves your different levels of understanding? What does this look like? And, why is it important?*

The next section of this paper describes a form of experiential education that combines learning and service. By combining learning and service we open up opportunity for people to “build a shared life together”. We use education as a tool for social outcomes. As learners we reflect on our lived experience and we look to this experience for ideas and action that will lead to change in our communities and neighbourhoods.

This form of experiential education, when facilitated by post-secondary institutions, is described as *Service Learning*. In *service learning* students apply the skills and knowledge from course work to help community organizations create change locally. In *Service Learning* the post-secondary institution determines and evaluates the learning objectives. Fortunately, Service Learning is becoming a recognized approach to learning and promoting citizen engagement.

A similar form of experiential education is *Community Development Service Learning*. In *Community Development Service Learning* the community organization determines and evaluates the learning objectives along with program participants who are people from the local neighbourhood or community. This form of experiential education is often delivered in partnership with a non-formal learning organization such as a literacy organization or local community college. Community Development Service Learning is an example of how learning might look if local citizen action and needs were truly recognized by governing bodies

The next section of this paper describes both service learning and community development service learning.

⁴ Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Harmondsworth: Penguin

⁵ Conscientization involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming part of the process of changing the world. Wikipedia.

Section Two: Learning and Service

Service Learning is a form of experiential education. It is applied in partnership between post-secondary institutions and community service organizations. Service Learning allows the student to apply their classroom based learning in real-life settings. The legacy of service learning is the increase of social capital within a community. Ron Faris defines service learning as⁶:

The integration of formal learning (academic, vocational-technical etc.) with student service in the voluntary or not-for-profit sector, in Canada or abroad, for academic credit. It is a form of experiential education/learning that emphasizes reflective thinking, reciprocal benefits to the student and the community/body involved.

The Candian Alliance For Community Service learning defines service learning as an educational approach that integrates service in the community with intentional learning activities. Members of both educational institutions and community organizations work together toward outcomes that are mutually beneficial.

Across Canada educational institutions are organizing themselves to offer service learning opportunities to students. The intent is to use learning for transformative change for the democratization of citizenship. The vision is for students, educators and communities to learn together to strengthen the individual and society.

“I’ve learned about issues in class. We talk (about issues) but mainly academic stuff. This [service learning] lets me deal with issues first hand, it’s different”

Service Learning participant

Service learning is evolving in Canada and is still being adapted to a variety of cultures and contexts. Foundations such as McConnell are supporting post-secondary institutions in efforts to create a fair and just society. And, to foster an attitude in young citizens that the knowledge and skills learned in the institution can be applied for the common good both within and outside of Canada.

“Being able to just do work -- physical and simple work that was helping others so much, and also to think about it was different. I got to learn how to reflect, to step back and reflect on how simple actions lead to bigger change.”

Service Learning participant

In January 2005, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation launched it's National University-Based Community Service-Learning Program. They have provided funding to ten Canadian institutions to

⁶ Service-Learning in Canada: A survey of policy and practice in the public education systems of Canada and the practice of using voluntary service as a means of earning post-secondary tuition credit. Prepared for the Learning and Literacy Directorate of HRDC by Ron Faris Ph.D. September 15, 1999

integrate CSL within their curriculum and to build strong partnerships with their local communities. The Foundation also funds the Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning⁷.

Community Development Service Learning (CDSL) is a similar form of experiential education. In Community Development Service Learning people in their neighbourhood or community decide what the learning outcomes and the service need to be. This is a key difference between CDSL and Service Learning. The community group may approach an education institute to partner in the service but the community determines the learning objectives. In CDSL the emphasis is mainly on informal and non-formal learning. Informal learning involves fostering understanding, knowledge and skills outside of the curricula of formal institutions. Within the informal arenas of community, practitioners consciously create learning opportunities for people to engage with each other to bring about change that enhances local life. The informal arenas of community such as community kitchens, recreation clubs, community gardens, festivals and potlaches are used as teaching grounds. Community Development Service Learning is usually offered in partnership with a non-formal learning organization such as a literacy organization or an informal storefront and local social and economic agencies. Community Development Service Learning aims to create conditions so more people can take better control of their personal life and the life of their community. Community Development Service Learning demonstrates how lifelong learning is integrated throughout community life. And, it makes concepts such as social capital, democratic citizenship and civic engagement tangible and easier to understand.

“People now stop me in front of the Post Office and ask me about community issues and I can talk with them – I even get invited to events. That’s new for me.”

Community Development Service Learning participant

In Community Development Service Learning individuals, often youth, learn about the benefits and responsibilities of belonging to a local community. It is citizenship education where individuals are taught how to develop, respond to, and incorporate a set of expectations that instil a sense of pride in attitude, outlook and behaviour, and provide a framework for daily life that leads to greater individual responsibility as well as a sense of ownership around the greater health of community. These expectations become the norm of behaviour for the individual.

In Community Development Service Learning an individual is part of planning, preparing, implementing and evaluating a community project. The community project is decided based on the interests and needs of the individual and the interests and needs of the local community. Community Development Service Learning has been most effective in communities who face social and economic hardship. Community Development Service Learning provides opportunity for engagement when employment is not an option. Community Development Service Learning takes a resiliency approach where projects are not decided for individuals but rather with and by the individual or group. Community Development Service Learning supports people to make decisions and take action to affect greater control over their lives.

“To realize that I was sitting with my neighbour, not a student, and share ideas on what we need to learn as a group was very significant for me. Then we moved these learning goals into shared action and activities. It changed the power relationship for sure.”

Community Development Service Learning mentor

In Community Development Service Learning the teacher/coach is also a learner and recognizes the learning relationship that exists between themselves, colleagues and Service Learning participants. It is within these relationships that critical learning, as citizens and neighbours, takes place. The individual/group drives the learning and service, and the teacher/coach helps and supports them, links

⁷ <http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/>

them with community resources and facilitates reflection and evaluation. In this process, participants learn how to evaluate their project, their performance and identify the learning that took place for them.

In Community Development Service Learning individuals develop such skills as communication, problem solving, critical thinking, self-assessment, how to plan, organize, work as a team member, meet expectations and, most importantly, identify themselves as a needed member of a local community who can identify issues, problems and opportunities and put ideas in to action for change

**Community Development Service Learning
Key Characteristics:**

- Heightens connection between individual and other.
- Individuals consciously recognize the activity as learning.
- First and foremost it aims for results in the community.
- It is both action and process oriented.
- Aims to empower people to feel more confident and gain more skills to take an active role in changing oppressive situations and structures.
- Uses daily experience as "curriculum".
- It is inclusive of the relational aspect of learning.
- It is place based, and therefore, encourages and documents the collective memory of the group working for change.

**Service Learning
Key Characteristics:**

- Within curricular CSL, service links to academic content and standards, and is appropriate to student learning goals.
- In extra-curricular CSL programs, service links to student learning and development goals.
- Involves collaboration between faculty/staff, students and community organizations to determine and meet real, defined community needs.
- Reciprocal in nature, benefiting both the community and the service providers by combining a service experience with a learning experience.
- Integrates a strong reflective element in order to maximize meaningful learning.
- Can be used in any subject or program area so long as it is appropriate to identified learning and/or development goals.

Whether it is Service Learning (applying skills and knowledge from course work to help community organizations working for change locally) or Community Development Service Learning (local people learning with and from each other for outcomes that are first and foremost for the benefit of community) individuals involved in either process are engaging in important acts as citizens, that is learning and giving service to community. The principles for learning and service are immersed in the principles of CED. It is an alternative approach to making change. CED provides a mechanism or a vehicle in which to further evolve learning and service in Canada.

Section Three: Learning and transformative change

This section highlights four organizations that are using and/or supporting experiential education for social outcomes. Although each organization described in this section is using/supporting experiential education in different ways they share a common philosophy about CED. That is, the belief that problems facing communities - unemployment, poverty, job loss, environmental degradation and loss of community control - need to be addressed in a holistic and participatory way. And, that by applying participatory approaches to education such as combining learning and service, we open up opportunity for people to “build a shared life together”.

Each organization described in this section is using learning as a tool to build human (individual skills) and social (relationships and reciprocity) capital. The third commonality between these organizations is that they are using/supporting experiential education so that more action is being led by people locally to create economic opportunities and better social conditions, particularly for those who are most disadvantaged.

The first two organizations described in this section, [Storytellers’ Foundation](#) and [Santropol Roulant](#), are applying experiential education at the community and neighbourhood level. These grass roots organizations recognize the need for experiential educational activities to increase employment, increase local control, and connect young people into their community and/or neighbourhood with a particular emphasis on increasing intergenerational relationships. These two organizations are also using reflection for participants to recognize the life experience they hold, learn from this experience, and use their learning for community transformation.

The second two organizations described in this section, [McConnell Foundation](#) and [CCEDNet](#), are working with community organizations on a regional and national scale to organize and advocate for enabling policy so that communities can address problems in a holistic and participatory way. These organizations are supporting experiential education both through service learning and community development service learning, and are facilitating peer learning among community practitioners.

The first organization highlighted is **Storytellers’ Foundation**. The Storytellers’ Foundation is a non-profit society operating in Hazelton. This region, also known as the Upper Skeena, is in northwestern BC. The organization operates an informal education storefront called The Learning Shop. The storefront offers experiential education programming as a means to increase civic literacy, particularly among young adults. Most of the participants are members of the Gitksan First Nation. The Gitksan First Nation makes up 80% of the Upper Skeena population. Of this population, 70% are under the age of 30. To read about *Community Development Service Learning in the Upper Skeena* [go to page 10](#).

The second organization highlighted is **Santropol Roulant**. This organization is situated in the centre of the island of Montreal. This local non-profit society offers meals-on-wheels to seniors. It also introduces young people to a variety of food security initiatives happening around the neighbourhood of Santropol. The organization operates with young volunteers who assist the elderly or people who are living with a loss of mobility. The organization aims to increase food security while breaking down

social isolation and promoting an inclusive intergenerational community. To read about *Learning for social outcomes in Montreal* [go to page 13.](#)

The third organization highlighted is the **J.W. McConnell Family Foundation**. This charitable foundation, situated in Montreal, funds projects in Canada that foster citizen engagement and build resilient communities. The Foundation is particularly interested in projects that have relevance nationally. The McConnell Foundation supports formal educational institutions to engage in experiential learning, that is, school- and university-based activities that take place in, or in partnership with, the surrounding community. To read about *Fostering Citizen Engagement in Canadian Schools* [go to page 15.](#)

The fourth organization highlighted is the **Canadian Community Economic Development Network**. CCEDNet is a national based organization that is member driven. Its main office is in Victoria, BC and it has regional coordinators supporting members across the country. CCEDNet seeks to increase the scale and effectiveness of community economic development (CED) - helping organizations and individuals strengthen their communities and create solutions to local needs. CCEDNet has an interest in experiential education, particularly peer learning, where members can share their experiences and, therefore, learn with and from each other. CCEDNet wants to focus on experiential education where the results of social and economic change are seen first and foremost in the community. The organization also wants to advocate for policy reform so that the membership can apply a CED frame to their work with more support than is currently being provided from provincial and federal governments. To read about *Peer Learning for Transformative Change* [go to page 17.](#)

Community Development Service Learning in the Upper Skeena

Community Development Service Learning is offered in partnership within the Upper Skeena. Each program offers environments for learning; service; workplace mentorship and social networking. [Storytellers' Foundation](#) has an informal education storefront called The Learning Shop. It is the learning partner. Many

different community partners offer the opportunity for service and workplace mentorship. An initial series of conversations ensures that each partner is clear on roles and responsibilities before any program begins. Most often, the social networking is facilitated by the traditional kinship of the program participants and staff. In this region the extended family network of the Gitksan First Nation is known as the, *wilp*. The *wilp* infrastructure offers opportunity for connecting with traditional teachers, extended family and hereditary chiefs.

Storytellers' uses informal education to increase civic literacy, which the foundation describes as citizen engagement. Storytellers' offers many types of experiential education. Community Development Service Learning is offered as a full-time program over six months. Each program accepts up to nine participants per intake. The program uses conversation, reflection and shared service to work with participants in a holistic manner. All program activities are within the food citizenship initiatives of Upper Skeena communities.



Upper Skeena Community Development Service Learning Agriculture Program

Community Development Service Learning provides people with an opportunity to gain work and service skills while working within the emerging economic opportunities of the community. All developed skills are completely transferable. Typically, a program is delivered for six months. During this time the participants are supported to identify personal interests and then match these interests with both jobs and services needed in the community. After an initial orientation the participants work three days each week on a community service project. One day each week the participants are mentored in a local work place suitable to their current attitudes, experience and skills. As skill sets develop job placements become more challenging and demanding. And, one day each week the participants reflect and evaluate the learning and service through experiential and reflective programming. Although projects and work experience change slightly from program to program, the following elements are always weaved into programming:

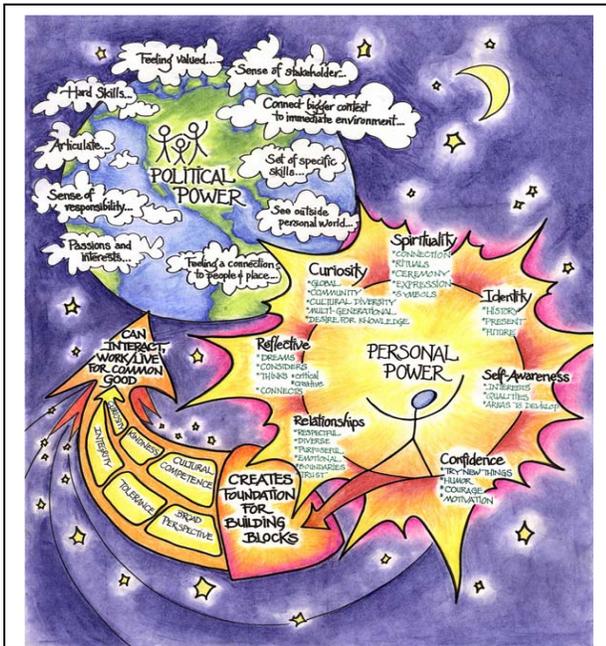


- cultural immersion work;
- work placements in food distribution and food action initiatives;
- mentoring relations in which they, in turn, mentor children in healthy eating/active living camps;
- food regulations and policy

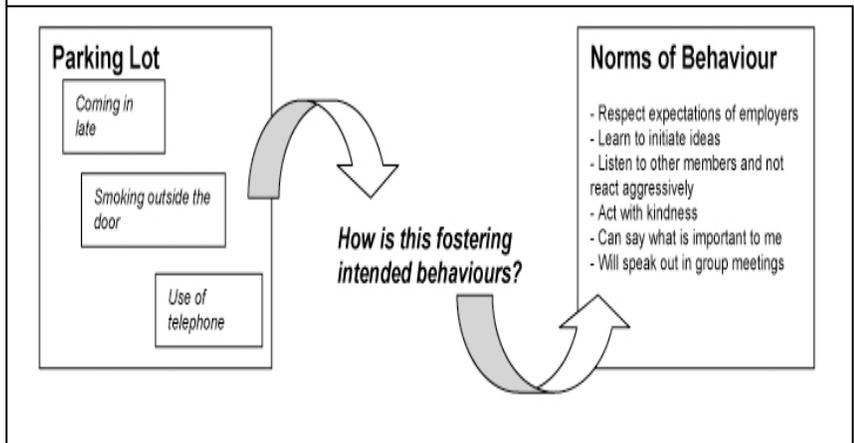


- research;
- human and social capital development; and **Learning together as kin**
- public education strategies to increase others' awareness about food policy and regulations

A community teacher (coach) supports the learning that takes place as the group gives service. A partner organization provides the supervision, direction and evaluation of the service. And, sometimes the local high school and/or community college partners so that students can apply classroom based learning within real life situations. Throughout Community Development Service Learning, participants are supported to build a relationship with family, extended family, peers, wlp members, and with local service providers. Each participant develops a Learning and Work plan that is implemented with the support of a local service provider and/or teacher, and with the support of an extended family member so that social networking continues beyond the life of any one program.



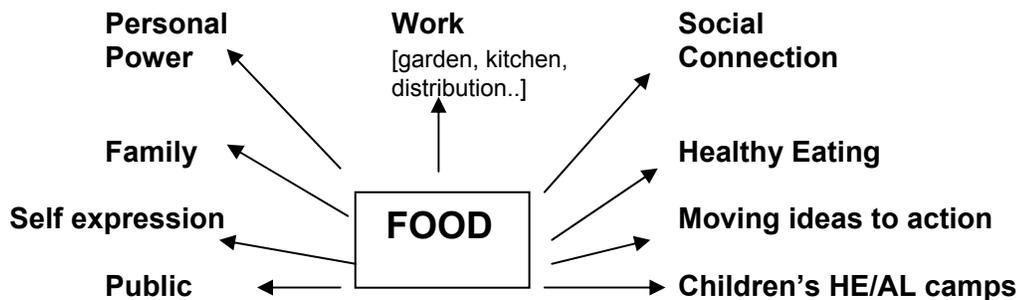
**Reflecting on Action helps us “wake up”.
We become aware of holding personal power**

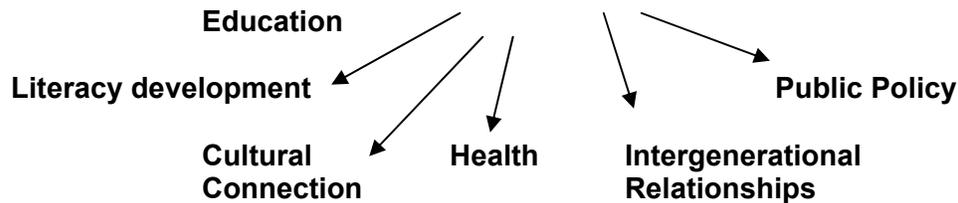


The process is as important as any resulting action

The program recognizes that food is central to the development of a healthy society for a land-based people who celebrate an oral culture. This program helps to connect young people who have not had the opportunity of extended connection to build healthier social capital through food initiatives that will open up opportunity for better personal, social, cultural and economic health. This model is holistic in its approach in that it uses food as the central vehicle to increase the human and social capital of youth while increasing awareness, productivity and engagement in local food action.

The model highlights the interconnectedness of social and economic issues and opportunities





Applying Praxis

Storytellers' Foundation designs, organizes, and implements experiential education within the informal arenas of community. Within these informal arenas people are learning all the time and, in doing so, are changing existing power relationships. This is learning for social change and it is occurring outside of the formal educational institutions. In their conversations, Freire and Horton⁸ say:

“Real liberation is achieved through popular participation. Participation in turn is realized through an educational practice that itself is both liberatory and participatory, that simultaneously creates a new society and involves the people themselves in the creation of their own knowledge”.



Learning in community helps us to find meaning in the world around us. When the learning happens in the informal arenas of community our natural ways of relating and our natural practices inform us of what is necessary to know. Our learning happens in relationship and, through these relationships, we learn for change. In the Upper Skeena, we have the comfort of knowing that the learning relationships are life-long because, as rural and land based people we aren't leaving home any time soon. And, we are far removed from the pull of urban living. This lets us be intentional and it lets us be organic. We have time to evolve and nurture relationships.

Storytellers' Foundation recognizes the interconnectedness of local issues and opportunities. It is from working in diversity that we are better equipped to see and understand this interconnectedness. Diversity in worldview is critical for a just society. The ecosystems that we are part of demonstrate how diversity is necessary for survival. If we learn to work in diversity and stay mindful that we are connected to place and to each other, we can create a just and healthy society

Storytellers' Foundation recognizes that community development service learning is a key tool for social change. People are learning throughout their lives. If this learning is highlighted then experience becomes a great teacher. If people are given opportunity and tools to reflect on their experience together, we can learn with and from each other to create better social and economic equality in our community. We can use our local knowledge to fulfill community visions.

⁸ We Make the Road by Walking. Conversations on Education and Social Change. Myles Horton and Paulo Freire, edited by Brenda Bell, John Gaventa and John Peters

Santropol Roulant uses informal education to support young people to connect with community issues. Through the use of conversation, question and reflection the organization is fostering intergenerational relationships while addressing issues of isolation, hunger and food insecurity. By offering experiential education the organization is increasing both the human and social capital of young and old alike. By building in an educational component to its work Santropol Roulant is ensuring that outcomes are first and foremost in the neighbourhood. And, it is fostering citizen activism among a youth population.

Learning for Social Outcomes in Santropol Roulant

[Santropol Roulant](#) is primarily a meals-on-wheels program. In this program young people deliver meals on wheels to local seniors. The program is a community organizing initiative, which offers young people an introduction in to various community food security initiatives while building intergenerational relationships. Santropol Roulant delivered its first meals in 1995. Since then, the Montreal community and other partners have welcomed it with much enthusiasm. Its programming has expanded to many projects including a Roof Top Garden, Kitchen and Bike workshops, Worm Composting and an Eco challenge. Projects are determined by many of the volunteers. This is able to happen because the organization supports young people to identify, and act on, their passions for community. Whatever the project, the organization focuses on building intergenerational relationships and breaking down isolation while increasing food security.

Over the past ten years through working and serving a variety of neighbourhoods in Montreal, partnerships and collaborations have developed naturally. Santropol Roulant is ideally located close to educational institutions. Links between the organization and nearby universities formed rapidly, in particular with McGill University, the alma mater of Chris and Keith, the two founders of Santropol Roulant. The two succeeded in involving young people who want to know more about their community, mostly students who come from outside of Montreal who are in the city for their studies. This has led to ongoing relationships with the university and with a continual supply of volunteers from the student-body. The organization has an extensive network and is linked with over 1,000 community collaborators.

The Organization is for Everyone

Santropol Roulant describe themselves as a “living organization”. This means that everyone involved in the organization gives and receives. No one is merely instrumental. No one is simply "serving" someone else. Volunteers, staff, and clients all contribute to the organization and are enriched by it. The organization says it doesn't look for ways to simply balance competing interests. “We look for ways to integrate them, so a meaningful experience for a client becomes a meaningful experience for a volunteer or staff member - and vice-versa.”

A Continual Development Process

Santropol Roulant does not offer a stagnant project nor is it an organization that charts its course with long-term development plans. Rather, it is a project that is constantly in an evolution dictated by the energy of its current and former employees and volunteers. The diverse activities that have shaped the organization have happened because certain employees and volunteers – and even certain clients (by their critiques and observations) – have believed in the organization and in the importance of its contributions.

Gradually, Santropol Roulant has been able to evolve its activities from only the original project. This improvement was made possible by the organization's efforts to inform itself about the satisfaction and the concerns of its employees, volunteers and clients. This process has been formalized in a

document entitled "organic evaluation": The organic evaluation allows for the natural emergence of problems through conversation, questioning and reflection. A close connection to the problems results in energy, speed and appropriateness in addressing them. It also allows the organization to get to the root of a problem. The approach of Santropol Roulant promotes the development of a stimulating environment where exchange, reflection and questioning are valued. Every week, the organization takes the time to update its activities, improve the quality of its services and allow for the emergence of new ideas.

Applying Praxis

That process of continued development is promoted by the organizational culture, in particular in the flexibility given to staff and in the participatory approach toward volunteers and employees. The organization takes the time to consciously promote learning, allowing young people and seniors to reflect on their experience and find meaning from that experience. By using conversation, question and reflection, the human capital of each individual involved with the organization is developed. And by building time in to each project activity for people to spend time together, the social capital of the neighbourhoods is also being developed.

By using reflection, the organization is continually applying informed action in their work. Santropol Roulant uses the knowledge of the seniors and the youth to shape and transform project activities. The organization then uses this knowledge to connect issues such as food security, isolation, health, and employment.

Facilitating a rigorous experiential learning component to their work means that Santropol Roulant ensures all those engaging with their projects are involved in detecting problems and suggesting solutions to organizational and neighbourhood issues. This participatory approach is even more successful because of the recognition and attention to an educational component.

Fostering Citizen Engagement in Canadian Schools

The McConnell Foundation supports formal institutions to engage in experiential learning. Through funds from this Foundation, high schools and post-secondary institutions can offer students the opportunity to apply classroom-based learning and skills for the benefit of community. The Foundation recognizes experiential learning as a critical tool in developing citizen engagement and addressing social, economic and environmental issues in Canadian communities. The Foundation seeks to create a culture of innovation and inquiry.

The purpose of The [J.W. McConnell Family Foundation](#) is to improve quality of life by building communities that help people to develop their talents and contribute to the common good.

The Foundation, through its grant contributions, stresses its role as a learning organization. It looks for innovative projects that can be replicated or have implications across Canada. The Foundation shares its learning and the learning of its grantees. It emphasizes a responsibility to knowledge sharing and knowledge management and so highlights learning in a comprehensive way on its website as well as links to grantee websites.

The Foundation has a strong emphasis on active citizenship and social capital. It offers opportunity for young people to get involved, for leadership to be diversified, and for people to take action on issues and activities that matter to them. With this in mind, the Foundation has funded many initiatives; one of these initiatives is Service Learning.

The Foundation refers to its service learning initiatives as Community Service Learning. Its intent for supporting Community Service Learning is to promote both a pedagogy for experiential learning and a tool to enhance contribution to community through active service. The Foundation recognizes that service learning has had a long experience in other countries, notably the US, but has only started in Canada relatively recently.

The Foundation recognizes the role that learning and service can play in helping community organizations. The Foundation has granted several million dollars over an extended period of time to encourage post-secondary institutions to play a role in helping community organizations. The Foundation hopes that Service Learning offers an opportunity for the universities to “leverage the learning, passion and energy of students and faculty as a way to develop real, practical knowledge for community organizations.”

The overall objective of this initiative is to build community resilience. It has four key goals:

- To enhance the learning experience for both students and faculty
- To create long-term commitment to community engagement for young people
- To encourage the academy to create institutional incentives for service learning
- To support the development of knowledge about service learning.

Experiential learning in a formal education setting

The McConnell Foundation in its Community Service Learning initiative focuses on formal education. Within this setting it is encouraging the Institution to use experiential education as a form of practice. In this form of experiential education, students apply their learning from courses by giving service to a community organization. In this approach the institution has a responsibility to highlight how learning can be used for the common good of society. This can help a student understand that learning is about citizenship, rather than only passing grades in a course or program. It can also make tangible for young people the benefits that come from contributing to society. This approach highlights a key difference between Service Learning, which emerges from a formal educational context, and Community Development Service Learning, which emerges from an informal educational context, most often the community.

Both forms of experiential education are beneficial to building healthy, resilient communities in Canada. Through support of Foundations such as the McConnell Foundation, we have the opportunity to deepen our understanding of how universities can partner with communities to share knowledge and increase local community health.

Peer Learning for Transformative Change

The [Canadian Community Economic Development Network](#) (CCEDNet) is a national non-governmental charitable organization established to support the work of community organizations that are creating economic opportunities and enhancing social conditions in Canada. The membership of CCEDNet is made up of hundreds of community groups, municipalities, foundations, and practitioners from every region of the country.

CCEDNet both supports local organizations to use learning for social outcomes and facilitates peer learning among its membership. As a learning organization, the Network encourages its membership to learn with and from each other. CCEDNet applies experiential learning in most of its activities particularly action research, peer learning, and informal education activities. It uses conversation, reflection, inquiry and shared experience to build capacity between the membership and also between staff of the organization.

The Network is a member-driven organization that seeks to increase the scale and effectiveness of community economic development (CED) -- helping organizations and individuals strengthen their communities and create solutions to local needs.

The vision is that the Network will strengthen community economic development in urban, rural, northern and Aboriginal communities across Canada, and contribute to better social, economic and environmental conditions at the local level.

The Network recognizes that social, economic, cultural and environmental issues are connected. Their work demonstrates this – as a member-led organization there are many committees that direct CCEDNet's work. These committees include a focus on youth, immigrants and refugees, CED sector strengthening, poverty reduction, international, policy and research.

The Network organizes a variety of learning activities and events for members to share experiences, converse with one another and, ultimately, learn from one another. Learning events are organized both by staff and member-volunteers. The focus is on participatory process and experiential education.

The Network has an active website that is dedicated to peer learning. On this site there are tool kits, case studies, research reports and resource links widely accessible to members and non-members alike. This electronic peer-learning site also has a member area where members can e-chat and join a selection of on-line learning activities.

The CCEDNet membership is organized into regions across the country. Each region has a coordinator and a regional council. Similar to committees, each council uses electronic communication to exchange information, plan advocacy work and engage in peer-learning. The notes from each of these activities are available to all members. The local issues that emerge are then used by CCEDNet staff for advocacy work for policy reform.

The Network consciously tries to foster environments for transformative learning. Budd Hall writes,

Transformative learning is an attempt to conceptualize an inclusive educational process, which describes the practice by which individuals within their social locations join together with each other and others in order to take action. It aims to empower people to feel more confident and take a leading role in formulating strategies that challenge oppressive situations and structures. Therefore, it involves a high degree of participation, recognizes mutual learning, stresses the creation of new knowledge and is directed towards social, economic or other forms of justice and democracy.⁹

⁹ "Transformative Education" by Hall and Sullivan for the "Transformative Learning Through Environmental Action" IDRC funded-research project, 1993-1994.

This is a fitting description of what CCEDNet aspires to achieve amongst its members. And it clearly describes the fit between learning for social outcomes and community economic development.

Next Steps

Through this project, CCEDNet is supporting peer-learning opportunities for CED organizations to engage in the informal education arena of community. The intent of the Community Development Service Learning Initiative is to deepen our understanding of how community organization's can use learning for social outcomes, which are first and foremost determined by, and the results seen, in the local community.

We want to explore the different implications on community when service learning is initiated by post-secondary institutions and when it is initiated by organizations within the community. And, we want to create a plan for peer learning so that CCEDNet can continue to support local organizations to use learning as a tool for social and economic change.

If you are interested in participating in this dialogue please contact [Kerri Klein](#) for information on the upcoming tele learning series.