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Table of Contents

Learning in Adulthood	2
Informal Learning	2
Gender, Age and Access to Time.....	3
The Importance of Reflection	4
The Role of Educators	6
Developing Communities.....	7
Defining Community.....	7
Democracy, Active Citizenship, and Civil Society.....	9
Fostering Leadership	11
Understanding Place	13
Place & Space	13
Perspectives on Place	15
Sites of Learning	17
References	19

Learning in Adulthood

Where one type of learning ends and another begins within adult education can often be unclear. Because of this, it is important to recognize the relationships between the three types of learning—formal, nonformal, and informal, and the contexts where each is found (Boeren, 2011; Chang, 2014). To aid in understanding these relationships, in particular where informal learning begins, academics have provided charts (Boeren, 2011), diagrams (Boeren, 2011), context-specific definitions (Peeters, 2014), and frameworks (REF).

Informal Learning

Beginning with a model comprising of three distinct forms—self-directed, incidental, and tactic (Peeters, 2014, [pp.](#)), a fourth if Bennett’s (2012) integrative learning is included, it is generally understood that informal learning takes place across the three domains of life—professional, educational, and personal (Boeren, 2011; Peeters, 2014; Mackean, 2011; Chang, 2014; Delaney, 2010; Gouthro, 2010; Mundel, 2008; Szabados, 2012). However, ubiquitous as it may be informal learning is often neglected in study due to the difficulty in pinpointing it as it happens (Mackean, 2011; Peeters, 2014). Peeters is forthright in his assessment of informal learning as a field of study, noting that a lack of available insights makes it challenging to speak of leading to feelings of illegitimacy when compared to the other types of learning ([pp.](#)).

To better understand and facilitate informal learning educators should recognize the value of lived experiences. Promoting individual and community empowerment (Delaney, 2010) and consciousness raising from the bottom-up (Freire, 1970), “the resource of highest value in adult education is the learner’s experience” (Lindeman, 1926/1982, p. 121; Mundel, 2008). Ira Shor (1992) builds upon Paulo Freire’s work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) in addressing

experiences in the form of participation. Shor notes that education acts as “a door to empowerment” (pp.) and is a “complex experience” (pp.) based in the context at any given point in an individual’s life. Coady (1939) shares this belief, noting that experiences shape an individual’s attitude, environment, and the world around them.

Even for all the value it may provide informal learning is not perfect. Informal learning “may not be recognized even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills” (Longworth, 2003, p. 45). It may be only with reflection—after the fact—that such learning can take place (Mundel, 2008; Peeters, 2014). Peeters (2014) cautions that informal learning can have negative outcomes, while Gore (199), Knowles (2005), and Prins et al (2010) agree that educators have a responsibility to foster these learning experiences carefully.

While present in almost any situation, informal learning happens most often in workplace environments, social settings, and during periods of transition within life. Present within these sites of learning are factors such as gender, age, and a surplus of time, which contribute to an individual’s capacity to fully realize and appreciate their learning experiences.

Gender, Age and Access to Time

Family, work, and community commitments, can significantly shape learners’ informal learning experiences (Gouthro, 2010; McKee, 2013; Peeters, 2014). However, both gender and age can impact an individual’s access to such experience and their capacity to meaningfully contribute to the communities they are a part of.

It is noted that there is a general lack of time for most people to contribute in their communities (Gouthro, 2010). This absence of available time limits the ability for individuals to volunteer and access the informal learning experiences which exist within them (Mundel, 2008). As males tend to work more often than their female counterparts in the traditional workplace

they primarily experience informal learning there (Boeren, 2011). For females, learning opportunities are found more often within volunteer roles and social settings (Mackean, 2011). A reduction in formal working hours can provide females—and seniors—with an opportunity to contribute more often to the volunteer labour pool and be exposed to informal learning opportunities as a result (Gouthro, 2010).

In retirement, an increased amount of disposable time can enable an individual to contribute more to community development and have their wealth of knowledge leveraged (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). But, additional time can also impact an individual's reception to and need for learning experiences (Meshram, 2013). Informal learning can help to ease such transitions in life as the capacity to learn remains in old age while formal learning opportunities decrease (Mackean, 2011). With reduced connections to professional and established communities, disengagement can be a concern. Social interactions and their paired learning experiences are important for both females and seniors as they can provide a sense of empowerment, create a sense of belonging, and help to increase self-esteem (Meshram, 2013; Prins, 2010; Peeters, 2014).

Learning can take place in most any setting, although an individual's access to these experiences may be limited by their gender, age, or access to time. Therefore, finding value in learning experiences becomes more important, regardless of access. However, deriving meaning from informal learning experiences may not always be possible in the absence of reflection.

The Importance of Reflection

Reflection is important to any learning experience regardless of community, culture, or demographic. Reflection acts as a tool to develop consciousness (Mundel, 2008) while enabling conscientização (critical consciousness), the ability to “perceive social, political, and economic

contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” ([Freire, 1970, pp. 35](#)). Missing from a banking model of education, reflection is a necessary component to the critical pedagogy problem posing approach to education (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992).

Given that learning happens primarily through doing and reflecting after the fact, developing a praxis is critical for building upon experiences, helping to explain actions and beliefs (Freire, 1970; Mundel, 2008; Peeters, 2014). With informal learning reflection becomes increasingly important. Although learning can happen through both formal and informal reflection (Mundel, 2008), intentional and deliberate reflection after the fact is essential (Peeters, 2014). Both educators and learners who recognize that space and time must be created for deliberate reflection (Mundel, 2008) help to differentiate between learners as Objects versus Subjects (Freire, 1970)—the former the result of a banking model approach to education, the latter a critical component in a problem posing approach.

Intentional and collective critical reflection can help to bring together perspectives for the common good (Mundel, 2008; Shor, 1992), this includes the changing of complex social structures (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Prins, 2010). Mundel (2008) notes the need to proceed with caution as negative outcomes can occur depending on the educator, organization, or their mandate for reflective practice. Educators should aim to be cautious when facilitating activities of reflection. Even for the purposes of fostering “empowered students [to] make meaning and act from reflection” ([Shor, 1992, pp.](#)) educators should avoid imposing any personal biases (Gore 1990; Prins, 2010) or hierarchical power structures (Gaventa, 2006) upon learners.

It has been noted that educators are not absolved from participating in reflection themselves. “The teacher who refuses to criticize conditions as they exist invites suspicion” ([Coady, 1939, pp.](#)). If “not concerned with [their] inner well-being” ([hooks, 1994, pp. 17](#))

educators may be threatened by the environments they serve students in. Often constrained in their work, educators should question their own thoughts to improve their actions through the act of reflection (Freire, 1970; Gore, 1990).

The Role of Educators

As a tool to develop a more active citizenry, education can "enable the intellectual being to use his intellect in such a way as to determine which things are possible and which things are not" ([Coady, 1939, pp.](#); Mathie, 2015). For others, the purpose of education is human and class liberation within oppressive societies (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). Building upon the notion of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970; McKee, 2013; Shor, 1992), education is seen as a tool, resource, and as a "practice of freedom" (hooks, 1994). If this is so, what then is the role of an educator?

In considering the co-operative power of individuals to be "masters of their own destiny," Coady (1939) understands that educators can empower man to "appreciate heritage [experiences] and express [reflect] upon himself" ([pp.](#)). Toomey (2011) identifies traditional and alternative roles that practitioners play, while Westoby (2016) situates educators along a spectrum—from instructor to reformist. Knowles (2005) encourages educators to "enable each individual to achieve his or her full and unique potential" ([pp.](#)), because as practitioners their role is "to build on students' strengths to increase their capacity" ([McKee, 2013, pp.](#)). Agreeing that educators should function as leaders who can release the power in others (hooks, 1994; Knowles, 2005; McKee, 2013) some scholars take this idea further. Noting educators as "healers" ([hooks, 1994, pp., referencing Thich Nhat Hanh](#)) or as comrades and not as masters ([Freire, 1970, pp.](#)), the idea of the educator as a leader can be found within economic (Coady, 1939) and more traditional contexts of learning (McKee, 2013; Peeters, 2014).

The relationship between teacher and student is mutually beneficial one. In the process of co-creating learning experiences (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992) teachers can grow and be empowered but only if they allow themselves to be vulnerable while working with students (hooks, 1994). However, educators should be aware of the hierarchical relationships (Freire, 1970; Gore, 1990; Shor, 1992) and the power structures they function within (Gaventa, 2006; hooks, 1994; Prins, 2010; Mathie, ????) as to not influence learner's experiences based on their own biases.

Scholars agree that informal learning can take place almost anywhere (Chang, 2014; Delaney, 2010; Mackean, 2011) with volunteer and community development roles providing valuable experiences (Gouthro, 2010; Mundel, 2008). With a shared history, adult education and community development are closely linked (Coady 1939; Freire, 1970; Mathie, 2008; English, 2012; Shaw, 2013) and any review of relevant literature should contain perspectives on both.

Developing Communities

How communities develop depends on both internal and external factors. For decades, scholars have studied the way community is defined, the role citizens play in a participatory democracy, and how practitioners can foster leadership as key elements which shape the way communities evolve. These elements collectively also provide opportunities for volunteerism and informal learning to be more tightly integrated into community.

Defining Community

Traditionally, scholars have categorized community into two distinct groups; spatial or geographic, an functional or symbolic (references from Delaney, [2010](#)). In more recent years, a more balanced understanding of community has been investigated (REF). Now, how our embedded cultures shape where we gather are included in definitions of community.

In the latter half of the 20th century, scholars have considered community beyond a defining element of place. Webber (1964) and Bhattacharyya (2004) argue that place should be disconnected from the idea of community, “the social relations that bond people”, while Bridger (2008) recognizes that ambiguity exists in these understandings, “Places are not *necessarily* communities” (REF, [emphasis added](#)). Offering an alternative, Bradshaw suggests that “sense of identity” (REF) might be a more useful way to define community as it considers the changing movements and habits of citizens (REF). Supporting a change in perspective, Johnson (2010) offers thoughts on localness as a commonality between differing knowledge systems ([pp.](#)) an understanding which goes “beyond the confines of place” (Mathie, 2008, [pp.](#)).

Still, the idea of community may relate more to social, economic, or cultural characteristics. Bridger (2006) offers that economic changes “alter the relationships between people and the relationships between people and places” ([pp.](#)) while Coady maintains a belief that economic cooperation is the bedrock of all communities. Johnson (2010) is more concerned there is a missing connection to “the significant culture histories and moralities that are stored in our landscapes” ([pp.](#)) as we consider and engage with place. Connecting this concern to community development, both Mathie (2017) and Adekola (2015) look to the traditional African ethic Ubuntu which states, “I am because we are” (ref). Defining community not only by location but by culture and histories has the potential to highlight cultural and religious associations as sites where community can be found (Chang, 2014; Kretzman & McKnight, 1993).

As individuals become connected to community they often develop an identity and sense of belonging, and as a result participate more in their community. Some scholars indicate that as individuals show greater interest in shaping their communities they shift from being clients of the

existing structures and organizations, to becoming active citizens who shape society around them.

Democracy, Active Citizenship, and Civil Society

Scholars have identified a shift in thinking regarding active citizenship along two dimensions: vertical—how citizens interact with, shape, and claim rights when dealing with government, and horizontal—how they interact with each other out of a sense of civic duty ([Mathie, 2015](#), OTHERS?). The power of an engaged populous has the potential to “humanize capitalism”—nurturing assets in even the poorest of communities, while holding governments accountable for their actions ([Edwards, 1999](#) via Mathie, 2005). As a group of “noble, independent, energetic” ([Coady, 1939, pp.](#)) individuals who are willing to work to improve their conditions, active citizens may be the “only hope of democracy” (pp).

Building upon the work of Haus and Sweeting (2006), Delaney (2010) identifies the strength in a participatory democracy approach for building communities. When citizens interact with one another to improve the common good they contribute to a “collective knowledge that informs community action” ([Delaney, 2010](#)). The result of such an approach is that all of society, including the capitalist and economic drivers, benefits as a result (Coady, 1939). However, it is only when individuals come together in a collective and take control of their own place in society can they create the change they wish to see (Coady, 1939; Freire, 1979). While their actions may serve a broader purpose and the larger community (Peeters, 2014), citizens who are more active in their community may do so with self-serving motivations rather than the act of participation being the primary motivator (Gouthro, 2010).

Concerned with increased citizen participation, Delaney (2010) questions whether citizens elected to represent their communities actually complete work in the best interest of the

broader collective they aim to serve ([pp.](#)). Additionally, why citizens participate needs to be kept top of mind. Rather than focusing on the needs of communities (Kretzman & McKnight, 1996; Mathie, YYYY), if citizen participation is increased through government programs alone citizens may become preoccupied with the business of the state rather than improving their own conditions. (Gouthro, INCLUDE HERE?; Shaw, 2013).

Understanding the roles citizens hold within their community is as important as knowing why individuals choose to play an active role. Mathie et al (2008) sees a transition of communities and their members, as noted by the title of their collection—*From Clients to Citizens*. As citizens take greater ownership over their wellbeing, working with—and often against—governments and established organizations, communities can create a collective identity and become further empowered to create change (Coady, 1939; English, 2012). In other terms, citizens become ““makers and shapers” of their own future, not just “users and choosers” of services and options defined by others” ([Mathie, 2015](#)).

While citizens may assume greater responsibility there remains a role for government and corporations in the development process (English, 2012). Citizens should be present as new laws and policies are shaped (Mathie, 2015), consulting and collaborating with community-based organizations and government to foster active citizenship (Gouthro, 2010; Shaw, 2013). As they engage with commercial or governmental entities citizens should remain aware of competing or ulterior motives. State or corporate interests may have a level of influence over local democracy and may “prevail at the expense of community interests” (Shaw, 2013, [pp.](#)). Citizens should keep this top of mind while working to develop authentic communities for the betterment of all as to not negate any progress they may make (Kretzman, Mathie, Gaventa).

As citizens become more active in shaping their communities they can transform from constituents, to members, and ultimately to leaders (Wilson, 2994). Given that the characteristics of leadership for community development efforts can often be under-appreciated (Kahane, 2008) it is critical for practitioners to identify and foster effective leadership for citizen-led change.

Fostering Leadership

As with developing communities, fostering new leadership should to begin within the community itself. Acting as leaders themselves within the process of community development, practitioners play an important role in identifying likely leaders across communities (Freire, 1970; Knowles, 2005; Shor, 1992). While the process may not be easy, it is important that practitioners work with community leaders to support the transition from clients to citizens.

Within community settings, effective leaders are likely to be “of the place” rather than an outsider (Mathie, 2015, pp.). This is an important distinction as leaders “must avoid organizing themselves apart from the people“ (Freire, 1970, pp.). Locals motivated by personal experience often self-identify as leaders which displays a sense of mastery (Mckee or Delaney?). In doing so, leaders exemplify self-empowerment which often directly relates to the collective ability of the community in which they reside (Delaney, 2010).

The process of identifying leaders can prove challenging for practitioners. Given their underrepresentation in governance structures across North America, leadership development opportunities should be provided to groups that may have limited access due to societal hierarchies or discriminatory practices (Skerratt, 2013; Foroughi, 2013). Providing leadership opportunities for disadvantaged groups can have an empowering effect (Boeren, 2011; Prins, 2010; Peeters, 2014). Both practitioners and members should remain aware of this when fostering new and established community leaders.

Individuals who “think critically about community issues and have the desire to create community change” ([Delaney, 2010](#)) are likely to be the individuals that no longer see themselves as Objects but rather as Subjects in society ([Freire, 1970, pp.:](#)). This is an important distinction. Action taken by someone who simply imagines they have power is neither sustainable or fulfilling in the process of self and community liberation ([Freire, 1970, pp.:](#)). However, leaders may not always want to be identified or may choose to lead through less visible efforts. Skerratt (2013) notes that while citizens may take public leadership roles, others may choose non-participation as a legitimate way to lead. Such a choice is made from a position of power and should not be ignored or negated as a sign of weakness. Additionally, “the engagement of key individuals or community leaders might not only be insufficient but destructive. It is likely that certain structures of power or ‘partial empowerment’ disempowers communities as a whole” (Skerratt, 2013, [pp.](#)). Educators, practitioners and established leaders must be aware of potential consequences when grooming new leaders within their community.

While leaders do have a role in coordinating and directing others, they need to be cautious, which echoes the leadership roles which educators assume in learning environments (see Role of Educators). Established community leaders need to be careful as to not impose their thoughts, words or opinions on others as this would “invalidate” their own praxis (Freire, 1970 [pp.](#)). The role of the “revolutionary leader” ([Freire, 1970, pp.](#) or [this](#)) should be to support learners and citizens to build the capacity that exists within them (Coady, 1939, McKee, 2013).

How a community is defined directly impacts an individual’s feeling of and the likelihood that they will play an active role in its development. As citizens exhibit greater interest in community, practitioners may find it easier to foster new leaders amongst a group. As

communities are inherently place dependent, awareness of the differing perspectives on place can inform a knowing of why citizens feel connections to place and assume leadership roles.

Understanding Place

In *The Production of Space* (1992) Lefebvre argued that “the world is organized by not only what takes place, but also where it takes place” (pp.). Since this seminal work, scholars have formed theories both in favour (REF) and against (REF) the role place has in shaping learning and community. Whether defined by spatial boundaries which draw people together ([Meshram](#)), or the absence of place in understanding the term community (Bradshaw, 2008), the concept of place appears to be ill-defined at best (Agnew, 2005). Regardless, both the public and academic community are paying attention to place ([Bridger, 2006](#)). Place connects on a personal level, prescribes meaning, offers sites of learning and community, and helps individuals to form a sense of belonging with where they are.

Place & Space

Terminology such as place and space can be confusing. Interchangeable language—place, space, social space, community etc.—creates inconsistencies in understanding (Kudryavtsev, 2012) which can lead to question being asked such as, “What Is Place?” (Nesbit, 2010, [pp.](#)). For many “the production of space”, as Lefebvre (1992) succinctly phrased it, provides a beginning point for understanding this complicated spatial concept.

Grunewald (2003) offers that, “Space is the medium through which culture is reproduced” ([pp.](#)). Evaluating this notion against a place-conscious approach to education, Grunewald identifies that it is place which is associated with cultural space, compared to space which can be more arithmetically defined ([pp.](#)). This perspective, that place is more than just a

mathematical equation, is a concept that other scholars agree on. Other academics identify place as a “social space” (Nesbit, 2010; Foroughi, 2013; Lefebvre, 1992; Bridger, 2006), a “verb of action” (Buell, 2001), site of power relations (Geventa, 2006), and as “space to which meaning is ascribed” (Byrnes 2001). While scholars agree that place differs from space, what creates this difference is up for debate.

The idea that “anyone can be a place-maker” (Johnson, 2010, [pp.](#)) becomes less of a conversation about city building roles (Bridger, 2006) and more about how individuals feel connected to space. Personal connections in various levels of community supports the notion that spaces are shaped by those within them (Bradshaw, 2008; Foroughi, 2013; Johnson, 2010;). Recognizing experiences as a site of learning leads way to appreciating that our relationships with space may be a form of learning in of itself (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Grunewald, 2003). While, the discussion of whether meaning is prescribed or ascribed is as contentious of an issue as the divide between place and space itself. From within the individual (Bradshaw, 2008; Bridger, 2006; Foroughi, 2013; Geventa, 2006; Kudyravtsev, 2012) or the places themselves (Grunewald, 2003; Johnson, 2010), how meaning is created is up also for debate.

Regardless, place matters, even in post-place communities (Bradshaw, 2008, pp.). However, “Western understandings of place and space, which stipulate them as Cartesian or Euclidean constructs, are too restrictive for understanding their role in educational settings.” (Nesbit, 2010, [pp.](#)). As such, scholars are focusing their attention on identifying differing perspectives of place grounded in cultural, ecological, and social traditions.

Perspectives on Place

It is important to pay attention to the larger cultural contexts of place. Where citizens—or place-makers—are educated directly relates to social context and the production of space (Grunewald, 2003). However, as Nesbit et al (2010) points out, Western understandings of place and space can be restrictive and perspectives situated in other traditions can inform a more balanced appreciation of place.

As social dynamics change it has become increasingly more important to appreciate cultural representations of place (Foroughi, 2013; Grunewald, 2003). This is important as learning is inseparable from the cultural and social contexts it takes place within (Nesbit et al, 2010). Attention should be paid to the “significant cultural histories” (Johnson, 2010, [pp.](#)) that may be missing from understandings of place. Without such perspectives, inaccessible interpretations of place can exclude populations from participating in spaces (Foroughi, 2013). Identifying cultural perspectives can help to build a more informed approach to place-based education (Grunewald, 2003) and understandings of how groups identify and find belonging in place (REF).

Grunewald (2003) calls for Native American and indigenous traditions to be considered when analyzing the power of place. Johnson (2010) begins to address this lack of knowledge by connecting indigenous understandings of place to a sense of “placelessness” ([pp.](#)) within Western society. Place is complex and is linked—if only conceptually—to our being (Ortiz, 2007). Only when place is examined critically from all perspectives may a more balanced understanding can be established.

Through a multidisciplinary framework, Grunewald (2003) considers indigenous perspectives on place as well as those rooted in bioregional thinking ([pp.](#)), ecofeminist

understandings (pp.), and natural histories (pp.). Connecting these perspectives to place-based education, Kudryavtsev (2012) emphasises the role of sense of place in environmental education. Motivated to protect the places which are meaningful to them, “it is possible that some cultural, social, and other place meanings do impact the ways people influence their places and more broadly their environment.” (pp.) This perspective provides balance against more stringent outlooks on place rooted in traditional spatial concepts such as mathematics.

For many scholars, a social perspective on place is often at the forefront of their contributions. Meshram (2013) notes the power of place for the purposes of empowerment and reducing isolation, Bridger (2006) for the creation and dissemination of social capital, and English (2014) and Foroughi (2013) for the purposes of community development. With that said, Bradshaw (2008) seems to be conflicted on a social perspective of place. Citing Bhattacharyya (2004) and Webber (1964) Bradshaw notes that, “place ... needs to be decoupled from the essential characteristics of community—the social relations that bond people.” (pp.) further supporting his argument for communities that aren’t tied to place. Bradshaw then notes that, “something is lost in places that are not also communities, especially collective action and bonding social capital” (pp.). This complex understanding of place, even from a Western perspective, illustrates why cultural, indigenous, and ecological perspectives are important for the development of an more informed concept of place.

As diverse perspectives are considered, their role in shaping the places where individuals learn can influence how citizens are engaged and new leaders fostered. “What we know is, in large part, shaped by the kinds of places we experience and the attention we give them” (Gruenewald, 2003, pp.). Understanding how this relationship manifests itself across sites of learning within community has the potential to change how learning is perceived.

Sites of Learning

The sites of adult learning within community are increasing being studied, though there is still a need to broaden their understanding (Chang, 2014). As scholars share their perceptions of the traditional, social, and experiential learning found “deliberatively and consciously integrated into [locations of] community development” (English, 2012, [pp.](#)) the notion that “places are profoundly pedagogical” (Gruenewald, 2003, [pp.](#)) becomes more apparent.

Context shapes both the type and value of learning experiences. Noting that there may be limitations within some environments to fully empower students (Gore, 1990), and that some sites of learning can be disempowering (Shor, 1992), it is important to frame a learning expectations within a specific location. Given that some sites are more accessible than others, due to gender, social groups, or cultural background (Boeren, 2011; Mackean, 2011; Prins, 2010; Peeters, 2014) it is important to provide learning environments for diverse populations.

Social spaces created by adult education programs are important for building community, relationships of trust, and for providing citizens with an opportunities to be empowered. Pioneering examples of such spaces include the Highlander Research and Education Centre—an organization that uses popular education, participatory research, and cultural work to develop community leaders (Horton & Freire, 1990), and the Extension Department at St. Francis Xavier University—which mobilizes people based on their interests and abilities to create change (Coady, 1939). Building upon the work of these institutions, almost every social unit in a community can be seen as a site for adult learning (Chang, 2014). Spaces which foster a “dialogical process” (Delaney, 2010), including cultural and religious institutions (Chang, 2014; Kretzman, 1993), create places where people can unite around common ideas (gouthro, 2010),

come together to learn from each other's wisdom (Meshram, YYYY), and make accessible to the broader public popular education techniques (English, 2012).

Approaching learning through a situated model (McKee, 2013; Shor, 1992) beginning with the experiences of learners themselves, has the potential to transform every site—space or place—into a site of learning (Chang, 2014; Lindeman, 1926/1982). The school is no longer the only place where one's self can be reinvented (hooks, 1994). As learning is tailored to the needs and circumstance of the students it becomes accessible and more effective in the process (McKee, 2013). As participation increases so does ownership over the process, while the conditions that foster alienation decrease ([Shor, 1992](#)). Furthermore, when students focus on developing a praxis the act of reflecting or theorizing in of itself has the potential to become of a site of learning (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). Conceptualizing sites of learning in this way, beyond physical characteristics, has the potential to transform where, when and how individuals learn.

Where we learn may be as important as is what we learn. As such, we need to be careful as to not lose connection with our places, in learning and in community. “Educational disregard for places, therefore, limits the possibilities for democracy (and for places) because it diverts the attention of citizens, educators, and students from the social, cultural, and political patterns involved in place making.” (Gruenewald, 2003, [pp.](#)). Developing a more thorough appreciation for the connections between place, community, and adult learning can be liberating. Understanding such connections may help to better understand the power structures embedded within society, the relationships of trust critical to individual livelihood, and the importance of building bonds with one's community.

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