**Personal Learning Audit: Major Assignment #2 Sections 1, 4, 5**

**Personal Learning/Teaching Journal, External Learning Audit,**

**Learning Audit Action Plan**

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**Abstract**

This second major assignment for EHRD 630 is a continuation of personal reflection and analysis while adding application of our learnings through personal objectives. The goal is to continue our reflections while also implementing our learning and experimenting on ourselves.

The assignment includes three sections. The first section is a personal learning/teaching journal serving as a continuous process from day one of the course until its completion. This journal is a place to synthesize ideas and content into professional experiences as well as catalog one’s learning. The following section (4) is an external learning audit. It is an opportunity to interview outside experts as well as fellow learners in a field of chosen study. Finally, section five is the learning audit action plan. This section is to translate the information and ideas we have encountered in our coursework and interviews into a measurable plan with clearly defined goals and observable progress markers.

**Section 1: Personal Learning/Teaching Journal**

Journal Entry Week 6

In the TED talk, "Aging: It's not what you think," Thad Polk exposes assumptions about aging and the brain that confront commonly held beliefs on the subject equating aging with an inevitable mental downhill. His talk illuminates many misconceptions and introduces more hope as we isolate and investigate various types of brain function. He also simple declares that when it comes to the biology of intelligence, we just don’t know. As a human being, that is so humbling to hear. The one part of intelligence that could be tangible, the brain, is perhaps the most mysterious. Personally, I appreciate the notion that the brain doesn’t easily yield its ways. I like that intelligence wants to be respected and not dissected. It doesn’t show its cards easily. If intelligence were easily isolated and alterable under a scalpel and laser the medical community would be at odds with the ethics of how to manage the demand for intelligence augmenting procedures. I like the illusive nature of intelligence because it has an effect of evening the playing field of social, racial, and religious divisions. That isn't to say that we are all given equal opportunities to work with our intelligence, but it does mean it isn't preprogrammed. My mother, a professional K12 educator and Doctor of Education, has a mantra of "you are as smart as you want to be." She has seen that simple phrase undermine the working of personal biographical narratives and family stories. It can release agency in the hearts and wills of those who want to succeed and there isn’t a gene or a part of the brain that can be pointed to in opposition.

In my professional field, working with unschooled women, I loved recognizing and affirming intelligence in them when I observed it. I was reminded of this reading on Schaie's perspective regarding the concept of intelligence being defined unitarily or with a multiplicity of factors (p.367 Merriam). He was referring to how intelligence scores or fares over age, but I can also see as it scores or fares over demographics. Meaning that when intelligence is equated with literacy or complex mathematics the women I work with would all score quite low. But if the intelligence testing included nuances of financial frugality in impoverished areas or equity stored in relationships and how and when to make deposits and withdraws for the community to survive, many of them would score well off the charts.

As a learner and reader, I appreciated the humility in the final pages of Learning in Adulthood. Merriam saying that we need more data, we need to hear from more voices and voices of the learners too, in order to have a fuller picture of adult learning. Her language felt like she was hungry to learn and to learn in a 360-degree capacity (p. 438). Being around people who are expectant to learn is incredibly invigorating. That is noteworthy as an instructor. When we present ourselves as engaged learners too we undoubtedly will be part of the inspiration process in our learners. This is one of the reasons I like Jane Vella's Dialogue Education model, because, "the dialogue is not a dialogue between teacher and her learner, but among learners, of whom the teacher is one" (xxi Vella).

Journal Entry Week 8

The readings about Islamic learning is urging me to be far more critical than I typically am. This is due to the divergence of what I am reading and what I have experienced while living, learning and teaching in the Muslim majority nation of Morocco. I mentally can understand the dissonance between aspired values of a people versus actual values, but it is difficult when actual practices are swept under the rug in the name of people not practicing “true Islam.” But as we have already spoken of, culture eats strategy for lunch so understanding that the contributors to the section of Islamic learning were coming from a primarily Malaysian Muslim perspective was helpful. Islam looks radically different depending on the society it is followed by. Clifford Geertz's Islam Observed excellently contrasts Southeast Asian Islam, Indonesia, with the Islam in the western reaches of the Islamic world (namely Morocco). And it looks still different when expressed as a minority religion within further west contexts in Europe and the United States. You cannot say you have met a Muslim convert in San Francisco and therefore say you understand Muslims in Libya, or India. Despite my personal critic of this section, I am thankful for the opportunity it gave me as it opened me up to the read other chapters more critically in general. Not with disbelief, but with less naivety that I would typically bring to a text. Not expecting that any writers are expressly trying to misguide me but expecting that they too are writing from their context and articulating the aspired values and not addressing the problematic real-world challenges that could be at odds with those values.

As for the Lakota learning explained by Dr. Donald Warne, I particularly enjoyed the mental, emotional, physical, spiritual framework he highlighted as a holistic map for Lakota health equity (Warne). I was reminded me of Illeris' approach as well as a story from our development work. It isn’t necessary that you agree with another's world view in order to work within it. You must at minimum regard it, ideally respect it, because if you don’t work efforts are foolish, useless and possibly harmful. The transformational development book, Walking with the Poor, recounts the story of a well-digging project that does research to dig wells for a particular impoverished community. After completing a needs assessment the project team digs the well only to find out the that land is “cursed” and therefore the villagers will not use the well. The project team did not have a spiritual framework for conducting their needs assessments, but the community did. So, the project was a waste (save the learning tool it has become)! Myers encourages us that, “whether we agree or not, these domains of the unseen spiritual world are where the community will tend to locate the cause of its problems and the hope for their solutions” (Myers, p.141). As a development practitioner, you do not have to share the spiritual beliefs with the people in your community of engagement, but you must allow their beliefs to inform the project.

Journal Entry Week 11

The need to be ever flexible, humble, always willing to learn, and relearn has been a key aspect of this past week. Due to the global pandemic of COVID-19 my life has been held in a perpetual question these days. In the course of one week my most time dominating roles dramatically expanded as my three kids' school closed its doors and I am found unexpectedly homeschooling, in French, while working professionally with teams and projects globally that require attention and oversight, both related to the crisis and not. So my reflections have been minimal this week which I regret, because I deeply enjoyed McGrath’s writing about Vocational Education Training (VET). My experience of observing the effects and management of technical skills classes in Morocco would be able to fill pages with the positive and the potential as well as the abusive, manipulative angles. When the start is focused on productivity as the goal instead of human flourishing it leads to greater corruption and unintentional negative results. I personally have seen the beautiful power of human development in various circumstances. Most recently with a woman named Hyatt as she gained her voice and then was able to access the skills she had learned.

I personally enjoy reading about different cultural belief structures and societal systems like we read in Chapters 4 and 7 of Non-Western Perspectives on Learning and Knowing. I appreciate finding commonality that allows me to reflect on the way we (humans) all find our versions of enlightenment. I also look for distinctives knowing that each path is different. I believe that to merge and insist on too much alignment robs some dignity in the process from us all. At least that is my opinion, and like I just wrote I'd expect some to agree with parts of that and some to not at all. And I suppose I need to be okay with that! As I learned more about the Hindu tradition I pondered the power of a religion or philosophical view of life that has been in existence for more than four millennia yet without a centralized organization or single founder I thought of the distinction between a starfish and a spider from an organizational perspective. Captured clearly in the business book The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations, by Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom. Brafman and Beckstrom demonstrate the nimble, quick, and exponential power of something that cannot be stepped on and squashed, but in fact has multiple regeneration points in order to increase the life of the whole. In my opinion, it undoubtably requires us to develop or embrace a high value for tolerance because what you lose in this set up is the semblance on overarching control. Regarding learning I saw the dual directions of learning of outward and inward a great balanced approach to maturity and growth. This idea seems to be supported well as we look in nature and physics. As you observe the strongest and healthiest structures and life forms, they have these in proportion. When narrowing in on the specifics of Hindu learning and particularly the historic divide on the perspective of male and female development I cannot help but take offense and wonder what riches would have been unlocked had women also been allowed the access to these rites of passage as oppose to being seen as external decorations to the males phases. As we have discussed in various other readings a key aspect of learning is meaning making. I would find it difficult as a Hindu woman (at least of the past) to find fulfilling meaning exclusively in the roles expressed in this chapter. Furthermore, I find the renunciation of the physical world to be antithetical to the more holistic examples of learning we have seen in other cultures like the American Indian Indigenousness pedagogy or even the trendier examples of Embodied learning taking place in modern science classes. My personal convictions and experiences do not incline me towards a Hindu philosophy primarily because I do not see the development of identity as equal to West's infatuation with individuation. I do not think it is in forgoing identity and renouncing attachment that we find enlightenment. I think it is in balanced self-knowledge situated in contextual awareness that we find opportunity to serve and offer light.

But like we can learn from our African colleagues, "Don’t throw away weeds found in a child's wild vegetable harvest." And while I am not insinuating Hindus as children I think the proverb can expand to mean not to discount wisdom and knowledge from unexpected sources. I think what I liked the best about the chapter on African Indigenous knowledge was that it ended with ideas and hands on practical application. I particularly appreciated this because one of the main elements that I heard repeated was the central aspect of instruction had to be embodied and practiced and done, not merely written about with the expectation that the information had been transmitted. Beyond the practical ideas I found a lot of familiarity in the Botswana context with my own context working in North Africa. North Africa at times can look more like Africa, the Middle East and even Europe. The use of parables, proverbs, wisdom, dreams and visions I have known and experienced. In our training material we try to make use of and encourage these traditional ways of knowing. We did this because dignity and valuing the indigenous processes for learning are important, but also because of the key insight on (p. 128.) If you expect anyone to listen to you and respect you, you must be willing to listen and respect their words and work as well. Even if you disagree. This can be tricky to navigate at times or know the boundaries of these guidelines. I recall a situation in which we were teaching a health lesson and the problem of gas poisoning and what to do was asked. This is a serious problem in North Africa because people primarily use refillable gas bottles in their kitchens and leaks can be difficult to notice until too late. One of the women in the group was convinced that you must drink milk if you had gas poisoning. She was passionate and her grandmother had taught her this. As a health educator, I knew that the key information that the women needed to take home that day was to get out of the house! Fresh air is what you need. But I also knew that if I contradicted this woman's milk remedy, that would be the message that was taken home. So, I listened and understood (without patronizing her) and then added that you should drink that milk OUTSIDE! And it worked. The next week the women came back and when we reviewed the lesson, they all knew the key aspect was to get outside and get help.

Journal Entry Week 12

Chapter 8, liberation theology and its impact on knowing & learning heavily overlapped with my professional role as a health educator in North Africa and as a religious human rights worker in the same field. There were embedded rituals in the learning practice that echoed learning processes we have already studied. The idea of look, reflect and react as seen on p. 137 caught my eye, as well as everyone participating even to the point of sharing their personal history. Liberation theology is not so much an attempt to understand God, as it is a movement to ensure that our understanding of God is true, for all, through all time. The most difficult place for theology to stand is alongside the oppressed and the poor. And that in my understanding is how liberation theology was born. It wasn’t about making the theology of the ruling class work for the poor but restoring the dignity of the poor. It meant that principles and doctrine were held more loosely, not a willingness to renegotiate everything, but being willing to renegotiate anything within the conversation of lived experience. Because a theoretical god is not a god of value.

On more personal/ professional application, p. 145-146 introduce the idea of a sociocultural agent or catalyst agent. That is who I try to be and who I try to train. I paid close attention to the wording in the section. I often am asked the question of "who" can facilitate a halqa (health education lessons). "Anyone who can learn the knowledge of the topic and knows HOW TO DEMONSTRATE IT SOCIALLY." the emphasis is mine, but I loved the answer of ANYONE and the awareness that the two needed parts are (1) information (2) demonstration ability, in our context that means the health principles & a storyteller with crowd control skills. I also appreciate the idea of speeding up social chemistry. Often times in these oppressive contexts we cannot wait the time it typically would require building the trust relationships or wait for the changes to take effect. We need to utilize skills of social acceleration. This element is also seen with the vision of each social agent in the process of the group learning environment being transformed into a multiplying agent. The final point that I would like to further reflect on in how we could train our volunteers is in the idea of how to discover the communication point of entry AND empathy. I thought the “and” empathy was a well-articulated addition to our current perspective. It can often be an assumption, but it is worthwhile to explicitly train around the idea. As it speaks of its success I am not surprised when it aims to be contextual, experiential and meaningful (p.151). That is quite the trifecta of adult learning! I loved this beautiful idea: "Liberation theology for education is the art of developing human beings."

**Section 4: External Learning Audit**

For this portion of my personal learning audit the assignment is to not only identify one context of learning work, but to reach out externally to interview learners or professionals in the field. My area of learning work is in linguistic study, the language of French. And while there are many books and resources on language acquisition, and I have profited by many, the purpose of external interviews provides a real time and place perspective as well as the ability to dialogue and adapt based off personal needs and opportunities. I chose to interview three people: two fellow learners, both American, one male and one female, and one polyglot who is also my French tutor. My questions were simple and direct, which was a function of intentionality in giving the interviewee as much flexibility in answering as possible as well as a function of practicality as I conducted the interviews in both French and English. My questions were variations on the following list: “What activities augment learning? Give examples of active, passive, deliberate practices that contribute to improving one’s current French level. How often do you engage in these practices? What are the quantifiable skills a person should have to be able to communicate in French? How long will it take for an American woman to become conversationally strong and unhindered?” Additionally, I posed a question of what thoughts they each had for me personally in order to take my French to the next level.

Some of the highlights of these interviews identified the importance of knowing the “why” of learning French. It reminded me of our earliest work with Simon Sinek’s emphasis on the essential element of having a strongly defined why in order to maintain and nurture in the biological power of loyalty and benefits of affective learning. Another clear commonality of the interviews spoke to the daily attention to learning French. « Il vaut mieux 30 minutes par jour que 6h toutes les deux semaines, » (L. Deslandes, 2020) is repeated by D. McCormick as, “a daily-ness to learning French... not something once a week but something every day.” Another theme I saw in each interview was the need for a plan, humility to rework as often as needed, a willingness to stick with it, and wisdom that the plan should be in the flow of your life and your passions and not competing with it.  “It will take intentional will and a focused plan, including the ability to continually restart and refocus,” said McCormick. Deslandes emphasizes the need for the subject or manner you are studying to be something that draws you into learning giving the example of researching cycling, “j'apprends l'italien en lisant des trucs sur le vélo : ça m'intéresse dans tous les cas, peu importe la langue.” Sullivan continues agreeing with both the daily and deliberate aspects, “It’s definitely active and deliberate, whether class work or engaging in French life.” I noted the textured nature of learning a language, not just the nuts and bolts (vocabulary and grammar), but also the oil and grease (sociocultural factors) that helps everything work together. “To learn a language, one needs to work on listening, speaking, reading, and writing, to begin with; and then anchor that in cultural learning that emphasize how to use the language in context.  A helpful skill is staying humble and being willing to change” (McCormick, 2020). One aspect that encouraged me to look more widely for language resources were the ideas the Deslandes offered in thinking through various people, their interests and preferences, “lecture, films, podcasts/radios, exercises "scolaires"... tout est bon à prendre,” and also the intentional awareness of looking for, “s'expose à la langue de manière prolongée.” Deslandes & Sullivan both used the word naturally or naturellement multiple times throughout the interview process. This subconscious or intentional use reinforced the reality that the more learning is in the path of my life the more often it will happen and therefore the more learning I will accomplish.

I enjoyed the perspectives that each of these interviews gave me. In many ways they told me things I already knew, but hearing someone else articulate it, and then here having to reflect and write about it requires me to lift it from the place of passive knowing and incorporate it into active learning or living. Having conducted these interviews I cannot say I am learning French with integrity unless I adhere to the wisdom of the community of learners and answer a few key questions that these interviews confirmed for me:

1. Why do I want to learn French? Really.
2. Given my time (I cannot change this. manage, yes! change, no!) and my values (I don’t want French at the expense of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, how will I learn French?
3. How will I know I am progressing? How will I manage the affective language learning aspects?

The answers to these questions will be addressed as I develop my application objectives and turn my want to speak French into an action plan to learn it.

**Section 5: Learning Audit Action**

I want to be a free communicator in French. I want to able to participate in French life as I choose and invest in mutually rewarding relationships happening in French. And I am tired of my 6-year-old correcting my grammar! In order to arrive at this level of French I need a plan. But in order to keep at a plan, I need a solid, “why.” Why learn French? For me, learning French is a bridge to a broader scope of my professional role. Learning French allows me to reach into new communities and across communities to make connections, do trainings, and learn. Learning French opens opportunities for our health education program to be utilized in new contexts and by new hosts. Learning French enriches and strengthens our family as my sons and husband already speak. Learning French also gives insight into cultural subtleties that are currently invisible to me. As I articulate those whys I am encouraged to learn. Reminding myself of the why is key to keeping up the affective aspect of continually learning.

Due to the changing reality around the globe today, my life as a mom, a graduate student, and a working professional, this plan must be flexible and aligned with existing structures and goals. I had begun work on my application objectives with this idea of flexibility being paramount. But I did not realize how flexible I would need it to be. Within one day of writing up a plan, my children’s school was closed due to the coronavirus pandemic and I needed to absorb 6 hours of their school day into my daily schedule. I had to go back to the drawing board. The following can be called application objectives for learning French 2.0.

* I will actively listen to 30 minutes of French teaching, paying attention to grammar and pronunciation while I am assisting my kids through distance schooling on M,T,H,F.
* I will listen to 1 coffee break French episode each week while cleaning the kitchen after dinner.
* I will read a familiar French book each day for at least 15 minutes (M,T,H,F).
* Relationships that could be either in French or English, I will maintain in French, even though I am tired, and it takes longer. (all texting, emailing or calls with them)
* I will take an assessment every four months to celebrate progress and identify growth areas (May, September, January).
* I will begin a 60min/week class in May with my tutor.
* I will use a language logger to track my adherence to these objectives as well as note any needed changes.
* I will craft my personal, “Why learn French,” statement and put it on the top of my language logger.

Currently, the application objectives will require about 4 hours each week, of which 3.5 hours are aligned with family life already happening. My time commitment will increase in May. But until there are significant changes (ie my kids are back in school), I cannot afford to divert any more solitary time to this goal of mine. I am confident that this action oriented measurable learning plan will transform my desire to learn French into progress.

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L. Deslandes, personal communication, April 3, 2020

D. McCormick, personal communication, March 12, 2020

M. Sullivan, personal communication, March 21, 2020