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What is the role of teachers in Learning in Depth, LiD?

This project examines the development and importance of the teacher's role in Learning in Depth. The goal is to discover ways in which the teacher's best practices enhance student learning, ownership of topic and encourage student self-directed study. This has been done over six years, examining LiD in more than 50 classrooms (K – 9) and by one active research project. This project upon examination of classroom visits, discussions with teachers, administrators, students and parents, highlights the teachers' role as crucial to the success of LiD programs. This project provides valuable information regarding the teachers' role in LiD as well as the value that students and parents garner through teachers' being role models. This project finds that most teachers of LiD classes find increased satisfaction in their teaching practices and higher student engagement.

BEST PRACTICES

Session choice: 40 min.

The Role of Teachers in Learning in Depth

By Linda Holmes

“It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.” Albert Einstein

I hope this paper will accomplish two things, a deeper understanding of Learning in Depth (LiD) and the role we adults play in it. And if by sharing LiD experiences the life of educators is eased and benefited, then the journey will be totally worthwhile.

And before I start sharing the LiD experiences, I believe it is imperative to understand the basic core principles of the LiD program, as these directly affect the function of LiD and teachers, in ways that may seem counter-intuitive to the manner most programs in schools are managed.

Core principles of LiD are:

- Teachers create a portfolio and or artifacts box for each student
- LiD is an add-on program of approximately one hour a week
- Each student will receive one topic for their school career
- LiD is a long-term project. The results are realized over time.
- All topics meet a set criteria that allows for the depth and breadth of study
- In the beginning each student will receive a topic that is randomly picked
- LiD is not taught, marked or graded
- It is up to the student to ‘drive’ their topic and they are responsible for their time and work

“Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterward.” Vernon Law

When I first started LiD in 2008 there wasn't a LiD book yet. I had heard Dr. Egan talk about LiD and I was intrigued, so much so, that using just the principals written above, I created what I thought a functioning LiD program would look like. Through weeks of planning, organizing and enrolling staff and administration I enthusiastically implemented LiD into my early primary, multi-aged class. I discovered in the first month that LiD was a lot of work! The preparation of materials (portfolios, magazines, books, etc.) for LiD was time consuming but nothing too onerous. I was overwhelmed by the huge demand of my students for my time. They struggled with being independent, self-directed and patient. The students looked to me to tell them what to do. I found my LiD classes chaotic, loud, unfocussed and more importantly, I seemed to be doing most of the work! LiD was exhausting and frustrating because, as soon as I helped one student, three more appeared. I was enthusiastically excited about teaching my students to build a relationship with knowledge, only to find out they were dependent on me. Was it lack of skills, tools, understanding or teacher support? So, I enrolled the Librarian to join us during LiD to be an extra pair of helping hands. She was a great help and it soon became obvious that, although the children, received help quicker and the behavior issues mellowed, they still remained dependent on a lot of teacher time. I was at a crossroad. Why weren't my students more independent and self-directed? How do I get my students to be independent, self-directed LiD people?

Hadn't I prepared enough, done enough? Was I overly ambitious, moving too fast? What was LiD achieving? Did LiD really require more teacher help than regular class? What was I missing?

After a lot of thought I realized I was too close to the situation and I just couldn't see the proverbial forest for the trees? In a thicket and at a loss, I sought out help from colleagues. I shared my frustration around my students' lack of independence and self-directedness. What I received was:

"Insanity... doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." Albert Einstein

Ah, I realized, here I was teaching LiD like a math or language arts class, which it is not. I went back to reread the LiD principles which started me on the question of how does a teacher 'manage' LiD? I remembered Kieran Egan talking about how the topics belonged to the students and that teachers were not meant to teach LiD. In fact, if LiD was successful, teachers could be marking while students worked. I was so busy leading LiD; my students following me around or goofing off while they were waiting for my next lead. I barely had a moment to myself, let alone marking papers! It became obvious to me that I was 'teaching' LiD. I held unrealistic expectations for my students to become independent learners just because I gave them some materials, an hour a week, and encouragement to go forth and learn.

"The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires." — William Arthur Ward.

So, I made it my goal to have such wildly self-directed students that I could mark papers. In order to achieve my goal of teacher independence, I had to give up

orchestrating the agenda, directing and setting the pace. When implementing LiD I had missed a very important aspect of any successful venture, the relationship between the people involved; the students, the parents and the administrators. I changed my context, the 'I' became a 'we' and the focus was on topics, while I managed the environment, not the children. As a class, we gathered together and started LiD each week in a group and we discussed what LiD was all about and that soon they would probably know a lot more about their topic than anyone else in the room and they would probably be teaching us. How exciting is that: twenty-four experts sharing their knowledge and understanding?

Some of the most interesting discussions I ever participated in were with my class, of 5- 8-year-olds. We discussed;

- What is knowledge and how do we know when and what we know?
- What is funny... funny – ha-ha or funny strange?
- What is a question? Why do we have them?
- What constitutes a good question?
- How can we show our thinking / knowing?
- Is there an end to knowing and what does thinking deeply mean?
- What is an expert and how do you know one when you meet them?
- What do we do when learning gets hard?
- Do our topics connect to each other and if so how?
- What does a good partner or team look, feel and sound like?

We took turns leading the weekly LiD time by sharing things we had discovered or created. Students would share what they were working on for LiD time and off they would go, or at least most of them would.

“Understanding is an adventure and, like any adventure, it always involves some risk.” Hans-

Georg Gadamer (1983)

Not to paint too idealistic a picture of our LiD class, we had our challenges. Like any class we had students with special needs; ESL, behavioral, psychological, physical and intellectual. Once the more self-directed students went off to their studies, I helped those who needed individual attention. Below are just a few examples of students with special needs and their LiD journeys.

Sarah who was diagnosed with OCD and anxiety disorder, waited for encouragement and clarification of what was expected of her before she would even contemplate starting anything. Throughout the month I encouraged Sarah to join two keenly independent students whom I asked to include Sarah. The two girls knew Sarah was shy and they were only too willing to help her out. By the end of the month Sarah joined in LiD without any further assistance from me.

Francis was a neat individual who struggled with learning to read and making friends in his previous class. I met Francis in October of his grade two year when he joined my class. His parents decided to put Francis in a new environment. I realized quickly he was a highly intelligent kid who had a passion for airplanes. He and his dad spent hours discussing, drawing, making and watching videos about WWI and WWII warplanes. Francis was always keen to share his passion, as he knew so much about planes, which puzzled the rest of the children in the class. They stared at

Francis incomprehensively, usually ignored him or walking away. Francis stopped sharing his airplane passion and only when I asked how his project was going, would he smile and enthusiastically tell me what he was learning and creating at home. When we started LiD I hoped it would help everyone learn to be passionate about something. When everyone had a topic of their own, Francis' life in class began to change. He learned to read and within 8 months was at grade level. Francis was no longer the odd one, as students began to develop pride and ownership of their LiD topics, they too were enthusiastic, interested learners eager to share what they knew. Francis found many friends and became one of many. As for Francis, what he cosmically picked from the topics bag was The Solar System. He had no difficulty connecting his passion of planes with his LiD topic.

Nathan was a six-year-old mover and shaker (in other words a runner and an escape artist) who had difficulty focusing for longer than 5 minutes, even though he often had a TA supporting him. Nathan could not read, write or play independently. He was not popular with the children because he sought attention and could be mean. So, Nathan often sat next to me, which seemed to help him remain calm for short periods. One LiD library class Nathan got up and started circling the library, pulling books and then putting them back. He wasn't disturbing or disruptive and after several rounds he pulled a book and walked over to one of the older boys who was working quietly. As I watched Nathan approaching Charles, who had his own severe anger issues, I started to move towards them, anticipating trouble. Ten steps away I heard Nathan ask Charles, "Can you use this book?" Surprisingly to me, Charles responded with a smile, "Yes, thank you." Charles took the book on **Bears**,

his topic, and continued his work while Nathan smiled and went back to the bookshelves looking for more books. Nathan did not often get positive feedback for his behavior. By the end of the year he knew the library organizational structure really well and in particular, where all the class topics were housed. Nathan found a way which he could move, be helpful and that made him feel good about himself. And along the way, he also learned how to trace and name several kinds of **Bugs** his topic. Now talk about a cosmic topic choice!

LiD time settled into a comfortable routine with small groups or individuals setting forth their personal directions for their time. LiD was a perfect place for collaboration where we discovered how topics intersected and how our knowing develops. One of our class sayings that was often used during LiD, “It’s not what you think you know, it’s what you know you know.”

As the months passed we developed into a community of learners and everyone had something to contribute. Use of LiD time was up to the individuals involved, that is, as long as they did not interfere or distract others from their LiD time. My students learned to ask questions, help each other and in time became self-directed to some degree or another.

As for me, my LiD job description changed. I put away my expectations, my need for speed (my need for results) and became, literally, the guide at the side of the room. I became a question asker, an active listener, an encourager and a knowledge- sharing cheerleader. Some of the ways I did this was by setting up student-teacher conference times so students could talk about their topics with me, and ask questions or request anything they needed from me. I also set up small

group discussions about how a library functions, how to trace pictures in books (rather than cut them out to keep in their portfolio), how to skim reading materials and how might topics connect to each other. I offered up challenges around connecting their topic to what we were learning in class that particular week, i.e. geometry – What shapes are in your topic, poetry – Write an acrostic poem for your topic, art – What colours are in your topic, music – What music is part of your topic? Some students took on the challenges while others centered their time on drawing, creating and writing in anticipation for what they would present to the class.

During one LiD class in the Library, our Vice Principal walked through and stopped to look around. He found me marking and asked me what was happening that my young students were so focused and intent on what they were doing. It really impressed him that the children were so self-motivated. I looked proudly at my class and realized how right he was. We talked quietly in my corner and I told him it was our weekly LiD class (which I raved on about in the staff room), he looked around once more and said, that if his grade 7 class could be half as interested in their projects, he would be very interested in knowing more about LiD and we set up a meeting to discuss it.

After a year of LiD I found I often sat at the side of the library marking spelling tests, conferencing or taking notes for my LiD journal. This became my treasured student one to one and observation time. I learned what skills and tools the students had developed those tools/skills they were working on and what tools/skills they needed to acquire. I was able to focus my teaching during regular class time to specific students needing specific skill and tool development. LiD was a huge gift for

me not only to observe my students but also to see their abilities as learners develop and mature.

Overall I learned that we all did better when I stopped “driving the bus”, relaxed and spent time being an interested participant, enthusiastic encourager or quiet observer. By asking questions, showing interest and being enthusiastically encouraging, LiD quickly became a favorite time for students and myself. LiD was easily the most stimulating and interesting part of our week. It even occasionally eked out recess time as our favorite part of school.

In our second LiD year Stephanie, a grade 6/7 teacher at our school implemented LiD, with my help. Her LiD implementation was less harrowing and stressful than mine as I was able to point out what the role of teacher looked like and, she watched while I introduced her students to the possibilities of LiD. Once the program parameters of time and routine of LiD were set and their LiD oath and ceremony completed, her class rose brilliantly to the challenges of LiD. Stephanie was also the first teacher I know of that took on a topic along with her students. At the beginning of each LiD class everyone would do a pair-share about something they had learned about their topic. As Stephanie had a topic, she also modeled (very enthusiastically) what she had discovered. The students were to present their topics to the class three times during the year but this had to be changed to twice a year when the first set of presentations, which were to be approximately 2-3 minutes in length, ended up averaging 15 minutes each. After the first three presentations some students asked for more time to prepare, while Stephanie had to end up putting on time limits. The presentations surpassed our wildest imaginings.

In the following school year it was Stephanie's new students who had heard about LiD from the previous class that asked and pleaded to have LiD be part of their schedule. It was so gratifying for me to witness how LiD changed school for so many people, including the teachers. And yes, Stephanie implemented LiD for the second year. She once told me she could hear me in her head saying, "Back Off! Stay out of their way." Did I really say that?

As one teacher, Andrea said after implementing LiD in her grade 5-6 class, "This is why I got into teaching!"

Over the five years I was at the school 80% of the teachers (Kindergarten - 7) joined in bringing LiD to life in their classes and to the community through two LiD Symposiums. It was my dream that the community be part of LiD and that one day our school would lead the way in a symposium. The symposiums we had were both huge displays of LiD work that took over the gym for one afternoon a year. The grade 6 students organized and ran meetings and sharing sessions with all grade groups of similar topics meeting. Families, administration and all the school were invited to come and see posters, books, art, computer-generated work; while hearing presentations and participating in LiD based experiments.

Once Kieran Egan's book, Learning in Depth was in my hands I devoured it. His book brought clarity to my LiD fuzzy edges and a definitive description of my role as a teacher of LiD. He first describes teachers' role...

"Initially students will likely need significant help from the teacher charged to guide development of their portfolios. But as time goes by, students' knowledge of their topic will exceed that of the teacher, and they will become increasingly autonomous in the way they continue their studies-some students might obviously be expected to become more independent earlier in their studies than others. Teachers will

continue to monitor the portfolio's development, and can counsel students and respond to their questions about new dimensions of their topic that they might explore." (Learning in Depth, Kieran Egan, Chicago Press, 2010, page 25)

After Mary's' first year of LiD in grade two, she met with me to asked if she could change her topic TREES. She articulately explained to me that she knew pretty much everything about trees and that she wanted a different topic. Mildly showing surprise, I asked her what she did want to study and she quickly replied, animals. I asked her, "Aren't there animals that live in trees?" Mary smiled, nodded and off she went, already listing off animals she knew of that lived in trees.

My interaction with Mary helped me see how 'we just don't know what we don't know' and having regular counsel sessions with students can help them open up possible new avenues of research, stimulate imagination and diversification of ideas not previously available to them. On page 137 Kieran Egan states,

"The teacher can constantly raise questions that may encourage students to develop further pieces of knowledge, even if initially the knowledge is only very general and imprecise."

Developing autonomy takes time, a skilled teacher and from my experience, lots of support. On page 26 of Learning in Depth, Kieran emphasizes...

"A further distinctive feature of this project is that students will work alone for much of the time. They will meet with their supervising teacher, with older students who may be working on the same topic, with parent volunteers, with college student volunteers, with school teacher-librarians, and with friends."

Having 24 five to eight year olds I can attest that independence can be achieved. As I stated earlier, once I stopped teaching LiD, slowed down any expectations that I held around 'end results' and started encouraging and engaging my students in conversation, the atmosphere during LiD began to settle. And when I

stood back to observe and mark, my students rose to working together or with their older buddy.

By the fourth year of LiD I spent most of my time note-taking, marking and observing. The days I didn't have marking I will admit I got rather lonely. On one such day I enviously watched my children fully engaged in a myriad of activities. One student started walking towards me and I thought, that I was going to become involved with some cool plan, or project or maybe it would be a stimulating question we could seek out the answer to together. I was smiling with anticipation. Jason looked at me and said, "Could you please get a book off the top shelf for me?" I got up, took the book down and not being needed for anything else, I returned to my place.

The question I am most often asked by teachers regarding LiD is, "How do you do it?" The 'it' being not only the schema of implementing LiD, but the schema of how the adult is to **BE**, to lead LiD. It is a program that requires little direct teaching, no marking and a slowing down of doing things. I ended up writing a sign by my chair that encouraged me... "They are the masters of their LiD, they drive their own portfolios which are theirs for life. Encourage, Council, Listen, Question and Back Off."

Throughout Learning in Depth, Kieran Egan refers to teachers as supervisors, portfolio supervisor, supervising teacher, or project supervisor. He goes so far as to ask on page 165 whether one teacher remain the portfolio supervisor for "... as long as possible, or should it be the job of the classroom teacher and change each year?"

Dictionary.com defines supervisor: “A supervisor is a person who supervises activities or people, especially workers or students.”

British Dictionary defines supervisor as, “a tutor supervising the work, esp. research work, of a student”

It is interesting to note that supervisor is derived from the Medieval Latin word, *supervidere*, meaning to oversee, inspect.

As a LiD teacher I supervise LiD by setting up a place for them to be safe to be independent, cooperative, responsible and inquisitive. Within this space there is lots of time; time to share what they know and time to present their discoveries to others on a regular basis. I do this by being enthusiastically encouraging, which sometimes requires me to stand back quietly, trusting myself to allow my students to risk, to create, and yes, to fail so they develop their own relationship with knowing and knowledge. In this safe LiD environment failures, successes, and risks, are all part of everyone’s path, including their teacher, remember me, driving the bus crazily down the wrong road.

Armed with my 5 years of implementing LiD in my class and 7 years of assisting other teachers and administrators to implement LiD, I have discovered it is not as easy as I originally thought to bring LiD to life in a class or school. There are a few perspective shifts that need to be made by the people involved if LiD is to be wildly successful. Below I have included some of the main perspective shifts teachers, administrators, parents and students have experienced and why they initially believed LiD couldn’t, wouldn’t or hasn’t happened. In many of the cases cited, these perspective shifts, helped people to move past and not only implement LiD but to embrace it enthusiastically.

1. Interpretations happen! Implementing the core principles of LiD does not always bring the same results. Why you may ask?

Adult Voices ... "We read the book. We don't need help implementing LiD."

At one school the intermediate teachers agreed to do LiD and believed they had enough of an understanding to implement the program. They held LiD class at the same time each week and although the students liked it, halfway through the year there was a slump in student interest. On visiting the school during their LiD time I observed students with heads bent over books, computers or papers. The rooms were quiet with little or no conversation. In one class the teacher, arms folded, stood by the door and shushed students or asked them where they were going. He was supervising.

I went up to students and asked them what their topic was and to tell me something marvelous about it. I was thrilled to find someone with my topic and with a little encouragement; an exciting conversation ensued with other students joining in. We shared what we found so interesting, funny, awful, etc. about our topics. I asked students what their passions were and how their passion fit, or not with their topic. I was impressed with the creative endeavors I saw around the school and told them so. And lastly, I asked what they liked about LiD. Answers: "My time. My pace. No comparisons, It's mine!"

Talking with the staff at break time, they could see an immediate change in their students once encouragement, interest and sharing were added to the LiD time. The teachers may have followed the LiD parameters; however; they had not

fully embraced how important their role in LiD was and YES... they could participate in their student's learning journey.

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." - Helen Keller

Once the staff started participating in LiD through conferencing with their students, asking questions and setting aside times for student presentations and sharing, LiD developed a more vibrant community life.

"The presentation is an opportunity for students to share the results of their work and receive feedback on it from their peers and from others, including parents, teachers, and older and younger students. ... A basic aim of the program is to give students confidence through knowing something, and that confidence will be enlarged if we encourage development of other skills as they learn." (Learning in Depth, Kieran Egan, Chicago Press, 2010,pg. 168-169)

The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery. Mark Van Doren

2. Not all teachers think alike. We all have filters, philosophies, presuppositions and habits we operate under, that influence how we perceive the world. We all have our own perspective.

"Everything we see is a shadow cast by that which we do not see." Martin Luther King Jr.
Adult Voices ... "I have always taught this way and it works just fine, so why would I do anything different." "My students' parents are not interested in what we do in school. They tell me it is my job to teach their children, not theirs. Won't LiD put my students at a disadvantage from students who have parent involvement?" "My principal doesn't want me to do LiD. We are doing our own in-depth learning." "I've taught a long time and I am always keen to try new ideas."

The most common example of ‘perspective’ I have heard from teachers, administrators and parents (of which I too was a shining member) is... *Students ought to choose their own topics.*

When teachers stated their belief that students should choose their topic and it is what stood in their way of implementing LiD, I negotiated with them. I told teachers to have the student choose 5 topics and then the teacher would pick the final one so no one has the same topic. To be honest that was how I got myself around my own philosophical reasoning, that if students have a choice, they would buy into the program. From experience having done topic distribution several different ways, including having high school students choose their own topic, randomized picks works the best. In the myriad of classes I have visited one thing students have taught me is that over time, all topics are wonderful in one way or another (funny, awe inspiring, fulfilling, interesting)... once you know something about them. This is a core belief of LiD. Knowledge is knowledge, no matter what topic it may stem from and all knowledge, sooner or later, intersects.

I encourage reading pages 36 -42 of Learning in Depth for many more interesting points addressing topic choice.

I was invited into a grade four class by the teacher to help her implement LiD program. Everyone was very excited about LiD and all started with great enthusiasm. Over the next 3 months the teacher complained that many of his students became less enthusiastic and some students even were requesting new topics because the topics they received are no longer interesting. The teacher was concerned that, although he was still very enthusiastic, encouraging and continually

offering up lots of ideas; some of his students were producing less. There was a lot of support offered up by other LiD teachers, along with encouragement to keep going, which he did; however, in the end, LiD did not meet the teachers' expectations. In one of my classes I had a five-year-old girl who enjoyed starting things but rarely finished. At home, Jenny would be keen to help mommy bake but she never stayed throughout the process, preferring to go off to start another project. Talking with her mom, I too shared the same experience in class and was putting into place some structures that made completion of tasks desirable for Jenny. Excuses were made for her by citing her age, her inquisitiveness or her bubbly personality. In the end, the parents decided Jenny just needed time to mature. By the time Jenny was in grade four, there was little change and although no one wanted to indulge her lack of focus, Jenny's need for immediate gratification ruled.

Teachers are trained to be result orientated, to help out through suggestions and to keep the learning bus moving! And there are a large number of teachers that rely on student 'buy in' to bring about cooperation and results. Looking back at that particular class, LiD became just another subject, like math or poetry and since it was an add on program, the teacher relied heavily on student buy in and swayed to pressures for new and different and 'spectacular'.

The tenet, the non-negotiable aspect of LiD is its long term; it has no end, therefor there is no haste or external demands put upon students. LiD requires teachers to step back so students can take ownership of their topic (no matter how unexciting it might be for the moment).

You can get help from teachers, but you are going to have to learn a lot by yourself, sitting alone in a room. Dr. Seuss

One student in another grade 5/6 class sat back after I explained the tenets of LiD, raised his hand and stated, "Then I don't have to do anything!" A few laughs, and giggles went through the room. My response... "Right. No one can make you learn. I certainly can't and neither can your teacher. Learning is totally up to you and LiD is an opportunity for you to have your own time, to show what you know, what you learn."

We all have dreams. But in order to make dreams come into reality, it takes an awful lot of determination, dedication, self-discipline, and effort. Jesse Owens

3. The principle of Scarcity and Abundance in Education. I hear it all the time from teachers, administrators and parents: *Students are **too!** ... Too young, too old, too advanced, too ill prepared, too badly behaved, too (fill in the blank) to do LiD. "I haven't got the time." "There are too many curricular demands." "I need marks." "If I start LiD this year, what will happen if no one carries it on?" "If everyone isn't doing LiD, then it would be fruitless for me to start." "I can't do LiD because my teachers won't go for it." "I don't have materials, computers, books, (again, fill in the blank)."*

I received an enthusiastic email (see below) from Ryan Hughes who is doing research into the area of abundance in education. Having read his paper, *The ABUNDANCE of Learning in Depth*, I think it is extremely valuable to understand LiD as an abundant program.

Linda,
David Jardine wrote an article where he discusses the abundance of knowledge and how our system is modeled after economic structures that create a 'regime of scarcity' that limits the true nature of learning

and knowledge. I believe that LiD is trying to install the idea of abundance into the school system. As teachers we are so wrapped up in our role within this 'regime of scarcity' that it is difficult to imagine how this role might be different when knowledge is perceived as wonderful and abundant.

Ryan

With respect I have attached Ryan Hughes' proposal paper, The Abundance of Learning in Depth after my conclusion.

Conclusion

"The adventure of life is to learn. The purpose of life is to grow. The nature of life is to change. The challenge of life is to overcome. The essence of life is to care. The opportunity of life is to serve. The secret of life is to dare. The spice of life is to befriend. The beauty of life is to give."

William Arthur Ward

LiD may not be able to solve all educational problems and meet every need. It is simply a one-hour a week, add on program that is available to schools to help everyone, including teachers, administrators, parents and families to enhance their personal relationship with knowing and knowledge over a long period of time. The role of a LiD teacher steps outside the usual teacher product-driven practices, to one of being a counsel /supervisor, encourager, questioner and, observer. LiD not only offers students a relationship with knowledge, it offers teachers the opportunity to reflect and develop their practices while expanding their relationship with knowing and knowledge.

I leave the last LiD word to Kieran Egan:

"This proposal for a new element of the curriculum is based on the belief that learning something in depth will add an important dimension to each person's education. It is further based on the principle that the more one knows about anything, the more interesting it becomes. (Learning in Depth, Kieran Egan, Chicago Press, 2010 pg. 216)

The Abundance of Learning in Depth

By Ryan Hughes

As teachers, we seek to foster lifelong learners who continue to discover, investigate, and be curious about the world around them. We want our students to have the confidence and skill sets to gain and develop new knowledge and use it in diverse and imaginative ways. When they leave our class at the end of the day or step out into the world at the end of their public education journey, we want them to have experienced and learned knowledge. We want them to know what it feels like to truly understand what they have learned and made it their own; transforming what they know into "... living knowledge." (Egan, 2010, p.214). This is our task, our calling, our purpose; to create independent, self-motivated, learners who use their experiences to create new possibilities and reimagine knowledge.

Are we meeting this goal? Are we teaching the knowledge, creating the environment or fostering the learning needed to help our students become these people? These big questions have complicated answers that span the spectrum of theories and beliefs about education. Kieran Egan, a cultural anthropologist and educationalist, believes that in our quest to create 'educated minds', we are failing. We are trying to implement competing theories and conceive a curriculum that provides a diverse breadth of experience without any deep understanding. In his book, The Educated Mind, Egan describes these competing theories of Progressivism, Traditionalism and Socialization and explains why their incompatibility is misaligning our teaching efforts, creating an environment where we are not being successful with any of the approaches. Egan outlines his theory of

Imaginative Education and makes a strong argument for a cognitive tools approach to teaching that encourages emotional engagement and promotes the development of thinking tools that will further our ability to understand and use knowledge (for more information on Imaginative Education please see Egan, 1998).

As a part of Egan's realignment of our education system, he draws attention to a significant missing dimension of our curricular framework. Throughout a child's formal public education, they will have the opportunity to learn a wide spectrum of knowledge that represents some of the most amazing and wonderful human experiences. Upon completing school, they will/should have an extensive breadth of knowledge. Unfortunately, there seems to be a disconnect between what a child should know and what they can recall. In their educational experience, they seem to have not really learned anything in depth. (Egan, 2010)

Learning in Depth (LiD) is a program designed by Kieran Egan that seeks to give children the opportunity to become deeply knowledgeable about a topic. This program creates an environment within our current school system where children can learn to experience the joy and the humility that comes from learning deeply. It strives to have children experience knowledge of a topic from as an expert, changing their school experience and emotionally engaging them in an unforced learning environment. During a ceremony on the first day of kindergarten, children are invited to randomly receive a topic that will provide the focal point of their LiD experience. These topics are specifically selected to provide an expansive breadth and depth of knowledge. Each topic must have multidisciplinary studies within. For example, the topic of trees can be studied through biology, ecology, literature, art,

poetry, politics and geography. A child could spend the first year learning about the many types and species of trees, learning about how and where they grow. Afterwards they could investigate the environmental impact from tree loss or tree inspired poetry. The opportunity for students to find their own place within the topic needs to be diverse; virtually unending. As students study and learn about the topic, they build and grow a portfolio that reflects personal understanding. The topics must also have the potential for deep detailed learning. For example, if investigating how trees grow, a child could learn about plant anatomy, following their investigation into the detailed study of tree DNA. The nature of each topic needs to give students the ability to choose their own interests within the topic and have enough materials to sustain their investigation for the 13 years of their formal education experience. This structure of topics that have breadth of access and depth of detail, are crucial to sustain learners for multiple years of study. Situated in an environment free from teacher direction, students can follow their own interests and embody the knowledge they learn. Ultimately LiD will "... transform children's relationship and understanding of knowledge." (Egan, 2010, p.21) It gives them a place to discover the joys of learning, separate from the coercive nature of school and allows for continual inquiry throughout their entire public school journey (Egan, 2010).

LiD, is not assessed, assigned or forced upon students. The teacher's task is to help create an environment where, during a single hour a week, children have time to work independently on their topics. LiD reimagines the role of the teacher to be the set designer and learning-encourager. He or she provides an environment with

access to resources and conducive to independent study. Teachers are the portfolio supervisors, meeting with students regularly to guide and encourage progress. They might give small workshops on certain skills like asking good questions, or teaching students how to trace pictures. Teachers might demonstrate some ideas they have for their own topic, sharing with the class opportunities that children might investigate. The intention is to allow students to take ownership of their portfolios, to possess their topics. Students need to see this program as different from the typical 'game' of school, void of assignments, evaluations and due dates. Below is the story of a teacher who redefined her role and relationship with her students during Learning in Depth time.

The classroom was meticulous. Student's desks laid out in single file rows, lined up from the front of the class to the back. The bulletin boards arranged with student work, expertly, evenly proportioned with big letters describing the assignment. At the front of the classroom, exactly in the center, a podium sat, where she would deliver her lessons to the students. Her whiteboards spotlessly clean, with the date in the top right corner and the 'Shape of the Day' on the left. As the bell rang, the thirty grade seven students funneled into the room and found their seats, sitting quietly, waiting for their teacher to walk down the center aisle and take a spot at the podium in the front of the class. Everything was scheduled, clean and organized.

On this particular day beneath announcements on the Shape of the Day, was LiD. Their teacher, in her skirt and blouse, carefully ironed and her hair tied tight in a bun, was reading announcements to her class. From her perch behind the podium, she read reminders for the week and reviewed the upcoming day. After all of the required messages had been read, she asked her students to take out their LiD folders. To anyone unfamiliar with her class or LiD, the

next transformation might seem bizarre. To her students it was a common occurrence on Tuesday after announcements. While they were busy retrieving their materials, their teacher had put her hair in a ponytail, pulled a hoody zip-up sweater over her blouse and sat down at an empty desk, pulled around to haphazardly face her students.

“You know when you are in the car driving somewhere, and something comes on the radio that is so interesting, when you get to your destination, you have to sit and finish listening before you can get out of the car?” she begins. “Well last night, I heard this apiarist (bee expert), talking about bees dying by the millions from pesticides and Asian Mites. When I finally got in through the door, I had to write down what I heard so I didn’t forget. I also added Asian Mites and pesticides to Copper Roses nemeses (Copper Rose is the name of her bee superhero). The new word that I added to my list is apiarist and I added a note to my portfolio to watch a TED talk by a guy named ... Anand Varma. Did anyone else find something new since we last had LiD?” A number of students share what they found with the class. The tone was calm, relaxed and collegial.

“Today, I am going to talk about collecting good questions at the back table. If you are interested join me there in 5 minutes. Plus, I would love to meet with some of you and find out how things are going. You know that the library and open area are available for working. Please try to be respectful of your classmates and have a great block.” The students, portfolios in hand, shuffled around the room, some staying in their desks, some setting up in the classroom and others moving to the back table, eager to discuss ‘collecting good questions.’”

This story describes a real teacher. During Learning in Depth, there is shift in the rhythms of the classroom that start with her. Her normal teaching style is to directly instruct her students, assigning homework with criteria, checklists, and strict due dates. Her students know her expectations and she pushes them to be hard working and successful. She is an amazing teacher who is organized,

considerate and her students' benefit from her deliberate, structured learning environment. When her class has their Learning in Depth hour, her role changes from director to encourager. She becomes a fellow learner and checks in with her students to see if they need guidance. She brings in examples of her topic in the context of day-to-day life and shares her own learning experiences with the class. She leads by example, modelling the process of inquiry. This story shows a teacher who has found her place within Learning in Depth.

For many teachers, LiD presents some misalignments with their current beliefs about education. It has met with great applause and objection. In hundreds of schools around the world, teachers and whole schools have incorporated Learning in Depth into their regular schedule. Many foreign school districts have seen Egan's vision and put the time, energy and money to implement it into their education system (IERG, 2014). In North America, there have been some objections to the plausibility of the program and concerns about whether it would actually realize the claimed benefits of lifelong learning. In his book, Learning in Depth: A simple innovation that can transform schooling, Egan spends time highlighting possible objections and responding to their points of concern. Below, I will outline a few concerns and explain how Egan has responded.

Objection 1: Students will soon become bored with their topics.

In this objection, Objector 1 exerts that children have short attention spans, and, with limited support, they will surely become bored and disinterested in their topics. Egan responds by saying that we all tend to have short attention spans, though we seem to be better at focusing on tasks that we are emotionally engaged

in. He goes on to explain how boredom is the result of ignorance and part of this program is to expose students to knowledge that will make them less ignorant and therefore eliminate boredom. Egan articulates two important presuppositions of Learning in Depth.

All my experiences of education suggest that boredom is a symptom of inadequate knowledge or ignorance. The more you know about something, the more interesting it becomes (“Everything is wonderful” ...is the underlying slogan that has been attached to this proposal.) The person without the intellectual resources deep knowledge can provide is much more likely to be bored. (Egan, 2010, p.33)

First, boredom is the result of ignorance or lack of knowledge. He sees emotional engagement as being the requirement to true learning and learning of knowledge to be the cure to ignorance and boredom. Secondly, Everything is wonderful. Every topic is connected and interesting, we just need to find our wonder within it. LiD “... is indeed, based on the belief...that learning about the world around us is intrinsically interesting to everyone.” (Egan, 2010, p.34) The impetus for LiD is that Egan is frustrated with the lack of engagement in schools and the depthless curriculum. “The common boredom and children’s lack of energy to learn is not due to the fact that they behave that way in the face of challenging topics, but rather that’s what the current superficial curriculum does to them.” (Egan, 2010, p.35) Egan thinks that Objector 1’s beliefs about boredom are misguided. Boredom is the result of ignorance and lack of understanding. The more you know the more interesting knowledge becomes. LiD creates interest that magnifies with prolonged study. Therefore, the long-term nature of this program results in increased interest not boredom.

Objection 2: The arbitrariness is absurd. Student Choice is important in such a scheme.

Objector 2 argues that children should be given choice in the selection of their topics. This premise is largely grounded in the progressive theory of John Dewey, where he believes that choice is critical to successful learning (Dewey, 1897). In my own experiences, this belief is considered 'common sense' and 'best practice' in schools today. Egan responds by again stating that "The underlying principle that guides the arbitrariness [of the topic selection] is that everything is interesting; and the more you know, the more the imagination can play with knowledge and drive to deeper meaning and understanding." (Egan, 2010, p.38) He also considers that we rarely give children choice in school and allowing them to choose their own topic does not fulfill our duty as teachers to expand our students interests and understandings. (Egan, 2010) In a way, LiD actually allows for more choice than most other activities because once students have their topics, they can choose how and what they would like to learn within the breadth of their topic. In a typical classroom program, the curriculum is predetermined by the Ministry of Education, the School District and school. Considerations are rarely given to student interests or experience. LiD allows students to find the wonder in a topic they might not have selected themselves. Allowing them to develop the ability to navigate future predetermined curriculum with the drive to find their own place within knowledge. The way in which topics are allocated is not a requirement of LiD, however, the process can create scenarios that are contrary to LiD principles. Egan contemplates

how choice might affect children's ability to persevere when they struggle. Objector 2 is applying a generalized perspective about the importance of choice. Through LiD, Egan is trying to maintain the independence and ownership that choice encourages. While still preserving the opportunity for students to experience the wonder of everything and to gain the confidence that perseverance and wisdom allow.

Objection 3: The students will drop out or revolt against it.

Objector 3 is more specifically referring to the adolescents that she believes will revolt or abandon their topic in their rebellion years. She says, "Threats and bribery – in the mild forms we use these in school systems – may keep them at it for their early years, but for most students it will become irksome and be seen as drudgery..." (Egan, 2010, p. 45) By believing that the only way to motivate children to learn is by coercion, Objector 3 is contradicting the foundational theories of Learning in Depth and giving more evidence for the need of a program like LiD. Egan's hope is that if students have been learning about their topic for 9 years, with multiple teachers, through cognitive changes and independent of teacher requirements, by the time they reach adolescence their topic will be as close as a good friend and may prove to be where students go to escape from the coerciveness of the school system. By arguing that the 'game' of school would cause students to revolt against and unmarked project, this Objector has actually given more reason for LiD to be implemented within the school system. Crucial to LiD's success is the way in which teachers create and foster the environment where the virtues of LiD can prosper.

As teachers, we revel in the moments when our students are full of curiosity and an unrelenting need to learn and discover something. The students who seem to leave our classrooms still glowing from something they learned that day and returning the next day having researched to find more answers and connections to their intense desire to understand. The moment seems to radiate with possibility, an abundance of knowledge. This is the enthusiasm, motivation and energy that Learning in Depth seeks to cultivate.

In his book Curriculum of Abundance, David Jardine explains this euphoric moment of blissful learning as the abundance of discovery and knowledge.

To come to an understanding of the rich places, the rich topographies, the rich topics that have been entrusted to teachers and students in our schools (those that are listed in such orderly dull, unimaginative fashion in our curriculum guides for various subject areas and grade levels), we must venture into such places and risk being transformed, risk changing, risk learning more than we might have originally anticipated or hoped or desired or planned for. We – students and teachers alike – risk becoming educated. (Jardine, 2003, p.3)

To perceive our curriculum as being abundant, allows us to uninhibitedly embrace the unknown and be curious about the world. It allows us to be lifelong learners, striving to embrace new ideas and become obsessively engaged in knowledge.

Unfortunately, abundance is not the adjective we often use to describe the learning that takes place in our classrooms on a daily basis. Jardine describes Ivan Illich's work (1971) as speaking;

... eloquently of how the institutionalization of education in the 20th century insinuated into students and educators alike the idea that knowledge was a scarce commodity and therefore that the shape of education must be one of competition for its resources. Moreover, access to this

limited resource is itself limited to the very institution that imagined its scarcity in the first place: schools, as places that have come to emulate images of the market economy. (Jardine, 2003, p.3)

Jardine goes on to explain how the 'market economy' of education has created a 'regime of scarcity' that seeks to mold curriculum into forms that can be predicted, assessed, monitored, consumed, dispensed and accumulated. "This is how a scarce resource appears in a market economy." (Jardin, 2003, p.4). Knowledge becomes "...striped of its abundance, unmonitorable, uncontrollable relations, possibilities and unguarded appearances. It becomes reduced to its manageable and monitorable surface features. Under this regime, to understand the Pythagorean theorem means to memorize its formula and be able to correctly apply it to mathematical problems on demand in an examination." (Jardin, 2003, p.4) The richness of Pythagoras, his history, discovery of the theorem and secret society is lost becomes reduced to a mathematical formula memorized to do well on a test. The abundance stripped away. "Once knowledge is understood as a scarce commodity to be consumed, satisfaction of the desire to consume is not only not sought, it is not desirable. Once we concede, willingly or otherwise, to education understood under the regime of scarcity, the desire for more must be maintained if the ravenous sway of scarcity is to be maintained." (Jardine, 2003, p.5) The regime of scarcity makes students apathetic towards learning. The act of learning in school becomes the act of converting successful participation into marks that are further converted into opportunities for social status. Those students that are good at the game buy into it because they are successful. Those students who are not good at the game become bitter and refuse to participate. People define themselves based

on their success within the regime and learning without compensation (marks/credit) becomes a waste of time. In other words children described by Objector 3 as needing coercion, deadlines and the threat of marks to engage in learning have already been educated into the regime and lost their ability to see, and appreciate the abundance of experience and understanding.

I believe that Learning in Depth is an attempt to renew the abundance of knowledge and experience. The topics are selected for their breadth and depth abundance qualities. The threats and bribery that reduce abundance to the limitations of scarcity are eliminated and students are encouraged to find their own connections and interests within the topic. The enduring principal that persists throughout Learning in Depth that ‘everything is wonderful’ is the same as saying that everything is abundant. People who have a difficult time accepting whether LiD will work may be stuck in the regime of scarcity and find it difficult to place LiD within that regime. It does not fit because it seeks to reinvigorate the abundance of learning. Although Egan does not use the terms ‘regime of scarcity’ and abundance, he describes these ideas when discussing the potential for LiD to create new learning opportunities for students.

We have created an educational system in which nearly all formal learning is forced in some way. Nearly all formal learning is subject to assessment, because we tend to assume that students need to be “motivated” to learn. That is, we have created a system in which the kind of easy, “natural” learning of the streets and fields that John Dewey wanted to see brought into schools is not generally expected to happen. Our system is based on the belief that we cannot give students a choice about whether they should learn, say, algebra or not, because we fear the results, and it is clearly believed that to “motivate” them to learn algebra we need to assess them and allot benefits in school and in life in proportion to how well

they manage. The LiD program is based on the belief that students' learning when unassessed and uncoerced will likely produce results quite different from what we consider inevitable in our current schools. These likely different results are a product of removing the program from the commitment of the schools to produce required learning for various social purposes and from the consequent need to assess students to help determine their future social roles and jobs. (Egan, 2010, p.171)

Egan's rationale for insisting LiD be implemented without assessment and coercion seeks to give students a chance to be the keen learners they are everywhere else in their lives. As a teacher, if I am going to create an environment where the abundance of knowledge can be truly allowed to cultivate, the constricting elements of the 'regime of scarcity' must not be present. I cannot be commanding, requiring or directing. My role needs to change. I believe this is where teachers struggle to implement and assess the success of LiD. Unless we can recognize our presuppositions about motivation in school and assume a role that contributes to the abundance of knowledge and experience, we are not actually doing LiD. In my experiences, teachers wish for their students to become the lifelong learners and embrace the abundance of learning, but continue to enlist the restrictive leveraging tactics that make short term shallow gains. When the belief in the abundance of knowledge is not commonly held and LiD can be disregarded as unrealistic in today's schools, we fail to instill the qualities of lifelong learning in our students.

Previously, I described a teacher who generally teaches within the regime of scarcity. When she begins Learning in Depth, her demeanor changes, her physical appearance changes and her position changes. She moves from directing the class to participating in the discussion. She becomes a support team, helping to guide the

willing and encourage the ones who still need to find their way. She seeks to embody the abundance of her topic as a leader from within and uses the celebration of curiosity and investigation to highlight the momentum towards discovery of experience and knowledge. As teachers, LiD provides us with the opportunity to shed the heavy weight of 'market economy' structures within our system. It gives our students a chance to see and experience knowledge, learning and school without the imposing, deflating risk of being judged and evaluated. Our system, our market economy of learning is producing children that understand how to do school but not how to learn and understand knowledge. Teachers who have told me that LiD will not work within the structures of our current system need to reflect on the whether our current system is working for our students. Passion, independence, generosity and understanding from within are all characteristics of good learners that have embraced the wonder and abundance knowledge. If this is what we seek as committed educators, an hour a week and adjustment of our role will help our student experience school in abundance.

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