

2018

## Fostering Future Leaders through a Holistic Approach to Discipline

Jennifer-Maple Loew  
*Portland State University*

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Fostering Future Leaders through a Holistic Approach to Discipline  
Jennifer-Maple Loew  
Portland State University  
Fall 2018

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## PART I: PREAMBLE

### Guiding Values and Principles

During my time in the Leadership for Sustainability Education (LSE) program at Portland State University (PSU), I have found that my values and guiding beliefs towards my practice have flourished to reflect a deeper and more critical lens. The first of my direct family to attend a graduate program, and being a mother of two daughters at a young age, I feel blessed to have had the chance for self-development and self-actualization that has unfolded during my opportunities in higher education.

I resonate deeply with an analogy regarding my favorite plant, a fern. The fern fronds and roots both develop directly from the stem. I visualize the stem as the mind, absorbing material, language and interactions; this nourishment travels deep into my roots while also developing transformation in my ways of acting, doing and being, unfolding my fronds of critical thinking. This ode to a biophilia type metaphor hints at the intense complexity of mind-body, a whole system working together being influenced by everything around. Coming from a background with some forms of violence, houselessness and non-nurturing, my greatest goal is to discover and implement self-nourishment into my core as well as find ways to share this with others.

Gandhi's ideals have had a great influence on my educational and life journeys. A Sanskrit concept deeply rooted in yogic philosophy and traditions, *ahimsa*, was a daily practice in Gandhi's life. *Ahimsa* literally means to do no harm, calling fourth our most brilliant and best selves; to practice courage, balance, love of

self, and compassion for others (Adele, 2009). Furthermore, *Ahimsa* encourages universal well-being and encourages a prosperous life for all-not just humans. It is the embodiment of living in the present and opening up to a good life for all (Prakash, 2013). During an LSE course titled Nonviolence and Gandhi's Educational Philosophy of Sustainability, I was awoken to the idea of non-violence in a vast array and this began to foster my already sparked interests to begin a more solid yoga practice.

Over the course of my time in this program, I enrolled in a 200-hour yoga teacher training. Yoga is a form of non-violence. I actively use my physical body, connecting breath (*prana*) and flow (*vinyasa*), and have the opportunity to get out of my head. Through teaching, connecting with students, integrating intentions, listening, and actively touching my student's bodies thru assists, adjustments, and modifications, I get to play a small part of mindfulness and self-healing for others' well-being, as well as find this as an outlet for my own self-nourishment.

As a parent, life long student, and educator, I find that my most memorable and cherished educational experiences are those with hands-on learning. Experiential learning has greatly shaped my lens of how I wish to facilitate the learning environment, while bringing people together and fostering our sense-of-place understanding. Hand's on learning connects us with the *anima-mundi*, the soul of the world, acknowledging the Earth as a living, breathing, spiritual being. The Earth is alive! The theory of *biophilia*, our affinity with the natural world, is often oppressed in the traditional classroom environment. Creating experiences where students can be outdoors, feel, taste, smell, use all of the senses to make connections

with beings, lends to a deeper relationship with the bigger world around us. I believe that doors open up towards land stewardship, self-care, community relationships, greater happiness, and greater personal relationships between students and educators, when learning experientially.

Critically engaged dialogue is a value that I hold very dear. While traditional methods of education see students as vessels to be filled, known as the banking method of education (Freire, 2000), I prefer to challenge what the system tells us to think and hope for others to find their voices as well. By organizing classes to be open, safe spaces with group norms created together, and through open dialogue regarding relevant issues, we can begin to process the information coming at us and to challenge it to make sense using our own authentic thinking.

I find great value identifying information that is relevant to students' lives. In the educational system there is a tendency to focus on specific periods of time that reflect what society tells us to believe. I found myself snoozing all the way through my high school US history classes as the information was one-sided and presented in such a boring, based on memory, manner. It is of utmost importance to capture students' interests and stoke their creative fires by including relevant topics as well as the ways of indigenous teachings and other cultures. Students come from diverse backgrounds and can have enormous differences in what is relevant from one individual to another; we must incorporate topics into the learning environment that are of interest to all of our students.

Having children of my own who have gone through the public school system, I find that being an involved parent with both my kids and their school systems are

beneficial and even necessary to their success. When my kids have been in trouble at school, playing an active role and understanding what is happening and what our options are can impact the overall outcome, having lasting effects. This is why it is vital to acknowledge all relevant information, not just one side. Looking holistically and openly, without judgment at situations versus sticking strictly to by-the-book policy can greatly shape the outcomes of students experiences along their educational journeys.

Fostering relationships and open communication are hugely influential when considering students success in an educational setting. I've experienced the differences between getting to know others on a more personal level versus a superficial level. Having worked alongside my child's school district to instill more crosswalks at local schools, I realized the value of fostering these relationships with the staff and school communities. When school systems are dealing with larger populations of kids, I am also aware of the challenges that can hinder getting to know the student body, and wider community, more closely. However, when dealing with students in the office spaces of the institution, taking the time to get to know them fosters building solid relationships. Trust, help, mentorship, confidence, safety, and security are just some of the benefits of getting to know the student body better.

### **Educational and Leadership Philosophy**

Community and Community Based Learning (CBL) experiences have led an enormous shift in my way of experiencing the educational environment. Growing community with in the school system allows for intention and meaning to develop. When we value personal relationships we break down walls that can

inhibit learning and connection. Palmer (1998) writes that “intimacy [is] the highest value in human relationships because intimacy is regarded as the best therapy for the pain of disconnection. When intimacy becomes the norm, we lose our capacity for connectedness with the strange and the stranger that is at the heart of being educated” (p. 92-93). I find that when I get to know the folks I’m involved with, be it in an educational or professional setting or other, relationships unfold and the core of matters can be addressed because we acknowledge one another, we can build each other up instead of tearing each other down in our cultures prevailing Western competition driven mindset.

Time for reflection is another philosophy I have incorporated into my toolkit. When we take in so much constant and often drastic change in this world, we need time to process. If we react quickly, perhaps we neglect to think over other possibilities. I have found that when I react quickly, I often end up regretting what I said, did, agree to, etc. I have recognized that I have a habit of not saying no, that I often end up unhappy that I didn’t wait to really think about my time as valuable. Only recently have I begun to step back and realize that I tend to be most happy when I have periods of free time. We need to learn to keep an open schedule and have periods of uncommitted time devoted to whatever we want, to whatever comes up (Heider, 1985). By having an open schedule I can tend to what my needs are at that moment-an important form of self-care.

Reflection also plays a vital role when dealing with my kids and their schools. If there are issues, it is important for the educational faculty and staff to have a well-rounded understanding of the effects that take shape when enforcing rules upon



students. Actions can take a long time to show what their lasting effects may be. It is important to slow down, to process information, to find outlets to critically reflect on information, such as journaling, dialogue, collaboration, and awareness, and to understanding what long term outcomes may be and how they might effect students', and so on.

#### **4 Key Learning Areas**

##### **1. Developing a self-understanding and commitment to sustainability**

**leadership** has been shaped through learning experiences while in the LSE program. Being part of the Learning Garden's Laboratory (LGL) and assisting in planting crops, cleaning up the gardens and sheds, studying the compost system and self-exploration in the complexity of the soil food web have all aided in my development of sustainability issues and understanding. I've also participated for several seasons at Sauvie Island Center (SIC), an organic vegetable Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm open to educational field trips to Portland Public School (PPS), predominantly Title 1 classes. Here, as both a field trip leader and a mentor for PSU students, I learned about crops and how the FBI, or Fungus, Bacteria, and Invertebrates heat up the soil and break down nutrients to help naturally feed the food we eat. I educated students on where their food comes from, from seed to harvest. We tasted food, and measured temperature changes in the compost heap. We traversed in the rows of corn and listened to the frogs in the grass. We hid in towering bright green Brussels sprouts. We engaged with all of our senses. Realizing that some kids and adults hadn't tasted or didn't know what certain vegetables were sparked my interests in food security matters.

I have since teamed up with a good friend and not only garden at my home, but also at a community garden, where we donate extra vegetables over the Spring, Summer, and into late Fall months, to a local organization that assists in feeding the local homeless community. I have volunteered several times to weigh and drive the boxes to the shelter and have gotten to meet some of the people served through this organization. It is a very humbling experience and I highly recommend that every single person who takes a part of the community garden visit the space. Through these experiences though, I began realizing a small portion of my privilege. As a middle-class white woman (though I've experienced homelessness in my past), I now have stability in my life that provides me with food and shelter and other necessities and conveniences. I have time now to focus on serving others, a regarded Gandian value. I decided that I want to find ways to introduce a more sustainable lifestyle to people, and I wish to infuse a more holistic connection of these experiences into public school systems, including into structures of regulations, more of this to come later in this paper.

2. Having the privilege to join a small group of LSE peers and professor Burns to Nicaragua, allowed space for me to hone in on complex issues that effect people globally. While I walk through the cloud forest in the high mountains near San Ramon, it felt as though time stood still, in a prehistoric consciousness, acknowledging old growth and trickling streams. A guide hacks into a tree, exposing blood like ooze that runs out of the trunk-medicinal properties. Using our senses we can feel the climate shift from the lower land to this higher point in the trees. Hearing the birds mimic our calls, we can't help but noticing our minds expanding,

our hearts growing, our bodies relaxing. Education of the head, hands, and heart has now settled into the whole of my being.

It is here in Central America, that I really take in a **Systemic View of the World**. At home in the US, we are stuck on the treadmill of production/consumption, bigger is better, and it is a symptom taking over the world. Here in Nicaragua, we visited some homes with dirt floors, exposed walls with nails protruding, and tapestries as doors. A wood fire slowly cooks handmade tortillas made with fresh corn. The children participate in the cooking, and the clothes dry on lines. This slow movement, having time to breathe, knowing what is in your food and making it yourself, family together time, this is what life is really about. We must take note from people around the world, and develop the capacity to listen and learn from others. Indigenous cultures may show us an image of a future by which we can escape our present. If a culture does not parallel the Western culture, it may be a gift, a glimpse into other possible ways of sustainably thriving in the future. Experiencing multiple perspectives encourages the breakthrough that reality and knowledge are ongoing, impressionable, and contextualized (Hawken, 2007; Zaytoun, 2005). I am hopeful for our future. If movies like Aquaman are shedding light on the amount of toxins and garbage littered in our seas, then the mainstream is sure to notice. The tides might be changing, after all.

**3. Developing bio-cultural relationships** has been of huge benefit towards a commitment to sustainability education. Having open discussions, time for reflection, and group norms, all aid in facilitation of multiple perspectives. Hands-on-learning provides real world experiences while backing up any book reading

knowledge. In this way students can have a more tactile and sensory experience of their learning and possibly meet the communities that are being affected by the experience. These actual experiences in education lend in transformational learning, to where, as Robertson (1997) suggests, the individual feels as though they have grown or developed as a person and/or a change has taken place in mindset. I personally gain far more through hands on learning. I hope to infuse my work as a future professional with lots of meaningful and transforming experiences.

4. Utilizing Permaculture ethics and principles as guides towards a more sustainable future is one way I'm **developing my tools for sustainable change**. Care for Earth, care for people, and return the surplus, also known as the permaculture ethics (Hemenway, 2015), are a support system which represents my ideal route of practice when creating, relaying, informing, and guiding sustainable pedagogy. It is a part of what makes up a whole system design. Within our program, we performed personal zone and sector analysis that provided deep insight into our own authentic lives. Being able to visualize and articulate our lifestyle systems in this way opened up room for transformation of what I see as relevant and value.

The LSE program has instilled a substantial level of confidence within, which I lacked beforehand. With have utilized coursework and mindfulness in ways that have fostered my personal growth. I have discovered confidence to see ideas through. I have learned how to think critically, which for me includes slowing down, reflection and process time, and to be able to identify when and where a system has room for change.

In a very dear to my heart ELP course, Adult Learning, I've expanded my mind to acknowledge a broader horizon, realizing the need to be as prepared as a self-directed, lifelong learner, prepared to create and thrive within jobs that aren't invented yet, and be able to use technologies that haven't been invented, and to identify solve problems that we don't even know exist yet (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). One theory that highly resonated with me, Self Directed Learning (SDL), is described as learning that is sought out, planned, where responsibility and evaluation of outcomes are valued and in general, it is a wanted and chosen learning experience (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). By including the SDL theory with my developing toolkit, I'm more engaged in my work, I feel better prepared to manage changes, to be able to focus on lasting relationships with community members through direct connection, and have the capacity to inquire about their needs and ideas-to hear their voices. For further information on the Stages of SDL, please refer to Appendix B.

In the LSE course Philosophical Foundations of Adult Learning, I've discovered I resonate deeply with the humanistic adult educational philosophy. What I find most significant is the emphasis on self-directed learning, with key concepts such as freedom and autonomy. I believe that when we follow our hearts as our guides, paths become clearer, and we can come to be proud of our work and invest ourselves more fully into the transformations we seek. Elias & Merriam (1980) point out other practices connected with the humanistic approach such as group dynamics and group process, as a few that resonate with me and are clearly embraced and practiced in LSE programming.

## PART II: ACADEMIC SYNTHESIS

### Introduction

The purpose of schooling is to foster future leaders, to critically engage students as lifelong learners to continue growing, connecting with their community, challenging business as usual and overall to be inclusive and actively engaged citizens. This paper begins with personal experiences in a larger urban public school district in Oregon, where current structures in place related to discipline hinder youth when it comes to how disciplinary actions are handled. It is my hope in pulling from my developing LSE toolkit, to address some of these issues, and to provide a proposal on how to redirect procedures towards a more sustainable route for all involved.

The disciplinary protocol addressed in this paper is specifically regarding instances concerning student suspension and/or expulsion. Any incidences of discipline are routed through a discipline action procedures funnel and assigned to a form in which the closest fitting incident description is then circled and officially documented and tracked on student records. These records follow students through their high school graduation.

If students are issued punishment, first they are sent to weekly evening Insight classes, then to three weeks of at school time at the Student Success Center for a second offense. Both are located at a single building on one side of town, serving all 46,500 approximate students per the 2018-2019 academic year. That's 31 public middle and high schools across the district, not including charter, alternative, and specialized schools and not including specific K-8 schools. All 6<sup>th</sup>-

12<sup>th</sup> graders are subject to the same line of punishment protocol and the grade levels attend these required classes together- there is no separation between grade levels.

Attending can lead to financial hardships for families, students academic success can become jeopardized through the sheer velocity of school time missed, there is attached stigmatization and labeling issues, and long term effects such as ongoing credit recovery to make-up for lost credits to fulfill this rigid and funneled system of discipline protocol. Students and families of larger public schools are oppressed by disciplinary practices, which don't honor the whole student. Oppressive and punitive disciplinary practices used in public schools hinder the growth of active, engaged, and empowered citizens who can be part of sustainable change.

## **Literature Review**

### **1. Dominant Systems of Education**

#### **Marketing Schools**

Western educational systems are promoting managerialist structures of oppression being imposed upon students where sadly, economics and politics are entrenched in our schools and harming the futures of youth. Western culture is geared towards bigger is better. Citizens have been wired to always want more, and to accept material items as disposable. The market economy reigns supreme. The treadmill of production and consumption is rampant in our culture, as seen in the turnover in the fashion industry with 52 micro-seasons a year, the industry goal is to sell as many garments to consumers as possible for quick turnover and to make

people feel out of trend (Eisenstein, 2013; Whitehead, 2014). Private sponsorships hold assemblies at high schools, changing school names on a whim and launching out free Nike tee shirts as swag, with a hidden agenda towards marketing through these publicity stunts. Corporations have control over publicly-run schools, donating ipads and building new basketball courts, but have a larger stake in decision making processes while not having personal interactions within the systems they are changing. An example of this can be seen in the European Union's decision to match up every public school with a corporation (Sterling, 2001). However, forcing schools to compete through the ruling of policies means that the advantaged schools get more while the disadvantaged schools become further disadvantaged and are shunned for not succeeding (Sterling, 2001). Marketing of public schools will only reify barriers towards sustainable education and empowered citizens. My goal is to shed light on this mechanistic dominated educational system and shift it towards a more sustainable education for all involved. This involves taking education back from those who intend it to be nothing more than centralized, homogenized, standardized, technologized, and industrialized (Orr, 2001; Sterling, 2001).

In this marketing fashion, schools have become like great big machines pumping out grades and test scores, rather than honoring the uniqueness of each student (Stone, Barlow, & Capra, 2005). This industrialized educational system is not savoring the experiences of students' journeys. Concern is weighted more heavily on test performance and student numbers for per student funding. Education has become more about assessment, performance, and memorization of



content, while lacking in cultural breadth, moral choices, variety, finding of real problems, reviewing relevant facts, and being contextualized (Stone, Barlow, & Capra, 2005).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is a shining example of a top-down, punitive flawed approach to the educational environment. NCLB values high test scores derived from cheaper and quicker methods from start to finish. When students and schools don't perform well, districts are shamed, blamed, and held financially accountable to deal with figuring out themselves how to raise scores. Courses such as music and physical education have been replaced with more math and English. Teachers' performances are measured on their efficiency and whether or not they complete their tasks. Teachers are reprimanded as weak or bad educators all the while teacher's workloads increase as do class sizes, burnout and stress, and salaries are cut. NCLB places high-stakes on schools but fails to provide any supports or resources for schools in achieving these requirements (Latvinov, et. al, 2018; Rose, 2014). The focus in this type of system is clearly not on fostering the success of children or in the sustainability of the educational environment. Instead, a broader view would need to be implemented, one where youth are engaged and developing skills deeper than memorization, and educators would need to be involved and work with students as a team (Ladd, 2017; Stone, Barlow, & Capra, 2005).

### **Lacking Staff Training**

A lack of continuing sustainable education on the staff's behalf nods towards Sterling's (2001) crisis in education; issues within the system creating managerialistic forces that dishevel humanistic and democratic sustainable values. Commonly found amongst public schools, a typical zero tolerance policy limits staff from making individual decisions around rules when it comes to discipline actions. It is an all too common occurrence that faculty repeatedly are forced to follow the demands of school districts policies and make hasty decisions that abide by strict rules verses using their own intuition and good judgment (Jones, 2007). Faculty are limited to the predetermined by the book policy procedures where they often have no flexibility to alternative routes and typically must follow the top-down chain of command flow when making any important decisions (Bolmand & Deal, 2013; Mallett, 2016). Developing staff decision-making skills as top priority, that gives staff and faculty flexibility and ownership, will help alleviate the complexity and control of structural authority mechanisms, while fostering resilient learners from a system of dominance and uncertainty (Jones, 2007; Sterling, 2010).

### **Zero-Tolerance**

As Mahatma Gandhi observed, no culture could live, if it attempts to be exclusive. Education and learning cannot be exclusive- students futures depend on more holistic, inclusive theories and practices (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Systems lacking in flexibility and freedom of choice lead towards sterile and controlling environments that closely parallel the zero-tolerance rigidity found commonly in schools (Wheatley, 2006). Zero-Tolerance policies were traditionally meant to

address serious offenses such as possessions of firearms but are now being used for determining the outcomes of student fighting and disrespect (Martinez, 2010).

When students are issued punishments that are exclusively set and funneled for the masses, we come across Freire's (2000) banking concept of education, where students are seen as vessels to be filled. This brain dumping of education is the epitome of the educational environment when staff lacks training and decision making capabilities. Administrators have misused zero-tolerance policies and the routes of this structure are based on exclusion, through suspension and expulsion, which carry with them harsh side effects to student's long-term success (Martinez, 2010).

Brain dumping is also standard of the NCLB Act and it is the embodiment of students' experiences when their futures are sealed with predetermined, unyielding rules and regulations. This becomes especially damaging as students learn, by going through this system, to accept oppression from schools due to the influential statuses of parents, peers, teachers, and the cultural environment, as business as usual (Hardiman, et. al., 2013). One size does not fit all and funneling procedures should shift towards a holistic design that fosters youth to challenge the norms and recognize systems of oppression. Creating a more sustainable protocol through transforming this funneling structure to nurture resilient learners could shift learning so it is relevant, engaging, and meaningful to students, while giving staff the flexibility in decision making when it comes to making choices that effect students futures (Ladd, 2017; Sterling, 2010).

## **SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE**

The limited structure of a zero-tolerance policy on discipline plays a substantial role in the school-to-prison pipeline. A lack of educators' flexibility in decision-making plays a significant role in the bridge to juvenile court and beyond (Mallett, 2016). This lack of alternatives to the rules has resulted in large portions of students experiencing suspension, expulsion and even arrests (Litvinov, 2018; Mallett, 2016). A trend found among the school-to-prison pipeline is that it disproportionately effects mostly low-income children and children of color. Black students were three times more likely to receive both in-school and out-of-school suspensions than white students in a 2013-2014 data survey, while graduation rates plummet and the dropout rate increases (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2010; Litvinov, 2018). Restorative Justice (RJ) Practices speak towards the need to reintegrate students into the classroom and school communities rather than shunning students after incidences of discipline. Findings show that students experiencing academic failure, school expulsion, or who are at-risk of dropping out, are often correspondingly involved in the court system (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2010). To create bright and dynamic futures for students, a shift to participative and collective learning and discipline procedures needs to take hold.

## **2. Educating to the Whole Person**

In the U.S. and other Western societies, the age of adolescents is when identities and self-creation develops. During this developmental period, youth are highly influential, articulating questions and choices about life decisions that can

ebb and flow throughout the lifespan (Tatum, 2000). Developmentally, the body and senses both play significant roles in how the human brain processes information. The cognitive process is not purely measured from memory and intelligence. A more highly influential measure is found in life experiences (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Considering Western culture's oppressive and punitive disciplinary practices used in public schools, protocol should be reexamined and shifted into a holistic system, one that is beneficial to students, engaging them in their own paths to learning from their mistakes, creating critically reflective learners, and one where families are not burdened from uniform protocol (Sterling, 2010). Providing a supportive rather than ominous structure to protocol can be one shift towards creating a more intimately connected whole-system. Educating to the head, hands, and heart should be considered when dealing with youth.

### **Educating through Head, Hands, and Heart**

When the schooling experience is enriching and supportive then the possibilities of students having lasting, flourishing experiences with the world can be rich and lively. However, when schooling is viewed and experienced as dark, formal, rigid and punishing, students' relationships can change in how they view themselves and the world (Singleton, 2015). It is critical that the school culture, the educational environment, fuels the passions that move and motivate students, preparing them for long-term success and emphasizing meaningful relationships. When education and even discipline are presented in a way that evokes engagement, curiosity, emotions including those of love and respect, and other

shaping factors of sustainable values, over those of doom and gloom, then the educational experience can foster and nurture the critically engaged and dynamic long-term learning of how to be in the world (Singleton, 2015). Building strong relationships with students, offering students time for deep reflection of their educational interactions and experiences, and incorporating involvement that is engaging and meaningful, are all ways to shift the top-down dominant systems of education towards a more sustainable practice as part of the educational environment (Singleton, 2015; Wangaard, Elias, & Fink, 2014).

Importance has been for too long placed on figures and scores, rather than on how school is perceived by those who attend it (Rose, 2014). School leadership, dedicated staff, and effective academic instruction are some key areas to utilize in minimizing risks of youth delinquency (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2010). Sauve (2007) indicates the need for striking balance, for reflexivity and critical thinking in the educational system, stressing that to achieve sustainability, an enormous coordination and integration of efforts is required in a number of crucial sectors. To acknowledge the overwhelming challenges students, faculty, and staff face in today's world would be to acknowledge that students might focus more on security than on self-improvement (Chickering, A.W., & Reisser, 1993). Students deserve to be able to focus on their education and set up for the future.

Considering the whole of our students, not just breaking them into good versus bad parts based off of regulation labels, we can begin to see the complex web or relationships and patterns that makes up the whole (Starhawk, 1961). If the structures of authority instead allow students time for deep reflection, time to learn

from their mistakes, to hear them out, give them space and respect, educate with relevance and reverence and show students' they are truly cared about, perhaps the world for our future leaders can change. However, if nothing changes, and a bigger picture isn't explored, then educators and parents alike should look at how following these procedures by the book is negatively affect students success.

Educational structures often ignore the equally vital contributions that our sensory experience, our ethical sensibilities, and our intuitive capabilities can make to a more holistic understanding of the Earth and of our place within it. The current educational paradigm emphasizes quantities at the expense of qualities, and prioritizes facts over values (Stibbe, 2009). We cannot say that we know what outcomes will be until we understand the effects of current regulation on real people and their communities (Orr, 1991). Solving problems involves working together, making sensible choices, and restoring relationships of trust rather than blindly enforcing regulations as final say (Sterling, 2010; Stibbe, 2009). Some kids will get into trouble; we cannot squash trouble from happening. Problems we often diagnose as ones of bad behavior and low motivation among students and educators alike, more likely reflect the gradient between schooling and something deep inside trying to break free (Stone, Barlow, & Capra, 2005). There is a need to highlight the importance of the linking thread between education and discipline and to insert a sustainable method(s) to these structures.

## **Solution**

### **Peer Mentorship Program**

Finding methods to shift the funneling effect into a new and lasting structure that fosters student's and familie's best interests can be tricky and should be well thought out. Designing a structure depends on prevalent circumstances and needs to consider the educational environments goals, strategies, values, resources, and community. Understanding the complexity and variety of design possibilities can help create and shift systems that work for, rather than against, both people and joint goals (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Taking design into account, the school's common discipline thread on protocol procedures could shift away from their one-size-fits-all, top-down functioning towards an open, flexible, and sustainable system that nurtures and critically engages students.

One such solution to the problem of the districts funneling of disciplinary protocol is found when students have opportunities to participate and be creative in their academic lives. Smith and Williams (1999) provide numerous examples of how to foster this creativity, asserting that the voices of children and young adults be given significant weight in the decisions that affect their lives. Examples range from beginning in the classroom with the creation of rules and expectations and participation in curriculum development, to the creation of multiple internship opportunities, and extend out to coursework opportunities through participation and research on local problems and controversies. Through more engagement and participation with their own learning, students can directly connect and express their relationship with themselves, their education, environments, and one another



(Smith & Williams, 1999). Through the inclusivity of students with their own education, discipline protocol can shift from a punishment-induced tract to a real learning experience that supports students' success.

In line with Smith and Williams (1999) participative and creative central goals for students', I propose forming a Peer Mentorship Program (PMP). Meadows (1999) points out numerous places to intervene in a system, including examining and reconfiguring the top-down structure of information flows, the punitive rules of the system, creating the power to add, change, evolve, or self-organize a systems structure, and reexamining the goals of the system. One model to infuse into a PMP is found in Restorative Justice (RJ) practices. RJ emphasizes students' participation through their own determination and willingness, focusing on relationships, empowerment, and collaboration of the whole population through a more peaceful, humane environment. These practices are an alternative to punitive disciplinary measures commonly practiced in schools, and have been found to improve the school environment, reducing suspensions among students between 40% and 90% while also improving students' academic performance (Frias-Armenta's, et. al., 2018). Students were also reported to perceive high school teachers who experimented with more positive approaches/relationships as more respectful (Frias-Armenta's, et. al., 2018). Inviting students to be involved with their educational journeys whether or not if that involves issues with school policies and protocol, makes social development, community growth, the educational environment, and empowerment of students' learning, all more approachable.

Following Bolman & Deal's (2013) Lateral Coordination, Peer Mentorship fits in as a less formal and more flexible solution than authority-bound systems and rules. In Merriam & Bierema's (2014) Self-Directed Learning (SDL) model (see Appendix B), learning is sought out and planned, responsibility and evaluation of any outcomes are valued and in general, learning is a wanted and chosen experience. This model would serve as scaffolding to reference for this program. Students' who have previously gone through the current structure of punishment can turn this singled out negative experience into a meaningful, engaging, and more rounded learning opportunity for themselves and others. It is important to teach the next generation skills to relate with other people, how to be part of a community, to look beyond Western cultures ideals of winning or being first...to help students gain the qualities of authentic unique individuals who are comfortable and love who they are (Stibbe, 2009). Additionally, through the implementation of RJ, a paradigm shift in relationships between teachers, students, family members, and the community, is possible. Lasting change requires shifts in deeply entrenched school discipline practices and with the hierarchical structures of authority (Frias-Armenta, et. al., 2018). A Peer Mentorship Program would instead put students at the helm of their learning, especially with instances of school misconduct.

A PMP could serve as beneficial both to students who are currently struggling and moving through the protocol system, as well as for those students who have previously gone through the system. The PMP goal is not to assimilate students into structures of oppression, but to transform structures so that students become critically engaged citizens (Freire,2000). Taylor (2008) provides context of

the importance of student interactions through environmental variables that influence young adult development, which include examining the micro, meso, exo, and macro systems of students' lives. A peer mentorship program would foster students' engagement and creates positive experiences with community as well as a positive learning environment.

Peer Mentorship would be set up to let students act as mentors and mentees who work together, picking crafted goals for themselves. Perhaps funds could be allocated from a portion of the SSC towards this program, sort of like imagining the over crowded prison population. Let's fix root issues, rather than just continuing to put people behind bars and draw funding of perpetuation. The overarching goal behind PMP is to engage students in authentic learning rather than the conditioning learning of a conformist system. Real education encourages spontaneity, insight, and reflection. Sustainable education's aim is to holistically nurture critical thinkers who live with compassion, energy, and purpose (Orr, 2001). A program such as PMP could help students develop social skills and learn to reflect and take action for their futures. Sustainability education fosters students and instructors to be inclusive, participatory, experiential, engaging, critically questioning, place-based, and transformational learners and leaders (Williams, Burns, & Kelley, 2014). Let us not sit idly by and hope things get better for students involved with the harsh discipline protocol. The time is now for making positive and lasting change for our students-our future leaders.

The program could be located at the students' schools, rather than a single building serving the whole district. The program could be run at lunch, before or

after school, on weekends, or as a class period, as to not jeopardize students' academic success as compared to the SSC. There could be compensation such as issuing credit as an elective course for both the mentors and mentees involved in this work while this would also hold them accountable all term for their presence (see Appendix C). Mentors could work together with one another to create curriculum, discussion topics, and activities. School counselors and LSE students could team up with mentors to offer support, encouragement, advice, and ideas towards this work. Field trips to parks and local gardens could be offered as well as activities such as meditation, journaling, art, movement, and yoga.

This program could potentially open up outlets to students that they didn't acknowledge were there for them prior to the program. The radical act of learning to love oneself, to find value in oneself, even during times of hardship can be fostered through a program such as this. Learning through art, movement, and outdoor experiences can foster the whole person, allowing for deeper reflection and means of expression. Finding the Stretch Zone (Heaps, 2017), where the most learning happens, when concerning students and instances of misconduct/discipline would be to create a more sustainable environment and shift policies to adopt a holistic lens to engage in the learning process (see Appendix A). The world opens up when we support students. We must put students behind the wheel of their destiny, encourage students to find their voices and speak for themselves (Palmer, 1998). Students' views of themselves as leaders for sustainability could be a complete shift in worldview. Observation and awareness of values is an important leadership skill to develop (Burns, Vaught, & Bauman, 2015). Allowing students to develop into the

future leaders that they truly are through a PMP is one solution to break away from the dominant systems of discipline currently in place. After all, we don't want to set our students behind further, we want to foster our future leaders. When considering students and families, our public schools need to foster future leaders and support their journeys; thus we must examine the dominant systems of discipline currently in place when concerning instances of misconduct and shift towards a more sustainable manner.

### **Conclusion**

Systems and cycles are ever changing. By finding the tipping points for change, our education structures can shift to support students rather than promoting unenlightening dry language of conformist discourse (Stibbe, 2009). Considering that evolution produces systems that have the greatest ability to endure over time, with our careful tending, we are beginning to identify and establish an educational process that is going to work for students, not just for institutions or the government (Hawken, 2007; Kimmerer, 2013; Nelson, 2008). Observation takes time and plays a huge role in maneuvering through the funneling and stagnation of structures. Solving educational policy stagnation and funneling issues involves working to restore relationships of trust within the educational environment rather than seeking to impose solutions and rigid formalities upon students (Stibbe, 2009). We must not keep our policies hidden and draconian, as untouchable and unyielding.

There are vast published works of literature in circulation reinforcing the need for shifts in educational structures and there is always a need for flexibility in systems, for growth, and improvement. Therefore, critiques for this paper include personal bias and perspectives with references to a single public school district, which ignited investigating into the discipline protocol that is the highlighting topic of this paper. Recommendations for future work include data statistics collection. This district could begin researching how the SSC affects students' academic successes. I propose data collection begins once students are directed to the SSC, and continue to follow students academically through high school completion, and beyond. I also propose that data collection extends back to the lead up of any disciplinary actions, so the possibility of tracking success can be noted, incorporated, and used in overall evaluation for longevity purposes.

Lastly, I propose that there be ongoing trainings for educational faculty and staff that are centered toward educating the whole student and student development. Included in the trainings would be developing the use of gender free language and appropriate usages of language for persons of diverse backgrounds (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Faculty and staff should have the flexibility they need to make important decisions including the flexibility to cross boundaries to do what is needed (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Continuing education would help educators to make rational well-rounded decisions, stay current on events happening locally and around the world, as well as be a useful tool in learning how to navigate rigid systems while identifying and understanding personal variances of authoritarianism.

It is my hope to advocate for the peer mentorship program and share it with the district in which the idea formulated. I hope one day to see the program offered for credit in local high schools. I hope to gain support from LSE and Educational Leadership and Policy (ELP) students and department leads. The audiences appropriate for this paper include but are not limited to, educators, school boards, school districts, educational policy makers, educational advocates, school counselors, educational and leadership departments in colleges and universities, parents, and anyone who works or shares interest with children in the adolescents range.

I will leave you with a quote that struck a parallel cord with writing this paper. Chickering and Reisser (1993) proclaim how “we may not know for years that a single lecture or conversation or experience started a chain reaction that transformed some aspect of ourselves” (p. 43). Inspiring and fostering students’ through their youth and academic years today, can prompt the critically engaged and active citizens of tomorrow.

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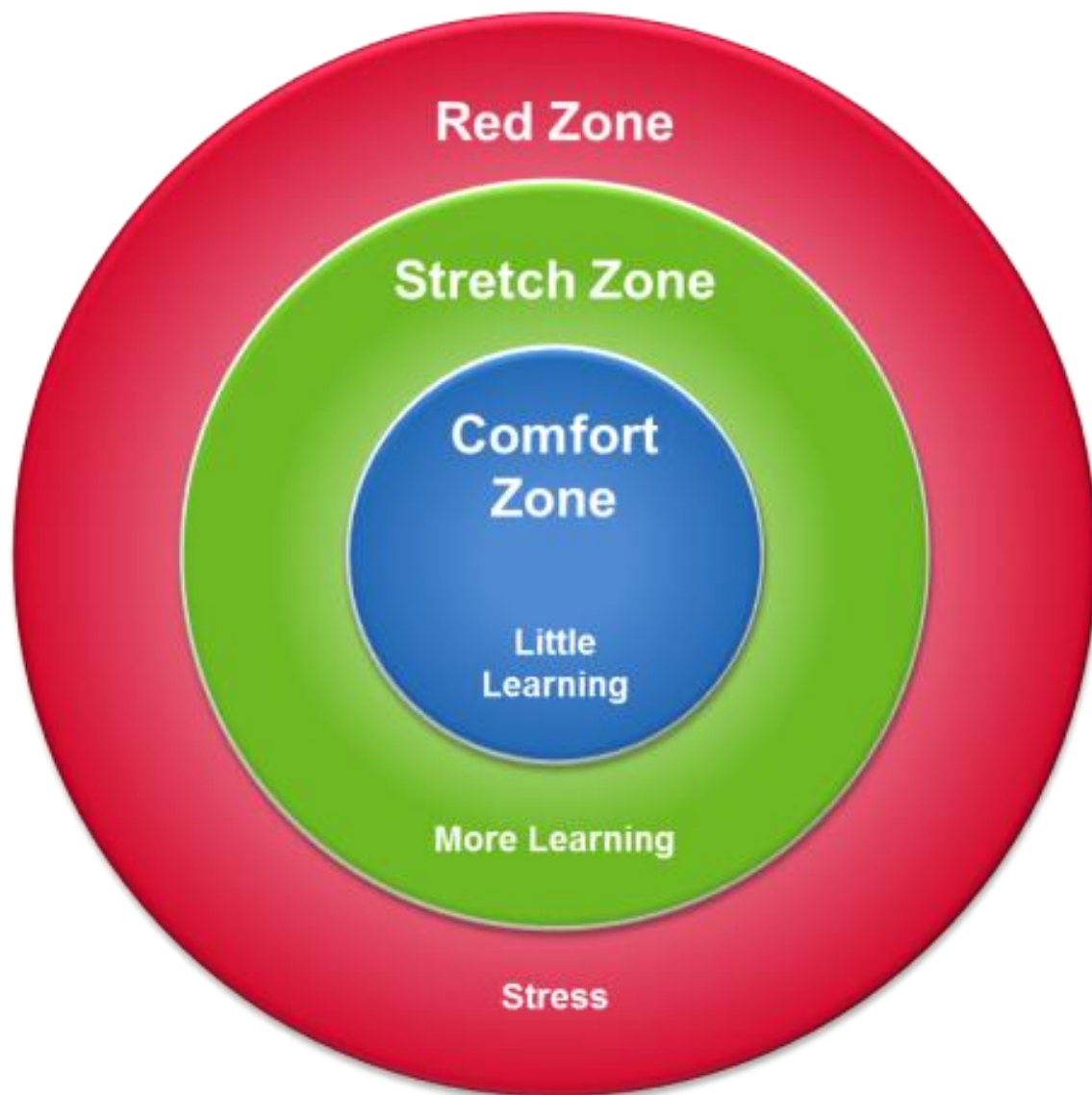
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## APPENDIX A

## The Three Zones

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## APPENDIX B

## Stages of Self-Directed Learning (SSDL)

Self-Directed Learning Stages Table : [https://www.google.com/search?q=Self-Directed+Learning+Stages&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiOwriR3MXeAhVKrIQKHYe0AiYQ\\_AUIEygB&biw=1280&bih=622#imgsrc=aimuejoAdqJWM](https://www.google.com/search?q=Self-Directed+Learning+Stages&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiOwriR3MXeAhVKrIQKHYe0AiYQ_AUIEygB&biw=1280&bih=622#imgsrc=aimuejoAdqJWM)



The SSDL model

Stage	Student	Teacher	Examples
Stage 1	Dependent	Authority Coach	Coaching with immediate feedback. Drill. Informational lecture. Overcoming deficiencies and resistance
Stage 2	Interested	Motivator, Guide	Inspiring lecture plus guided discussion. Goal-setting and learning strategies.
Stage 3	Involved	Facilitator	Discussion facilitated by teacher who participates as equal. Seminar. Group projects
Stage 4	Self-Directed	Consultant, Delegator	Internship, dissertation, individual work or self-directed study-group.

The Staged Self-Directed Learning Model.  
G. Grow

Appendix C  
Peer Mentorship Program Class Description Example

**Title:** Peer Mentorship Program  
**Grade Level(s):** 9-12  
**Credits:** .5 Elective credit per term  
**Prerequisite:** None

**Course Description:**

The Peer Mentorship program is a student led course designed to promote inclusivity, community, and positive experiences for mentee students enrolled in the program. Mentee students may range in grade levels 6-12. High school mentors have the ability to coordinate with one another, with schools counselors, and with the provided Leadership for Sustainability student volunteers from Portland State University. This class focuses on Restorative Justice Practices (RJ) and introduces topics around healthy ways to thrive as a student in today's academic systems. Topics and activities such as meditation, mindfulness, journaling, movement, art, yoga, outdoor sit-spots, walks, mini field trips, forest bathing, and so on, may be apart of what student mentees will experience in this program. Mentors will work together to promote well being, community, and be active listeners and advocates with and for mentees. Mentors will create class plans and facilitate program direction and discussion. This can be an internship style opportunity for student mentors and useful on resumes. This class is appropriate for all students with encouragement for students who may have been involved with the schools system concerning incidences of misconduct around suspension and expulsion issues. This class is open to all students.

For more information on PPS Student Success Center, visit

[https://www.pps.net/cms/lib/OR01913224/Centricity/Domain/44/SSC/SS\\_Cflyer.pdf](https://www.pps.net/cms/lib/OR01913224/Centricity/Domain/44/SSC/SS_Cflyer.pdf) ).

For more information on PPS Policies, Handbook, and Guidelines, visit

<https://www.pps.net/Page/1065>