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EDU6319: How People Learn

A2: Personal Learning Reflection & Professional Competency Model

## **Part I. Introduction.**

As with building pigment onto a canvas to build a portrait, the process of reflection in a professional and especially educational context requires deliberate acts of noticing and reaction to phenomena in real time. Layers of color become saturated as washes of oil or acrylic are lavished onto and into one another, the details forming in piecemeal as they bring the overall image to life. Similarly, reflection on praxis and memory helps to unearth the deposits of emotional reactions and pivot points that correspond to milestones in one's career and trajectory. They, too, open up to reveal a fuller image, on a narrative of origins and pathways that can connect a wide array of episodes of interactions and germination processes of learning and development. Even digressions can find a way of contributing to the overall tone and ambiance of a painting, offering contrast or juxtaposition in a way that enriches the fullness of the portrait depicted. Life being the long and winding road that it is, digressions too lend much to the value of reflection as topics of aspiration or bias begin to flicker in the story. It is only in halting, even momentarily, and taking the time to notice and to adjust that segments of paint and color, that may at first sit separately, begin to be implemented into the larger whole, as they take on new nuances and meanings towards a completed picture. Painting and reflection, then, are alike in requiring balance between observation and physical action in order to habituate a tangible portrait.

This paper will build a profile and portrait of a life still in transit, built upon a foundation of memories and experiences stretching back into my formative years of schooling and childhood and veering into the stages of my career as it has evolved. These details and stories help to elucidate on the stances and values I hold within myself and my work, and empower the practices I have adopted that may be carried into future chapters and enterprises. From there, investigation into the current landscape of the field will be considered, with observations of crucial and emergent topics that help to define the zeitgeist of the here and now as well as its possible impending future, alongside noted roles and positions from the current job market to help demonstrate these ebbs and flows, as well as my own professional aspirations. Together, these components will clarify an underlying pedagogy and help to locate my positionality within a vast field of educational research and practice, a field that continues to grow and implement new ways of being.

## **Part II. Reflections.**

My practice of education is undoubtedly an outcome of my experience of learning, and being in school, throughout my life. This, I feel, is an intrinsic and irrevocable component to every educator's approach and narrative, and props up education's arguably unique standing as a profession that allows or even demands its practitioners to exert reconciliation in addition to pursuits of teaching others content and understanding. Ruminations on the tactics and

strategies that worked well for us as learners often reveal threads that connect with currently held day to day routines or methods. Specific settings, people, events, even emotions can all help to empower the motivations that inform what any of us believes education to be capable of, or best suited to doing within the world. Education is also fixated as much on a future orientation, of the ends and the goals, as on the journey and means to getting there. Because of this, reflection is necessary to be an effective educator, and rewards those who practice it and its encouragement of intention to being able to unveil possibility within one's career whether or not it moves organizationally or pedagogically.

My work now and for the last decade has been as an educator in the sub-field of outside-of-school time (OST) or afterschool spaces. Specifically, I represent and build partnerships that activate resources of a museum institution within the context of community organizations. The details of this work resemble that of many afterschool programs, in that they are informal gatherings of youth and staff around activities that occur in smaller or less frequent proportion than that of formal classroom education, in my case once weekly for around two hours of scheduled making and exploration. But the content with which this work interacts and investigates is just as profound as for schoolday teachers, in that the world of afterschool itself possesses dynamics, social groupings, subject matter, and logistics as broad and varied as within the classroom. Youth are also bringing the residue and immediate responses to things that occur in their schoolday or at home to these afterschool spaces, and to that end educators in this space and time of day often must do the work to learn and to make connections between the happenings in these moments to those that have transpired or will transpire when they come up. Though afterschool is a major component to the ecosystem of youth learning and enrichment, it is still widely misunderstood, and deeply under-resourced, and both within it and in its connection to the other spaces that make up this educational landscape is a potential for new horizons that can stoke improved learning.

I feel comfortable and activated in afterschool spaces because it is here that my own youth was largely spent, and the pursuits of afterschool also reflect my long-held self-identification as a dabbler in DIY and hobbyist. Born to two working-class immigrant parents, my siblings and I relied on the entertainments and offerings of afterschool for virtually every need throughout childhood and adolescence: from homework help and tutoring to nutrition, and of course enrichment and learning. It was in these spaces that I also developed capacity for the microcosmic ways these spaces conveyed the larger social dynamics at play in the communities I belonged and to society itself. Youth sometimes have to relearn how to exist within group dynamics in spaces as robust and large as in the YMCA or Boys & Girls Clubs spaces, with their many enclaves and operations, as they must when participating in single-topic programs like tae kwon do- or ballet- or chess-focused organizations. Though I did well academically and enjoyed school, it was in afterschool spaces that I encountered a sense of becoming, and is where I have staked my flag as a contributor to the field of education now as a practitioner.

Because I identified more with the arts than with mathematics or science as a youth, I often felt detached and confused from the textbook- and lecture-heavy approaches in some classes at school that often weren't very multi-modal or tactile. If I could find an aesthetic or constructive angle at which to enter, I excelled, and in instances of biology's keenness towards systems and anatomies or the usages of functions to define the geometries of shapes, points,

and lines, I could muster my natural strengths to better consume these subjects. But instead, I often felt extraneous cognitive overload, and would suffer in other classes that relied too heavily on verbiage and technical jargon and their memorization, retreating into my notebooks to doodle. As an educator now, I am building on two core practices and commitments in my work. The first is that I utilize a tinkering pedagogy to uplift the background connections, perhaps cultural or from prior engagement, that youth and facilitators alike might have to build understandings of different science and crafts practices and with their personal sense of dexterity or usage of different materials and tools. By nature, tinkering is fixed upon a method that invites embodied tussling with physical objects, or with ideas through objects, but just as much is devoted to uplifting the dispositions and background narratives that allow these concepts and ideas to come forward better and with more detail through these interactions with memory or artifacts, and to build on them, sometimes literally. These can be familiarity with sewing machines as with a drill, or EVA foam to even the universally beloved construction paper. I encourage stories of summer camps when students last explored uniting coin battery with copper tape and LED bulb in the introductory Circle Time discussions I have with students as passageways to explore conjuring tabletop games made from wood and electronic components, for instance, or the warmth of a day spent with an aunt or abuela who used a sewing machine to fix the hole in a shirt as a crucial detail in constructing fabric pouches in one of my sessions. It is in the multidimensional array of ways to interact with objects and to highlight personal connections that I believe any subject can be broached in a way that feels compelling and in sync with one's one needs and style of learning.

Secondly, I exert a model of redistributed leadership in my workshop spaces that often mean shifts in our facilitation as youth co-construct our approaches to explorations like macrame or weaving, Japanese paper marbling, pinball machine-building, or lamp-making. Alternative to approaches that center the teacher or adult, itself based on a depositing theory of education, this model of program and learning experience design winnows vertical strata into a more democratic format that allows any participant to steer not only their own experience, but potentially the course of the activity or series of workshops for all. In addition to the core segment of time devoted to experimenting, pronounced time around research and development before the activity is introduced and also to debriefing on these sessions and all involved after the activity has wrapped are crucial elements in my workday and in the overall model of the programs I operate and foster. Debrief sessions with young adult facilitators, alumni of the program themselves that I manage and co-facilitate alongside, yield reflections and decisions about the next week, semester, or even year. Nimbleness, then, is a value I hold and iteration is the language I speak as an educator who wishes to implement reflection and response as key features of my pedagogy. To this end, I enjoy learning when it is not only a demonstration of skill or understanding, but the content itself and the subject amplified in discussion. In the next section, I identify a few currently available jobs that showcase this approach to learning and design.

Because I am a person of color, child to immigrants who speak English as a second language, and am queer, the entirety of my educational background has been flecked if not saturated with tones of Otherness. I rarely felt represented in the content or instruction of my learning, sometimes even microaggressed, which led to a persistent feeling of detachment. But to be an outsider looking in often results in a developed fluency in the attributes of that insular

culture, with gaps filled instead by notions of critique and imbued with personal politics of reclamation and the riches of sub-culture. This also makes up my motivation to remain in afterschool spaces and my resistance to working in formal school settings, but is why my motivations and aspirations both have much to do with wanting to unravel and deconstruct the vital connections between these spaces. As mentioned, I believe educators are invited to reconcile the experience of their own learning as contributors to the field, and in my case I have situated my work to act as an advocate for youth that I wish I had in my formative years. I have continued to take interest in and implement emergent topics that contribute to the deeper understanding of learning and schooling for youth who come from historically-marginalized and underserved communities, such as trauma-informed and healing-centered practices as well as social-emotional learning, and also aim to pivot my work around the pursuit of empowering intersectional considerations, but especially in terms of ethnicity, class, and gender, as important parts of the subject matter I foster. Tinkering is a functionally and philosophically open-ended and accommodating pedagogy that pairs well with this paradigm, and because so much of science has historically been wrought, or stolen even, from the wisdoms of indigeneity, this has been a crux of my development and is where I aim to direct more of my professional capacity.

### **Parts III & IV. Growth, Goals, and Aspirations & Competencies.**

In having cultivated a career in education over many years in a variety of organizations and across many spaces - including classrooms! - I have developed an adeptness and level of detail in my work's portrait that I feel both poised and equipped for some next milestones or pivots. Though this painting of my pedagogy is not complete, as it likely never will be, I am in a state in which the canvas, tubes of pigment, and tools could satisfyingly be moved and take on new and additional meanings exhibited within other enterprises. In this section I will identify traits and goals that make up the hopeful next steps of my career, as well as markers and indicators of the direction I believe the field as a whole or my portion of it are headed.

Before exploring the nature of the work I intend to move towards, it is helpful to portray the milestones I have already reached within my career and which will empower these decisions and directions. These include:

- having spent many years as a Lead Teacher and been promoted to manager for the programs I am involved in
- having worked on multiple facets of the same work: as an activity/curriculum designer and facilitator, as a leader of professional development, and as a business development manager procuring and maintaining Memorandums of Understanding with different educational entities and stakeholders
- having taught in museum, classroom, community space, religious, outdoor, and street fair settings
- presenting in different convenings for educators and museum professionals, within conferences and symposiums, on best and emergent practices
- co-contributing as a writer and researcher in a peer-reviewed journal article on the values and practices within my work advocating for belonging and becoming in afterschool spaces (Escudé, M., Rivero, E., Montano, J., 2020)

- developing DEAI considerations and strategies within a museum setting in contribution to its educational missions and program designs

There are instances and nuggets within these milestones that I hope to proliferate in the next steps of my career. These goals and aspirations include:

- building on a capacity for grant-writing and understanding the dimensions of program funding and institutional advancement
- producing more contributions in writing to the scholarship and research happening in OST and afterschool spaces, as well as in educational work intended to uplift a community orientation and underserved populations
- commanding from a broader vantage point the interplay between program design, educator recruitment, onboarding, training, and professional development, and pedagogical practice
- better understanding what makes for a successful non-profit organization
- taking on a Director-level role at an organization devoted to informal learning, or founding my own non-profit organization

Lastly, the following are traits and characteristics of directions that I have observed the field of education as a whole or informal learning are headed. They include:

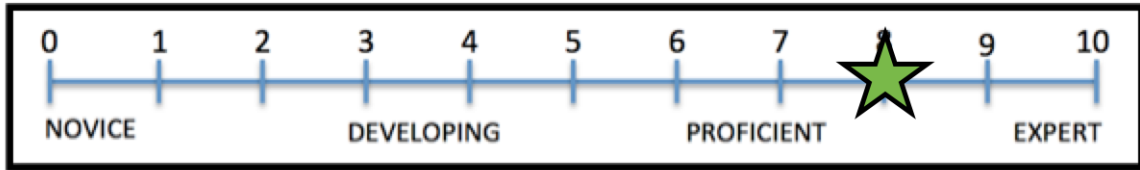
- a continuing proclivity for social-emotional learning and for learning spaces to adopt practices that foster a sense of belonging, equity, and intersectionality
- additionally, for considerations of trauma-informed and healing-centered care to take root in school systems especially in response to racial and gun violence, waves of immigration, and as considerations of queer identity come to be understood
- a newfound distaste or interrogation of tests and assessments as indicators of learning, in place of other tangible and intangible demonstrations
- renewed interest in embodied forms of learning, through hands-on protocols and material-based explorations that pedagogies like tinkering help to uplift
- rethinking the role of and access to technology in learning, especially as it relates to distance learning and to asynchronous learning

Taken together, each of the three sets of bullet points displays an array of possibilities within the sub-field of informal or afterschool learning within education, if not for the field as a whole, with a movement that feels unlikely to halt anytime soon as old ways of thinking are revisited and new ones are confronted. To me, many of these emerging innovations come from reflections on the pandemic but also from other social forces and factors like the rise of Black Lives Matter, as well as to the effects of the internet and the maturation of Gen Z as both audience and stakeholder. The usual mechanisms for field-wide sharing and professional growth, such as conferences and peer-reviewed journals, are being put to arguably better use now that formats once taken for granted have become subjects themselves of reformulation, and the cultural traits of institutions - and institutions themselves - are being reconfigured to align with these rising considerations. There is more opportunity in education than ever before,

because the notion of what education is and looks like has been pushed upon and altered in ways that have exploded its boundaries and allowed for so many new players to lay claim.

And, in investigating the current landscape of jobs, organizations, and methodologies across the vast terrain of education, some very specific requirements and duties help to yield more about the direction we are headed. Several of the job positions found in my search zeroed in on the need for hirees to be capable communicators and plan actualizers across multiple strata of leadership or structure. A position with Swissnex, an off-shoot of the Swiss Embassy in San Francisco that is devoted to economic and educational partnerships on behalf of the Swiss government with entities in the Bay Area, around Program and Engagement Management, for instance, asks applicants to be prepared to represent their institution in conversations with universities, museums, governmental bodies, visitor audiences, and students. This makes sense, as informal or OST educators often must partner with outside organizations to recruit students or to identify location settings for their work to be done, often collaborating with schools or churches to maximize on their available space at times their facilities might not be in use normally. The increasing complexity of the world of informal learning and OST design means that organizations must be competitive and valuable in their offerings, and flexible to the available commitment levels of their audiences who are likely balancing multiple involvements. Though the ability to partner and collaborate is infinite, space is finite, as are the number of people in a target audience.

Exerting a multidisciplinary or open-ended/collaborative approach to one's work was another commonly cited trait amongst employers in my search. This points to the increasingly non-linear way institutions are defining problem-solving, whether that is within the questions of their operations or within their pedagogy, and that leaders in these organizations are encouraged to define metrics and to define the content of their work in much more nuanced and varied ways than ever before. For a time, education was fixated on the collection of disciplines enveloped in STEM, but for the many years since, and exacerbated by the inequities of access to things like technology during the pandemic, have reformulated those demands into something that is more inclusive of the disciplines of tradespeople, of arts and crafts, and of the human sciences. Narratives around reclamation are also starting to take root, as museums confront pushes for repatriation and as schools interrogate their role in communities and to their most vulnerable students, which has led to framings of even traditional subjects to be more considerate of different approaches and needs. These and other preferences can be found in the table below showcasing competencies.



MEd COMPETENCIES	Rating
<b>A Systems Thinker</b>	
Perceives self as an educator participating within a larger system of education	9
Demonstrates strategic awareness	9
Looks for patterns and makes connections	9
Sees how parts relate to the whole, including the implications of systems and organizational change	8
<b>A Communicator</b>	
Proficient as a writer and as a presenter	8
Capacity to work within groups to listen well, speak well, and co-author	9
Able to collaborate and communicate in a range of modalities (face-to-face and online)	8
Facile with technology, keeps current with emerging technologies and social media	7
<b>A Creative Problem Solver</b>	
Situational awareness and leadership in identifying and defining challenges	8
Thinks creatively to generate ideas and be open to alternatives	8
Develops and implements plans for addressing problems and effecting change	8
Is resilient in less-than-optimal circumstances	9
<b>Culturally Responsive</b>	
Perceives the professional self as functioning within a global context of education	9
Aware of the dynamics of race, class, gender, and the other cultural factors within community dynamics and intercultural communication	9
Interest in, and capacity to perceive, multiple perspectives	9
Self-aware of cultural perspective and privilege	9
Capacity to serve as an agent for social justice	9

As demonstrated in the table above, I feel poised and equipped to pursue more pronounced work as an advocate and consultant to emergent topics and considerations within informal learning spaces, and hope to wield new skills and abilities from this Master's program and from my continuing work to take on a role as Director within an organization, or to found a non-profit organization of my own. I have cultivated a viewpoint and practice over time that strongly takes into account a systems thinking approach and that views education as a force for public health and transformative learning experiences for whomever the audiences are.

I have identified a need to keep building as a creative problem solver and as an enacter of change within an organization because my current role is located more in the bridge between two organizations than in one of oversight over the mission and organization as a whole. Because of this, and despite being able to wield the largesse of the museum in which I work to the betterment of my programs in community spaces, I also frequently face barriers and bureaucracy from having my work located in an institution that employs more than 500 people

and is involved in a huge number of projects from exhibits to residencies to public programs to grants, retail, and beyond.



<b>LEARNING &amp; INSTRUCTION COMPETENCIES</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Anticipate and meet the needs of diverse students to effectively teach and lead in schools and communities	8
Understand the impact of local, national, and global changes on educational policy and practice	8
Recognize opportunities to transform the classroom, school, or broader educational community	8
Develop a capacity to serve as an agent for social justice	9
<b>ADDITIONAL COMPETENCIES from your own research</b>	
Ownership: You take broad responsibility for your work and approach tasks with a critical mindset	8
Prioritizing: You are comfortable maintaining multiple channels of communication and independently managing your workflow to keep projects on track	8
Openness: You regularly seek, incorporate, and share new information and feedback	9
Enjoy building a persuasive case for social impact and relish the opportunity to invite people to join in a meaningful mission	9
Act as a strategic advisor on the organization's strategy, vision, and overall performance. Provide thought partnership on the organization's strategic planning.	7
Work closely with members of the program team to build and maintain processes for green-lighting new site expansion	8
Coach and mentor students and researchers and conduct the research needed to ensure they meet inspiring people their residencies	9
Serve as focal point for all university-related inquiries and activities such as residencies, public events, and tours on-site	8
Support the interaction of the CEO and leadership team with high-level figures of the academic world, and translate high-level intentions into specific action plans	6



**Cells in green correspond to Educational Programs Director position with Urban Adamah in Berkeley, CA.**

**Cells in blue correspond to Director of Partnerships position with Aim High in San Francisco, CA.**

**Cells in red correspond to Academic Engagement Program Manager with Swissnex in San Francisco, CA.**

## Part V. Conclusion.

In reflecting on the portrait of my career thus far, I've been able to take stock of various origins and motivators for my work, that have colorized my practice and stances and inform the directions I aim to move. Along the way, I've identified key factors that have been necessary for my career and traced where they came from, and painted an image of the kind of approach I bring to education. I currently feel midway through a storied trajectory, and have appreciated the ability to loop and thread aspects of my past with those of my present considerations as I look to the horizon and develop the needed adjustments to move forward.