

SGER: Learning through Observing and Pitching In to Community Activities

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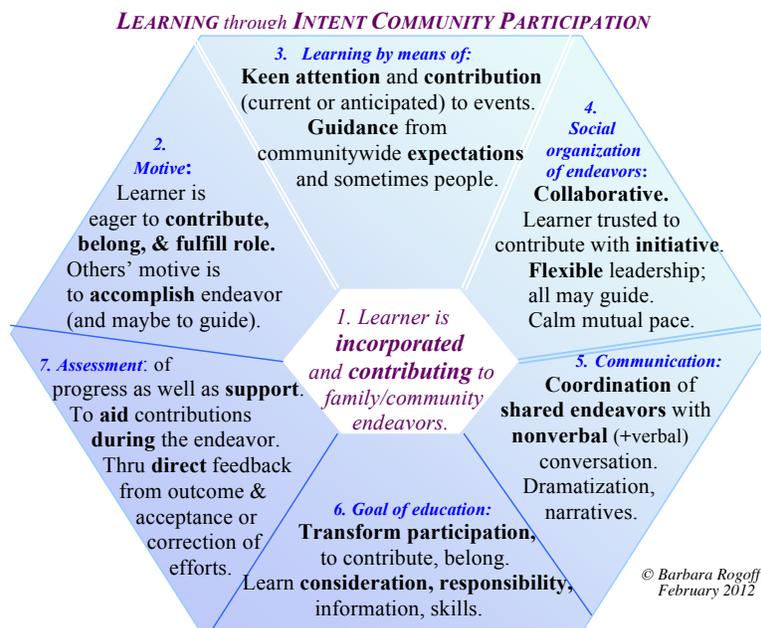
The grant supported the research progress of an international, interdisciplinary consortium of 38 researchers studying a valuable model of informal learning that is found in many communities where schooling has not been prevalent, such as Indigenous communities of the US, México, and Central America. This model can serve as inspiration for institutions that are attempting to improve the ways learning is supported for all students, and especially for students from these communities.

In this approach, children are often integrated in the activities of their families and communities, and learn by observing and pitching in to the activities around them (through “intent community participation”). Learning by observing and pitching in occurs in many other communities, but it seems to be much more common in communities where children are routinely included in the range of community activities.

The project advanced understanding of how this way of organizing learning works, focusing on Indigenous-heritage communities in the US, México, and Guatemala. The research found that in such communities, many children

- have access and contribute to valued activities of their families, communities, and schools,
- contribute with initiative to family and community endeavors;
- show keen attention to events around them;
- engage with adults and other children in collaborative endeavors, with flexible roles;
- use a balance of means of communication, including especially nonverbal conversation based on shared action grounded in the context, in addition to talk;
- learn to be responsible participants in the community, gaining skills for collaboration as well as task information and skills, and
- are aided by in-context assessment of their contributions.

These aspects of learning through intent community participation are summarized in the diagram below.



Our research found that this approach tends to be less prevalent in European American communities. In addition, we found reduced use of this approach associated with extensive Western schooling in some Indigenous-heritage communities in Mexico, Guatemala, and the US.

The grant funded

2 annual *workshops* of the whole Consortium, 5 small-group or individual *workshop travel fellowships*, and
27 *writing fellowships* to write and submit research for publication (10 more than were proposed).

The grant directly resulted in 30 articles and 1 research monograph:

13 articles published or in press;
14 articles and 1 research monograph under submission for publication;
3 articles in preparation; and
a website in both English and Spanish, with an overview of this approach, links to related videos and books, and abstracts of some relevant articles by Consortium participants:
<http://www.intentcommunityparticipation.net>

Broader Impacts of the Work

The project was designed to enhance the research and research skills of the Consortium participants, in addition to advancing research on our topic. The Consortium involves a broad range along the career continuum, from senior researchers to graduate students and recent BAs.

The Consortium enhances the infrastructure for research and education by creating interdisciplinary and international networks and partnerships for future collaborative research. The Consortium includes researchers primarily from Mexico, Guatemala, and the US, with training in psychology, anthropology, education, history, sociology, linguistics, and Chicano/Latino studies.

The consortium's interdisciplinary approach provides a model of how scholars can bridge across the disciplines. Our research advances are based on using multiple methods that are sometimes associated with distinct disciplines, integrating ethnographic and quantitative approaches. Many of the participants are engaging in new collaborations across disciplines (and nations) as a result of their experience in this project.

Our Consortium includes many researchers who themselves come from backgrounds underserved in higher education, and especially in STEM disciplines. Of the 38 participants in the Consortium, 14 are US Latinos or American Indian (and 7 are Indigenous people of Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru). Several others are Mexican nationals of Mestizo background.

The project's work contributes to improvement of educational practices and policy, especially for young people with Mexican, Central American, and American Indian backgrounds, where learning through observation and pitching in appears to be especially common. Greater understanding of this approach will enable schools and other educational institutions to improve instruction for these children, and will also provide a model of informal learning that can support efforts to improve educational institutions.

The Consortium participants are deeply involved in national and international organizations working to improve learning, in both classroom and informal settings. The Consortium also held two public sessions in one of the Indigenous communities that has participated in our research: one for K-12 school administrators and teachers, and one for parents, explaining the research on which our group focuses.