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# Maine School of Wonder: Developing a School for Earth Skills and Sustainability in Maine

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**Maine School of Wonder:  
Developing a School for Earth Skills and Sustainability in Maine**

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*Master of Arts in Sustainable Development  
Capstone Project  
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### **Abstract**

This research project explores the feasibility of establishing an earth skills and spirituality school in Maine, examining pertinent literature on adult environmental education, contemporary notions of work and leisure, earth-centered spirituality, and sustainable development. The study draws insights from interviews conducted with four distinct organizations across Maine engaged in similar initiatives. These include two farms hosting community events and workshops, alongside two retreat centers dedicated to fostering personal growth and skills development. These interviews provide diverse perspectives on the operational dynamics, required resources, and necessary skills for launching a new school aimed at creating inclusive, engaging, and sustainable learning environments for adults. The findings underscore several key factors critical to initiating such an educational venture: the formulation of a clear vision and mission statement, the pivotal role of community engagement in program development and community-building efforts, and a shared ethos of curiosity to meet evolving community and organizational needs. The research affirms the viability of establishing entities like the Maine School of Wonder or Overland Apiaries Nature Education Center, emphasizing the potential for realization through focused dedication of time, energy, and resources to enhance community integration and organizational diversity.

## Introduction

The question this capstone project will explore is, “How do you start a school?” A school is a multifaceted undertaking that involves financing, philosophies, marketing, personnel, knowledge bases in topics being taught, a place for the school to be located and gathering interested participants. There is much literature already written on this wide range of topics. This literature review strives to address the important topics related to starting a school.

To begin, it feels relevant to tell the story of how this idea came into being. It was spring of 2019 when, while sitting with a few friends, we began dreaming of a place where people could gather to enjoy the outdoors, have community meals, do regenerative farming and serve as a place for education on how to live in tune with the earth. In April 2020, I started putting down a vision for a school that taught everyday skills useful for sustainable living. Over the past few years the idea continued to grow, with more details being added. During an SIT Agroecology course in Oaxaca, Mexico, we visited a school for progressive women of all socioeconomic backgrounds that focused on teaching everyday skills of repair and carpentry for sustainable living. This visit inspired the idea for a community center and farm with a focus around homesteading skills and earth skills. These two types of skill sets can be passed down through generations as they are honed over time. Jack Mountain is a wilderness school in New Hampshire that focuses on primitive skills and earth skills, saying: “The terms that have fallen under its umbrella over time are many, including traditional wilderness living skills, wilderness survival, bushcraft, living off the land, primitive skills, indigenous skills, woodlore, and countless more” (2023). Both primitive and earth skills might include food preservation, farming, cooking with local, seasonal food, beekeeping, fruit tree caretaking, practical crafts for household use, foraging for food, land stewardship, raising animals, identification of flora and fauna. This school will serve as a haven for the

curious, connected and environmentally conscious people of the Northeast. This is the origin story of this capstone project.

### **Vision of Maine School of Wonder**

Through this research, the vision for the school's philosophy and mission will become clear. The working name of this future school is Maine School of Wonder. It focuses on expansion of the head, the heart and hand. The school believes that learning cannot be exclusive to one of those three parts, it must be felt in all of them to be fully integrated into someone's being. This is called holistic learning. The term "holistic" is generally defined as "characterized by the belief that the parts of something are interconnected and can be explained only by reference to the whole." By bringing together a number of philosophies and pedagogies on adult environmental education, the Maine School of Wonder will encourage adult learners to invest not only in themselves but in their knowledge of how to be an environmentally conscious human in the modern world. This idea is multifaceted, weaving diverse philosophies, pedagogies and historical support. This capstone project dives into each of the crucial puzzle pieces that must come together to create the whole picture of the school's vision.

The intended participants are people who are lifelong learners. They are people who are interested in understanding how to run a homestead with ease or use skills to improve life at home. Most likely participants are environmentally conscious, as many of the workshops at the school will focus on lowering consumption and preserving what already exists. One example of this is a workshop on harvesting from the garden and canning the food, which both connects participants to the earth and teaches how to store homegrown food for the winter with reusable glass rather than buying disposable cans. There will be a variety of workshops, from beginner's knowledge to advanced. Those who want to attend an advanced skills workshop will be asked to take the prerequisites or demonstrate they already

have experience with the skills. As much as possible, the facilities at Maine School of Wonder will be ADA accessible. Participants will vary in age, from young adults to older folks. Most workshops will be open to all genders, with some exceptions to allow for more connections among women, LGBTQ+ populations and men. Workshops will be priced on a sliding scale. This will allow for more access to more people, with the goal of offering one full ride scholarship per workshop which will typically be 1 out of 12 participants.

Generally, Maine School of Wonder wants to send learners home feeling empowered and encouraged to take reasonable risks that might bring them towards more joyful lives. How will the school know the impact it has had on people? At the end of each program, time will be set aside for reflection. Students will write their impressions, favorite moments, and recommendations for improving the programs. End of program surveys will also ask participants about openness, knowledge gained and sense of community they felt over the workshop. Additionally, one month after the program, participants will be sent an optional survey. This survey will have a wider range of questions, including asking about how students are now using the knowledge they gained. By asking this, the school can gather qualitative information about the positive impacts of the programs. A month also allows for integration time. Monitoring and evaluating is an integral part of the framework for the school. Just as in the permaculture principles, “applying self regulation and accepting feedback” makes for stronger systems that support people, planet and profit.

### **Sustainable Development**

Due to the capitalist, neoliberal system of politics, commerce and power that are prevalent in the modern day, matters of environmental protection become evermore fragile. However, there is still hope. One of the most effective ways to take action towards slowing climate change is through

connecting to our inner worlds. Another way is connecting to other people. The third is connecting with a place that we care for deeply. Maria Montessori was a pioneer in the education world with her ideas on whole child education (Aljabreen, 2020). Montessori's pedagogical approaches were written up for school aged children, yet have validity in adult education as well. She put a particular emphasis on education of both the heart and the mind, using experiential activities to engage students (Aljabreen, 2020).

The definitions of sustainability abound. The most frequently quoted definition is from *Our Common Future*, also known as the Brundtland Commission report, published in 1987 by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development: "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (1987). This sustainable development principle will be used through the school's connection to the land it will eventually own and steward. The choices we make as we build additional structures, set up the power and water infrastructure, and plan gardens will all be with ecological sustainability in mind. The facilities will reflect a profound reverence and appreciation for nature. There are ripple effects of even a single change. This concept is central to many religions, Jainism in particular (Kolthari, 2019). Schools are places where minds often change through learning new information. These changes in individuals are how change in the world is sparked. This will be directly part of the conversations at workshops, but also available for participants to explore for themselves during free time. Modeling systems at the school, such as solar panels, gray water collection systems, regenerative agriculture gardens and locally sourced meals will show participants the importance of how each person's choices can make a small difference.

Climate change is no longer only about future generations. It's having an effect now. Evidenced through climate zones shifting, seasons off schedule, farmers having to endure changes in patterns that

they have relied on for a long time- climate change can now be clearly seen. This is where the big picture awareness links with the need for cultivating natural human curiosity to learn about and take action against climate change. A guiding question for workshops will be, “How can we be empowered learners and citizens in the area of climate change?”

Complexity comes from living consciously in a world that is crafted to numb or distract due to the limitations placed on citizens by governments and industry. This creates tension because each person has some level of control over their life, yet the systems of modern living often distort that personal power. Richard Bolles says, “We often are at the mercy of forces we have no control over. A good hurricane or earthquake will remind you forcibly of that fact” (Fields, 1984, p. 113). This is where global sustainable development relates to teaching and learning earth skills in Maine. Having a toolbox of spiritual and emotional resources becomes important to leading a healthy life. These skills are learned alongside practical earth skills. Bolles also is quoted saying “although we are in fact battling powerful forces out of our control, those with an empowered mentality will choose to do battle with those forces” (Fields, 1984). Skills schools offer a way to learn new tools that empower people.

### **Spirituality with Connection to Earth**

This mission of Maine School of Wonder is to empower learners through hands-on educational experiences to know their inner and outer worlds more completely so as to inspire people to advocate for the natural world. The mission strives to connect participants' everyday lives to sustainable actions. Sustainability is often considered to have three main components. People, planet and profit. The origins of this framework emerged from discussions of how to address planetary sustainability in terms of the economic status quo (Purvis, 2019). There are other frameworks that explain sustainability in more complex terms but for the purpose of this research, approaching the topic from the three pronged



lens allows for discussion of the central concepts. The authors of the book *Spirituality and Sustainability: New Horizons and Exemplary Approaches* believe that “in order for sustainability to be sustainable, a profound spiritual transformation has to take place, root branch and all, at the individual level.” (2016). This supports the mission of the school.

Equity, defined as the quality of being fair and impartial, is continually a demand from the sustainability movement, for equity includes justice, dignity and opportunity for all beings on the planet, as well the natural world as a whole. It is easy to connect the ideas about equity with ecological spirituality because it involves being aware of how individual and societal choices affect the greater world. “At its base, ecological awareness is spiritual; it is a return to the simple, profound respect for and responsibility to the earth that our ancestors knew and practiced. Ecological philosophy, like spiritual philosophy, teaches that we are all one, all united” (Fields, 1984).

Framing education equitably means shifting learning to being process-based versus outcome-based (SustainabilityTreaties.Org, 2012). Education systems can offer a level playing field to learners through letting curiosity and hands-on, experimental teaching and learning approaches lead the learning . This begins to set the framework of this project, which will emphasize place-based learning. Adult education settings, where most participants will be arriving with little to no previous knowledge, need to be places where a wide variety of people can feel welcomed. As the three pillars tell us, sustainability considers people. Therefore it is imperative to create safe and supportive learning environments where curiosity flourishes.

### **Spirituality and Personal Growth**

Personal growth must be considered as an important aspect of creating an organization that serves the needs of people. In this project personal growth is defined as, "the process of psychological

change and development that involves improving oneself through learning and experience, leading to enhanced well-being and achievement of one's potential" (Robitschek, 1998). The Maine School of Wonder, through its workshops, will promote a way of living that connects people to place, to the earth and to themselves. This way of living more slowly is a critique of modern life. More than one thousand years ago a Chinese zen master wrote a poem that goes like this (translated version):

Magical power,  
Marvelous action!  
Chopping wood,  
Carrying water  
(Fields, 1984, p.xi)

This poem is a reminder that everyday life is full of beautiful moments that carry spiritual lessons. It is not only the highs and lows of life that are powerful for learners, but the integration of intentionality into each task completed throughout the day. Physical labor chopping wood and carrying water offer particular potency, as are other activities done with the hands like cooking and cleaning. Of course the views on work will vary depending on the cultural lens, however this notion of simple, everyday tasks having deep meaning will inform the philosophy of the school.

Maine School of Wonder will be a place for participants to contemplate as well as experience what the world would be like if capitalist notions of work shifted towards a more holistic view of human labor. The initial step to making room for an extractive system of economics is to encourage citizens to become individualized, detached from the collective (Kish, 2020). In this paradigm, such as the one predominant in modern society, labor is connected to money and is broken down into jobs that not only separate workers, but lack skill-building that aids with improving quality of life (Kish et al., 2020). This means people use their days to work that does not benefit them as an autonomous being (which is different from hyper individualism) nor does it bolster their connections with their community (Kish &

Quilley, 2020). Kish and Quilley bring together literature from over a 100 year span, 1893-1994, to remind the reader that modernity was associated with “anomie, disenchantment, rationalization, ontological insecurity and alienation” (2020). Marx is considered by some to be a radical thinker, yet when reading his ideas on the modern structure of labor in capitalist nations, he has merit. Marx believed that alienation is the process in which workers are decoupled from useful skills, from the product they are adding to creating and from neighbors (Kish & Quilley, 2020). Here is where there must be a modern movement towards once again adding value to the work people are doing, along with reinstituting social connection as part of the work day.

Simone Weil was a French philosopher who was alive from 1909-1943. Simone Weil wrote on an array of topics, from philosophy to worker’s rights. She was an active part of the French Worker’s Movements while she was alive, connecting her work as a teacher of philosophy to the subtleties of the dignity that each person deserves in their everyday life (Morgan, 2020). Simone Weil is well known for her ideas about attention being the primary purpose of education and in turn, of building skill sets (Morgan, 2020). Attention is what each person has to offer to the world, and there are many avenues through which to do so. When jobs, roles and work in general lack skill building, so too does it lack the power to inspire people to bring their attention to it. This idea is adjacent to Karl Marx, as it focuses more on the spirituality aspects of work. However, dignity and spirituality can be closely tied together. The other notable idea from Weil that applies to this research is about how joy is necessary in learning. In her book *Waiting*, Weil writes, “intelligence can only be led by desire. For there to be desire, there must be pleasure and joy in the work. Intelligence only grows and bears fruit in joy. The joy of learning is as indispensable in study as breathing is in running” (Morgan, 2020). There is a capitalist argument to be made that work does not need to involve joy, but that is not the stance of Maine School of Wonder.

Joy and pleasure belong within each day. Simone Weil's notions of joy and dignity being integral to not only education, but work, are part of the framework of the school's formation.

Peter Kropotkin echoes Marx and William Morris in pointing out how the economic systems that promote the need for progress through tedious, repetitive labor tasks are the same systems that take away the detailed crafting skills so many people had before the industrial revolution (Kish et al. , 2020). This idea of all workers being in factories or just a cog in the machine shifted as the markets became more diversified to include the many sectors known today such as finance, real estate and tech jobs. Yet Weil and Marx would argue doing work that does not allow workers to learn tangible skills during the day is the same phenomenon of those working in factories. For an ecological, localized economy to exist, dignity and practicality must be reintroduced to work across all industries.

The Maine School of Wonder is not only a place to learn useful skills, but a place to do so in community. These workshops will focus on skills that are useful in everyday life, such as herbal remedies and food preservation. These sets of knowledge were known by many before the culture of consumption fully took over the culture of the United States (Jack Mountain, 2023). In New England, these were skills used for survival, used to extend what abundance there was in the warmer months, while also connecting people to the land upon which they lived (Jack Mountain, 2023). Both Weil and Marx would look fondly upon this movement to re-skill workers in order to help themselves be autonomous and interconnected to other humans as well as the land. During a recent cultural exchange experience with knowledge holders from the Penobscot Nation in Maine, I was reminded that "earth skills" are nothing new to indigenous people who have been living on this land for thousands of years (J. Neptune, personal conversation, June 2024). Foraging food, creating stable structure to live in, constructing boats, making and applying herbal remedies are all examples Jennifer spoke of during her talk about the history of the Penobscot people in Maine (J. Neptune, personal conversation, June 2024).

*The Nature of Transformation* is a book that discusses the impacts and approaches to adult environmental education (Clover, 2013). In the introduction some of the benefits of adult education are described. This following expert addresses a number of the aspects that will help define the mission of the Maine School of Wonder.

“The activities and stories encourage dialogue and critical questioning, tap into people’s understandings and use their own knowledge and experiences as the basis for discussion and activism, uncover power relations, illustrate how to facilitate learning through community settings and/or to incorporate creative, arts-based practices” (Clover, 2013).

Therefore, critical thinking and dialogue are crucial in overall human development (Clover, 2013). The school will hold these as common practices in every workshop. Reflection on learning through the lens of critical thinking and out-loud processes will encourage integration of learning. As Clover notes, this allows for connection to be made from learners’ personal experiences to the material they are learning, which increases the richness of the experience (2010). From this connection to personal experience opens opportunities to contemplate power relations and activism. Students are inspired to ask questions such as, “How does my empowerment make me feel?” and “How does a more educated and capable populace affect the systems of power that exist now?”

Play, joy and creativity are key components in human development. School is often seen as stark, with grades to achieve and tests to take (Fields, 1984). Throughout the typical US school experience, there are many times when there is a “right” and “wrong” answer. In adult education workshops such as those that will be taught at Maine School of Wonder, the focus is on curiosity. Curiosity is defined as a strong desire to learn or know something. In a broader sense, curiosity as a learner leads to wonder and discovery on their own timeline, with their own process.

Beginner’s mindset is a reminder that humans are continuously learning. From finally understanding what amount of spice makes a recipe pop, to feeling deeper into certain emotions,

learning happens each and every day. The “now or never” pressure that the traditional school systems put on learners, through things like standardized tests, does not leave much room for experimentation, beginners' mindset, play, says Theodore Roszack (Fields, 1984). Along with this pressure is the embedded idea that there is a beginning and an end to learning. In reality life is one long practice of knowledge. To be a successful adult learner, one must take on the beginner’s mindset that children naturally embody before they become heavily conditioned by the assumed “truths” of their culture. First, adult students must unlearn conditioning around learning, only then will their minds be open enough to arrive at the experience with authenticity.

On the other side of the beginner's mindset, must be addressed the ever-prominent resistance and fear. When learning, fear arises naturally due to trying something new and straying from the comfortable (Fields, 1984). This fear is organic, it may arise with learning new things because learners do not want to seem foolish or uninformed (Fields, 1984). Most of this comes from the systems of scarcity and competition in the modern industrial world. Wendell Berry writes about the systems of competition in the economy as a detriment to building community (2010). Berry writes in his book *What Matters?*, “...no individual can lead a good and satisfying life under the rule of competition, and no community can succeed except by limiting somehow the competitiveness of its members” (2010, p. 94). Fear and competition go hand in hand. Past healthy competition, why do people compete? Often it comes from a scarcity mindset, that if one person has something, the other person will not.

These emotions of fear, acceptance, love and scarcity all come with different background contexts for each individual. When teaching adult learners, identity plays a key role in how information is received and integrated( Motulsky, 2020) . This is the topic of a book called *Identity and Lifelong Learning* by Sue Motulsky (2020). This book was recently published, it includes a number of articles that focus on the way identity and learning are intertwined. Motulsky writes in chapter 12 about women

who are transitioning careers and facing a myriad of challenges associated with starting over, including but not limited to the expectations society puts on each person over their lifetime (2020). For example. Womens need to do everything: parents, have a career, take care of themselves well, have hobbies, and be great partners. The question inspired by this related to adult learning and the Maine School of Wonder is, “How can we create a supportive space for learners to let curiosity lead, feel they can be a beginner and experiment with the skills they are learning?” Diverse identities will be considered at Maine School of Wonder. It is important to consider how, “....gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, religion, nationality, language, and the complex mix of these identities play a significant role in how learners define themselves and others and how their meaning-making shapes their experience in the world” (Motulsky, 2020).

Dialogue between learners will be encouraged both during skill building classes and in the free time participants have. As this research is the initial step to beginning the school, the nuances of our core values are still in the beginning stages. Some questions the school will consider as it forms a solidified list of core values include but are not limited to the following.

- What does equity look like in the setting of teaching adults earth skills?
- Where does content knowledge intersect with compassion in a teaching and learning setting?
- How can programs and offerings be explicitly and implicitly inclusive?

Connection to other people is another key way to aid in healing, for people often think they are alone in their struggles, yet others have similar experiences. “When we reconnect to the parts inside of us that long to belong, we ignite more authenticity, meaning, and pleasure in all our external connections” (School of Integrated Living, 2023). Feeling the support of a group of people, even for a weekend, can aid in opening up the hearts and minds of learners.

## **Skills Learning as Empowerment**

The terms “earth skills” are currently the most applicable terms that explain what the Maine School of Wonder will offer to learners. Earth skills rings true as the term most aligned with the mission of the Maine School of Wonder. Earth skills do not have one definition, though generally they are skills that help humans stay connected to earth such as foraging for food, increasing knowledge in local flora and fauna, and gardening skills. . The terms “practical skills” and “life skills” have connotations more related to continuing education, especially to those who have not done well in the traditional school systems. The academic research on environmental education continues to grow, uncovering more reasons why and how it is powerful.

As discussed, learning new skills allows for people to be beginners once again. It is a tangible link to our shared human history, and offers students unmatched opportunities for understanding and living in the natural world (Smith, 2023). Workshop content will focus on skills, as well as the history of the practice in the local area, including indigenous influences. Jack Mountain Bushcraft School in New Hampshire writes about the connections between learning earth skills and gaining experience with having a relationship with the earth means.

“This is then used to construct a broader educational framework, where the skills, accomplishments, and experiences facilitate communicating broad-scale concepts and ideas that provide insight into a holistic view of the natural world and our role as participants in, and stewards of, it.” (Smith, 2023).

Being a beginner evokes humility and curiosity in humans. It also can bring out fear, resentment and worry. All high quality adult environmental education aims to “to help people to learn, create and re-create the world they want, to address contemporary socio-environmental crises and to encourage hope and a stronger sense of political agency through an ecological approach to teaching, and learning” (Clover, 2013). How humans support themselves in connecting to and learning about



themselves, is inherently linked to nature because it is multifaceted, complex and yet simple. Natural spaces and places offer authentic learning experiences that allow play to be at the forefront of the educational approach (Sjoberg, 2017). The skills, foraging wild plants, growing abundant gardens, weaving baskets, sewing clothes, chopping wood, raising farm animal for meat, eggs or milk, making furniture, preserving food, building houses, cleaning water to make it potable and herbal remedies are all examples of that were used for survival for millions of years. Many of these have been lost in the modern world where so much is available with the utmost convenience. Some of the testimonials from the School of Integrated Living's students capture the impact that this type of learning can have for learners. " I think that it was a wonderful soul-level experience. It has made me develop an even deeper appreciation for the Earth and our patterns of consumption and our relationship to the earth and each other" - Mary Rock (SOIL, 2023).

### **Context & Background: Relevance to Maine**

If you walk into a bookstore in Maine, you will see the common trends right now are towards conscious living. Books about living simply, spiritual enlightenment and practical skills line the shelves. These trends are also showing up in brick and mortar stores in many towns along the coast of Maine. Locally made goods have always been a point of pride for the state, along with modern rural living and local food. Maine, being so rural and 90% forest, has a rich history of homesteading due to necessity (Land in Common, 2022) . Hard work is not foreign to Mainers, especially those who farm or own property in the most remote locations across the state. In the 1960's and 1970's there was a back-to-the-earth movement, during which young people from out of state moved to rural areas of Maine to begin farming again (Hagerman, 2015). These young people integrated themselves into the local culture, creating partnerships with the aging homesteaders of rural Maine (Hagerman, 2015). This

still happens today in Maine, especially since the pandemic sparked renewed interest for sustenance living and farming.

Thousands of years before the descendants of colonizers became adept homesteaders, the indigenous people of Maine were living in harmony with the land, understanding intimately the species of flora and fauna. The Dawnland Confederacy includes four Maine tribes: the Maliseet, Micmac, Penobscot, and Passamaquoddy (Abbe Museum, 2023). It is widely known that the Wabanaki people are masters of living close to the earth, creating reciprocity and relationship with the local landscape. Basketmaking from ash trees is a Wabanaki tradition, an earth skill that many people re-learn as adults (Abbe Museum, 2023). The hope is that some of these skills can be taught to those participating in Maine School of Wonder by representatives of the Wabanaki people.

Between the history of rural living in Maine and the rich knowledge of the indigenous people of the Dawnland, Maine is predisposed to being open to a practical skills and spirituality school. Portland, Maine is not a huge city, but it still has the hustle and bustle characteristic of urbanity. There are many things to buy, coffee shops on most blocks, traffic jams, obvious poverty, obvious wealth, unhoused people, addiction centers, corporate offices, parks, public transportation, shops, museums, art galleries and restaurants. Maine is special because of how easy it is to leave the city to convene with nature. Even with the rise in the number of conscious living related business, classes and events, there is still room for organizations that offer skill building alongside personal growth. Retreat Centers often offer a quiet space in nature for participants to enjoy. People escape to nature for a wide array of reasons. Participant Eva Moss wrote, “Coming from downtown Raleigh, the journey to Earthaven was a much needed escape - escape from the hustle and bustle of city life, but an escape back to nature, back to self” (SOIL, 2023). This quote is from a city dweller who visited Earthaven Ecovillage in Black Mountain, North Carolina. It captures what it feels like to live a busy life and then visit a place that is moving slower.

Land in Maine is becoming more and more inaccessible. Around 57% of the land in the state is owned by top 100 US land owning families, multinational corporations or billionaires (Land in Common, 2022). This means that those making Maine's average salary of \$55,960 are priced out of most opportunities to own land or homes (Wong, 2023). Maine School of Wonder will eventually own land. This will provide those who do not own their own land to connect more deeply with a place they can temporarily call home. Through workshop topics and conversations, participants will create a relationship with the land the school partners with. A core value of reciprocity with the natural world will be discussed and taught during each program.

Research shows that jobs are now more knowledge intensive, though in the US, lower-skilled job opportunities are most available (Rocco et al., 2021). Workforce development, which in simple terms is skill development, is important to foster in an ever changing economy (Rocco et al., 2021). Ellen Scully-Russ and Ximena Vidal De Col write that broadly, adult education in the United States needs to "refresh" its approaches to practices, theories and purposes in order to more effectively teach useful skills to workers of all ages (Rocco et al., 2021). There is a need for programs that are well put together and responsive to the needs of the modern day workforce (Rocco et al., 2021). Maine School of Wonder will strive to offer this, preparing people for lucrative jobs related to the skills taught through workshop weekends.

### **Existing Philosophies of Adult Education**

First, it is important to note the differences between educational philosophy and pedagogy. Philosophy of education focuses on foundational questions about the nature, purpose, and goals of education, while pedagogy focuses on practical methods and strategies for teaching and learning. Philosophy of education is broader and more theoretical, addressing overarching principles and

ideologies that shape educational systems. Pedagogy is more specific and practical, dealing with the day-to-day practices and techniques used by teachers in educational settings such as classrooms and workshop settings.

In *The Nature of Transformation*, the authors assert that “Adult education must now include not only the social, economic, cultural, and political spheres but also ecological discourses and spheres” (2013). Alas, the question is, how does a school focused on holistic education of adult learners focus on all of these components at once? The answer is it would be difficult. The best way to attempt to do this is through a defined philosophical and pedagogical backbone to the organization. In the excerpt below, Clover brings to attention the capacity of human beings to learn (2013). Even though school is commonly thought of as formulaic, adults actually thrive in settings that are experimental. Employing a diverse set of learning approaches allows for more people to access the content being delivered.

“Indeed, human beings are thinking, feeling and active beings with the ability to acquire and create knowledge in and through various ways. Given the opportunity to experience a multiplicity of education and learning methods affords a greater possibility for personal and social transformation” (Clover, 2013).

Again this connects personal empowerment through learning to environmental sustainability. To be an adult learner takes commitment. Most of environmental education is in K-12 and university, as is learning in general (Walter, 2009). We have an idea that once you graduate, you're done. Yet life is about continuous learning. These frameworks of adult education are being continuously improved upon. Through his article on adult education, Walter explores the different philosophies to help adult environment teachers to locate themselves in philosophies that are mostly undocumented (2009).

First, it must be addressed that much of the literature on adult environmental education has been driven by white middle-class men in the past. Even beloved examples like Thoreau, John Muir and Emerson all have a particular lens from the middle class (Walter, 2009). This means that many of the

academics, thinkers and curriculum developers up to this point have been systematically supported by the socio- economic and educational avenues that already exist (Walter, 2009). Middle class perspective sees leisure as not only attainable, but important. Additionally, those from the middle class usually have some expendable income that can go towards self-expansion experiences such as traveling, continued education or hobbies. Though adult education has long claimed to have social justice as a guiding principle, often the programs offered are complicit in oppression through its involvement in educating slaves and other historically oppressed people to be more productive (Rocco et al., 2021). Important to note is the recent shift towards including more voices of color in the conversation about adult environmental education (Walter, 2009). Lorenzo Bowman and Jeremy Bohonos note in their chapter on *Adult Education and Race*, that literature on Critical Race Theory specifically related to adult education has become more prominent since the 1990's (Rocco et al., 2021). In the Handbook for Adult and Continuing education, Rocco and co-authors name a number of academic voices of color who are researching and commenting on current adult education trends (2021) Some of these names are as follows: WBell, DeCuir, Dixon, Delgado, Tate, Ladson- Billings, and Whiteaker (Rocco et al., 2021). What must be addressed in equitable and anti-racist education is that liberalism has historically maintained that colorblindness is the way forward, yet this creates a society that can then "ignore the reality of racist policies that perpetuate social inequality" (Rocco et al., 2021). Additionally Johnson-Bailey and Cervero's research discovered that the 1970's served as a turning point for honest recognition of how racism was woven into adult education up to that point (Rocco et al., 2021). Since the full mission and vision of the Maine School of Wonder is still in the stage of formation, here we can pose a question to guide said creation: How can the school as an institution and its educators practice anti-racist teaching both within and outside of the formal classes it holds?

Answers to this question will vary, as different levels of racism exist in the culture of the United States. A first attempt at answering this leads to a sense of curiosity being the leading intention educators bring to this work. Studying and practicing cross cultural communication is also important, because educators must understand that not all learners are coming from the same backgrounds. Assuming so will deter, or worse completely prevent, some learners from furthering their education. Thompson is quoted in *The Nature of Transformation* explaining: “Racism is not solely about personal prejudice but rather a combination of structural, institutional, embodied, and ideational/ideological factors rendered legitimate by policies, laws, common sense and even science” (Clover, 2013). Therefore, the anti-racist educator uses this knowledge to inform teaching that opens learners up to deconstruct the complex systems of racism in US society. Using a anti-racist lens to teach that there is history in every story, one example being how conservation historically focused on saving the “beautiful land” versus addressing the indigenous people who lived on the land originally (Clover et al., 2013). Although arts-based and anti-racist lenses are not philosophies, they are pedagogies used in modern adult education, therefore relevant to this research. Both will be important to integrate into the teaching and learning philosophy of Maine School of Wonder in order to create a learning space in which learners from many backgrounds feel valued and welcomed.

Walter explains there are 5 primary philosophies of adult environmental education: radical, liberal, progressive, behaviorist and humanist (2009). In addition to those 5, the authors of *The Nature of Transformation* ask educators to consider adult education through arts-based and anti-racist lenses as well (Clover et al., 2013). Arts-based education centers imagination and creativity as guideposts to adult learning, ensuring supportive spaces for people to feel comfortable enough to ideate together (Clover et al., 2013).

The **humanist philosophy** of adult environmental education is the one that is the most aligned with the vision for Maine School of Wonder. The humanist philosophy is focused on the individual's self actualization and happiness (Walter, 2009). This philosophy puts social, emotional, spiritual and intellectual development at the center of educational experiences. Here, learners are seen as having unlimited potential and being inherently motivated and self-directed (Walter, 2009). The facilitator's role is to establish a climate of acceptance, where the learner is seen as holistic as well as complex (Walter, 2009). Self evaluation and getting insights into problems are the ways this approach assesses learning. There is ample room for intuitive, spiritual and emotional learning through hands-on experiences. There are some overlaps with progressive philosophy but humanist philosophy is more focused on metaphysical shifts in ecological consciousness from realizing and contemplating the importance of earth to humans (Walter, 2009).

**Radical philosophy** of adult environmental education includes a strong focus on social justice and activism (Walter, 2009). Examples of this are Greenpeace and eco-warriors, groups that are active agents and constructing a world that's more focused on environmental conservation, restoration and preservation (Walter, 2009). The radical philosophy also focuses on liberation from social, economic and political oppression while increasing critical consciousness around modern topics of environmental concern. This includes social change, geared towards the collective versus the individual. Nonviolence and consensus building are part of the radical philosophy, overlapping with the humanist and progressive philosophies (Walter, 2009). Within the radical philosophy, facilitators act as co-investigators, activists, dialogue leaders and pose problems for participants to engage with (Walter, 2009). Importance is put on building up humans as active agents in constructing the world, people who can work towards tangible solutions to environmental issues.

The **progressive philosophy** of environmental education is about educating for democracy and social reform, assuming humans are born neither good nor bad (Walter, 2009). This philosophy also believes that learners have an unlimited potential for growth, just as the humanist perspective does. Teachers are guides and facilitators for experimentation and experiential learning (Walter, 2009). Through this pedagogical philosophy, observation and demonstrations of learning are how students are assessed. The progressive philosophy began in the 1920s when experimentation to solve problems became a key component of learning experiences especially in K-12 teaching settings (Walter, 2009). It began to expand past that into workplaces and places of leisure, with a newfound focus on hands on problem-solving. Like some of the other philosophies, the teacher is a guide as well as a source of knowledge (Walter, 2009). Some modern examples of progressive philosophy in adult environmental education are Eco-tourism, the writings of Aldo Leopold, and formal wilderness outdoor education programs such as Outward Bound .

The **behaviorist philosophy** is focused on ensuring survival and minimizing suffering of human species (Walter, 2009). This approach feels very different from the others discussed by Walter because it is structured and assumes that the instructor is the engineer of all learning experiences. Organizations like the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) in the Natural Resources Defense Counsel use behaviorist philosophies to not only educate but inspire people to join in on their causes. This looks like using the stick and the carrot to motivate change.

Lastly, the **liberal philosophy** is what many know as the liberal arts approach to education. It is holistic, centered on expansion of knowledge through rigorous intellectual training. The liberal philosophy of education assumes humans are rational beings, empty vessels and that the mind is the powerhouse of learning. The assessment of learning comes through exams, essays and reciting information (Walter, 2009). Many museums of natural history, aquariums, botanical gardens and zoos



use this approach to learning. Liberal pedagogy uses books, academic articles, Socratic dialogue and writing to aid students in digesting information (Walter, 2009).

Philosophy	Purpose of Education	Nature of Adult Learners	Role of Instructors	Methods of Assessment
<b>Humanist</b>	Transcendence; human happiness; social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development	humans by nature are essentially good; humans are complex, autonomous beings with an inherent sense of freedom and dignity learners have unlimited potential; learners are internally, motivated, and self directed	facilitator establishes climate of acceptance, promotes personal growth, and self awareness, uses experiences and potentialities of learners; learning is holistic, subjective, and problem - centered, and takes place through cooperation in groups; learners take responsibility for learning	self-evaluation; achievement of insight into problem-solving; individual learning contracts
<b>Radical</b>	liberation of humans from social, economic and political oppression; humanization of learners and society; social transformation	humans are active agents in constructing the world; humans as creators of culture and history	facilitator, coin, investigator, organizer, activist; pedagogy of the oppressed; dialogue, reflection and action; focus on generative themes	increased critical consciousness; political activism, visible social change
<b>Progressive</b>	education for democracy and social reform, liberation of talents, experience, knowledge of adults, betterment of human condition	humans are born neither good nor bad, humans are adaptive learners have unlimited potential for growth	teacher as guide, facilitator; learner centered; experimentation learning; problem-based learning; apprenticeship; focus on scientific method	observation, demonstration
<b>Behaviorist</b>	ensure survival and minimize suffering of human species	human nature is either good nor bad, human behaviors are result of prior conditioning	contingency manager, behavioral engineer, environment shapes, desired behavior	observation of behavioral change, measurable outcomes, evidence-based
<b>Liberal</b>	Expansion of knowledge and	humans are rational beings, learners are empty	teacher as a source of knowledge and authority,	subject matter exams, essays,

	understanding, rigorous, intellectual training, development of spiritual, moral, and aesthetic sense	vessels, focuses on the power of the mind	guides learners through content and contemplation, book sender, pedagogy, Socratic dialogue lecture	recitations
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**Table 1.** Philosophies of Adult Education. (Walters, 2009)

What is important to note with these philosophies is the way the learner as well as the facilitator relate to learning. Each has a distinct approach. When thinking about an educational organization, it is highly important to consider the profile of the facilitators, teachers and educators. These are the people who set the tone for the whole learning experience. Learner profiles are also important, but it is in relation to how they engage with content instead of how they are as people. These philosophical approaches connect to spiritual human development.

### **Compare and contrast current models**

Initial research into this idea shows there are few clear ways in English to concisely express the description of the school. The terms “community center”, “homestead”, “adult environmental education,” “education center,” “earth skills,” “retreat center” and “practical skills” are all good options to begin research. There are numerous examples from around the world of education organizations that see the learner holistically, as a being made of a spirit, mind and body. Also known as the trinity of the parts that make a human whole. This is another helpful place to begin. Models like Waldorf and Montessori, educational approaches for kids 5-18 years old, see the learner as being made up of three parts: mind, body and soul (Aljabreen, 2020). As Aljabreen notes, a theoretical basis for both Montessori and Waldorf education is that the student determines their own direction of learning (2020). Without teaching all three parts, the education is seen as incomplete.

It should be noted that often in the United States, “adult education” often refers to adults going back to school for a basic degree, like the GED (Clover, 2013). *The Nature of Transformation* claims there are generally three categories of adult education. First, formal, which includes university degrees (Clover, 2013). Second, non formal, such as workshops led by a facilitator (Clover, 2013). Third, informal, self-directed learning such as hobbies (Clover, 2013). Though helpful to have groupings of the types of adult education, these definitions are simplistic, as they assume the traditional way of learning as having the most form or structure.

Pedagogies such as Montessori and Waldorf education highly value the form-less moment in education as well as experience above all else. One cited example for experiential environmental education, in an article by Christina Gerhardt, is having students visit a nuclear power plant and hear from a variety of stakeholders (Viakinnou-Brinson, 2018). This exemplifies a high quality holistic learning opportunity. Not only are students out in the real world, they are hearing from people who have a stake in the matter at hand, students are able to use their own background knowledge to engage with the topic of nuclear power. This type of learning can be very powerful. Other examples of holistic, experiential education are agriculture extension programs and vocational studies. Outdoor education programs like Outward Bound provide a roadmap of education that centers practical and spiritual learning.

Place-based education has recently had a resurgence, especially at the elementary school level. There is work being done with experiential education at the adult learning level as well that includes a focus on place. In an article by Christina Gerhardt, she talks about how place-based education is what fuels a connection with a place that is strong enough to evoke or inspire ecological consciousness (Viakinnou-Brinson, 2018). Using connection to place as a center point for education allows for people

to forge even deeper bonds with the learning they are doing, to feel comfortable and curious. The famous environmental writer, Naomi Klien, says in her book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, that a commitment to a place is one of the key ways to help combat climate change (Viakinnou-Brinson, 2018). Though participants may not be from the area, they will see how the school as a living entity is committed to reciprocity and relationship to the land. Way of The Earth School in Blue Hill, Maine includes the *Land* as one of the staff members of their program, describing the beings who live there as well as the characteristics of the landscape itself (2023). A common theme between the example schools that will be interviewed is that they also see connection to place as paramount to holistic learning. Some adult programs that will be discussed in the next section also use place as a centerpoint for teaching and learning.

### **Review of Similar Organizations**

The Maine School of Wonder will not be alone in its mission to help teach adults about spiritual, emotional and practical skills. Across the United States and world, there are numerous examples of organizations committed to teaching earth skills through community and connection to the earth. Described below are five organizations that do this work. Each description includes the key components that come together to give each one its unique character. These descriptions will include: *mission and vision, skills taught, outline of a common workshop or event, pricing examples, key personnel, and setting*. The goal of the interviews will be to dive deeper into these topics in order to learn more about how each school began. Other goals for the interviews will be to inquire how each approaches sustainability in the sense of people, planet, profit.

The **School for Local Living in Temple, Maine** is a remarkable example of what it looks like to turn a homestead into a learning center. This school offers programs for all ages, from grade school

immersions to semester long experiences for young adults (School for Local Living, 2023). They also host family programs of 3 or 5 days, for one or multiple families. The programs are mostly immersion , meaning more than 3 days long. **School for Local Living** covers nearly all skills related to homesteading, some examples are: wooden handicrafts, farming knowledge, local food production and preparation, ecology lessons, ancestral skills like fire making, and sustainable systems at the home (2023). Programs range from \$800 - \$4,700. This mission is as follows, “Our mission is to nurture the human-earth relationship through the practice of living locally. We share traditional and contemporary skills for living wisely in our place. It is our belief that through living locally we can invigorate a world-view of gratitude and responsibility toward human and earth communities” (School for Local Living, 2023). From what can be gathered from the website, Maine School of Wonder will be in close relation to the mission, skills and setting of the School for Local Living. Interviewing someone from this school will be profoundly helpful in learning how to start a skills school. The core group of teachers is just three people, with three additional people serving as guest teachers.

**Alcyon Retreat Center** in **Seal Cove, Maine** is another quality example of a welcoming space to people from different walks of life and encourages connection to self, community and the earth. The Alcyon Center states its vision as, “The vision for the Center is rooted in a desire for bold and practical ways to meet the spiritual hunger of our times. Providing a peaceful setting and an experience of living a daily rhythm of work, prayer, study, and rest constitutes the main way of bringing this vision to life.” The programs are focused on inner work and spiritual exploration. Some are self led, focused on being in silence. The retreats begin at \$200. The facilitated weekend retreats are more in depth, with facilitators and themes for each. The longer programs are \$600-\$700. Alcyon is a retreat center, so it is different from the vision for Maine School of Wonder. The structure and energy of Alcyon Center, however, is similar to the vision of the school because it is teaching people how to move slower, how to

be in an authentic community with each other and how to live locally. There are two main leaders who run the daily operations and run programs with the help of guest teachers.

**Way of the Earth School** is located in **Blue Hill, Maine**. The setting is a piece of land in a rural part of Maine which is about 4 hours north of Portland by car. This area is known to be conservation land, as there is little development and attracts many people who are in connection with the cycles of the earth. This school focuses on 4 month immersion programs during which participants learn a wide array of skills that bring them closer to living with the earth (Way of the Earth School, 2023). This program costs \$4,200 - \$7,500 on a sliding scale. This list of skills includes but is not limited to basket weaving, foraging for wild edibles, building simple structures from poles and animal husbandry. Way of Earth also hosts day long workshops that cost around \$100. Listed on their website are topics of felting clothes and making baskets. The mission is “to cultivate an environment for people to reclaim their roles and caretakers of the earth by sharing earth living skills, developing community and reawakening to their inner wildness.” The key personnel at Way of Earth School are a group of 4 educators who are deeply immersed in earth skills learning and teaching.

North Carolina is home to two examples of schools committed to a mission of both practical skill building and spiritual growth. The first is a school called SOIL, **School for Integrated Learning**. This school is connected to Earthaven, a well known intentional living community. SOIL’s mission is, “to populate the world with empowered, skilled, and conscious leaders dedicated to creating regenerative change and healthy relationships” (School for Integrated Living, 2023). The programs at SOIL vary greatly, covering natural building skills like cob, to retreats focused on spirituality. One example of a holistic retreat weekend that reintroduces participants to skills and questions that are integral to being human. The program description explains participants will be “exploring what it means to Belong: to Belong to Oneself, to Each Other, to a Lineage, to a Place, to this Life” (School for Integrated Living,

2023). Browsing SOIL's website, the school holds spiritual ecology at its center, which can be witnessed through the topics of the teachings as well as the writings about their philosophy that are all over the site. SOIL is located in rural Black Mountain, North Carolina and has more than 40 people on their teaching or administration team (School for Integrated Living, 2023). The in person programs being offered over the next year seems to be more varied than the other example schools. These workshops range in price from \$50 to \$1500 (School for Integrated Living, 2023). SOIL hosts permaculture certificate programs, week long intentional living experiences, day long gardening classes, something called "Compassion Camp." The classes are focused on intentionally living in a community.

**Wild Abundance** is also in **North Carolina**, it is a school that has sustainability at its center. Maine School of Wonder will use the model of Wild Abundance to form. There are four core values stated on the Wild abundance website: "Nurture competence and capability through hands on skills and knowledge; Embody authenticity as we lead and inspire with courage and humility; Care for and interconnection with the earth and our many communities: human; plant; animal; elemental; Achieve resilience through sustainable actions" (Wild Abundance, 2023). The programs are set up as week-long workshops or long weekend gatherings that teach skills such as carpentry, permaculture or tiny house building. Foraging and herbal medicine and rewilding workshops are also common offerings from Wild Abundance. The programs are priced between \$850-1700 (Wild Abundance, 2023). One of the most inspiring aspects of this particular school is the sustainability they model in the campus, which include tiny houses made by students from salvaged materials, earthen buildings, renewable energy sources and extensive permaculture gardens (Wild Abundance, 2023). The team is made up of 8 people, with guest teachers hired when needed (Wild Abundance, 2023).

## **Conclusion of Literature Review**

As with most things in the modern world, starting a school is a complex endeavor. There will be many moving parts. This literature review provides background knowledge to help inform some of those distinct parts. Sustainability, spirituality, adult education and earth skills are the most important aspects of this idea. The backbone for Maine School of Wonder holds strong in the notion of empowering learners through hands-on educational experiences that are in service to understanding their inner and outer worlds more completely. In addition, understanding the state of the natural world and how each person can advocate for its conservation. As the humanist pedagogy explains, knowing nature intimately inherently goes hand-in-hand with knowing ourselves intimately (Walter, 2009). The shift we are trying to make is from the individual view to the collective. Learning in community allows for oscillation between the two, finding a balance. As a direct result we move together towards a world that is more connected, cared for and supported.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This literature review discusses many topics. What is at the core of a school is the values and the framework through which it sees its mission. Personal empowerment through hands-on learning is key to the formation of this educational organization. The two most prominent theoretical frameworks Maine School of Wonder will use to direct its mission will be of place-based education and Maria Montessori asserts that holistic learning happens through experience (Aljabreen, 2020). The pedagogy of place based education has taken on its own unique power within the new educational structure, though it has been around informally since pre-industrial society. Since the industrial school system model took over and effectively separated students from place, there continued to be settings like rural schools and forward thinking education organizations that continued using place as a critical aspect of



authentic education (Vander Ark et. al, 2020). There exist a number of definitions of place-based learning formed by a myriad of scholars, however Vander Ark and colleagues use a simple definition that encapsulates the essence of this pedagogy, “anytime, anywhere that learning leverages the power of place to personalize learning (Vander Ark et. al, 2020, p.2). Along with Maria Montessori’s belief that place has a powerful role in learning, Laurie Lane-Zucker writes, “(PBE) is the pedagogy of community, the reintegration of the individual into her home ground, and the restoration of the essential links between a person and her place” (Vander Ark, et al., 2020, p. 2) The second framework that holds up this research project is from Simone Weil, who asserts that work offers a spiritual experience, though societal norms say otherwise (Morgan, 2020). Simone Weil’s notions of joy and dignity being integral to not only education, but work, are part of the framework of the school’s formation. By building the school with this theoretical and philosophical framework, workshops on skill building will be planned and taught with joy in mind. The offerings of Maine School of Wonder will also use Weils’ ideas on cultivating attention in learning as the main goal of any education experience (Morgan, 2020). Weil also believed that to find joy in work is a step towards being able to see the world from a place of truth, uninhibited by human delusions of grandeur (Morgan, 2020).

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The research question being explored in this project is: What will it take to start a school for adult learning in Maine, with a focus on earth skills and spirituality? This is to inform a longer term project of a practical intervention to start a skills school community center in Maine. This research aims to comprehensively explore the foundational theories and operational strategies necessary for establishing, managing, and sustaining a school dedicated to adult environmental education. The primary methodologies employed include a thorough review of existing literature and interviews with

key leaders and founders of similar institutions. These two approaches will provide a comprehensive understanding and address the central research inquiry.

**The envisioned components of the Maine School of Wonder are:**

- Enough land to farm
- A large, regenerative farm that provides 40% of the school's food by year 3
- A place to gather, such as a farmhouse or renovated barn
- A building or buildings that provide lodging for participants, the farmhouse and additional small structures on the land can serve as lodging
- Regular workshop weekends that focus on specific homesteading and earth skills, 3-4 day programs
- Open for classes April 1st through December 15th of each year
- A profitable business by year 3
- A farm internship program for aspiring young farmers by year 2
- A robust community of volunteers who help run the farm and organization by year 3
- By year 3, staff of three year-around paid employees, with 7-10 paid guest teachers throughout the year
- A community space where meals and meetings can be hosted

**This study:**

- ☐ Examines existing models of environmentally-focused, community-based skills schools.
- ☐ Helps arrive at an understanding of the intellectual, financial, human and material resources required to build a skills school in Maine.
- ☐ Informs the writing of a mission and vision statement for the proposed skills school
- ☐ Develops a design a model/blueprint for a skills school
- ☐ Draws up a plan for execution of the project including ascertaining the population(s) whose needs it will meet, estimating the resources and developing a time frame for the same.

The study uses a combination of a desk review and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with leaders

of existing skills schools in the New England area as well as North Carolina. I interviewed at least one representative from each of the 5 schools researched in the section outlining similar organizations. The respondents for the interviews will be those working in a leadership capacity at the concerned school, to illuminate the administrative and organizational aspects in addition to the pedagogy and curriculum. Please find the interview guide attached with this proposal in Appendix A .

### **Participant Description**

The participants interviewed were leaders or founders of a variety of educational organizations in the Eastern United States. The original plan was to interview three from Maine and two from North Carolina. All of the leaders are of middle or upper middle class economic status. These 6 people were experienced in starting sustainable businesses that took into account people, planet and profit. Four interviews were conducted with four distinct organizations. One small scale farm, one retreat center, one holistic wellness center and one tree farm that also serves as a community center. Although all organizations originally discussed in the methodology were contacted, only one was available for an interview. Thus, others had to be identified and contacted. This led all interviews to be with organizations based in Maine, which aid this research even further, given that the proposed school is to be located in Maine as well. Gathering data from these four organizations gives helpful information about the specifics on how to create, run and sustain similar ventures in the state. Each interview was approximately one hour long. Three were via video call. One interview, with The Local Farm, was conducted in person. The Local Farm's business name and interviewee names have been changed in this paper to respect the request to remain anonymous.

**Ethical considerations**

The ethical considerations for this research project include potential emotional stress or concerns of confidentiality related to financial questions. Organizations go through many different phases, sometimes finances can be tighter than other times. When someone's livelihood is riding on the success of an organization, this can cause stress due to each person's particular relationship with money. As the interviewer, I will ensure the respondents that they are free to share information till the point that they are comfortable. They can specify information that they would not want to be attributed to them in the public domain and I will maintain that confidentiality and ensure in the published version of the study the information would not be represented in a way deleterious to them.

**Positionality**

What I know about the world comes from my upbringing. I come from a small town where I grew up in relative privilege with all the resources I needed. Both of my parents have Master's degrees. The places I know the best are not rural communities, though I have spent ample time in farming communities in my work and life as an adult. My life experiences across the globe since the end of high school also heavily inform my positionality. Being an American, the social lens I bring to this research is based in a democratic society that highly values individualism and self-determination. This includes class, sometimes assuming what resources are available to people. Race and gender also play a role here, as I am a white woman talking to a variety of people from different backgrounds through the interviews.

I also often assume all people are interested in growing and learning. This is not always the case. My background traveling around the world to educational organizations affects the knowledge I bring to this research. I am a teacher by trade, so my own preferences and tendencies towards a

humanist approach to education is part of what I bring to the table. These preferences will not disrupt the interviews, as I am curious about how others teach, learn and facilitate. Through my degree in environmental science, I became a systems thinker. Meaning I bring to the world an assumption that others also see life as interconnected.

I bring an ontological assumption that all human beings that are in this world have their own rights, thoughts, interpretations and meanings of reality (Amed, 2008). This assumption is reflected in the methodologies chosen for the research, interviews. Epistemological constructivism will be used as a lens in this study, assuming meaning is constructed via the social context in which it takes place (Amed, 2008). Though many opinions are being taken into account, there is not just one valid interpretation of events.

These positionalities affect my research by determining my view of the world. These are my limitations as a researcher explained. Additionally, I may be considered an outsider, as I do not live in any of these small communities where the schools exist. The characteristics I have will also determine how I handle conflict, success, tension, communication and cultural experiences.

## **Data Analysis**

In the first table below, responses have been coded to easily compare and contrast the organizations interviewed. They are listed in the same order in the “code” column and the “meaning” column. The codes are shorthand for essential aspects of each category. The second table allows for easy data analysis, making more clear themes on important topics which will be later discussed. It must be noted that the data collected did not always include clear enough responses to code, in that case, the responses have not been coded at all in order not to assume anything about the organization.

Category	Code	Meaning	Category	Code	
<b>Organization Age</b>	0-10, 11-20, 21-30, 31+	Range of years the organization has existed	<b>Pedagogy/ Philosophy</b>	OMPed/OMPhil	One Major Pedagogy, One Major Philosophy
<b>Age of Leaders/ Owners</b>	20-40, 41-60, 61-80, 81+	Range of ages of people who lead the organization		UOf, UOc, NOU	Used often in offerings and daily operations, Used occasionally in offerings and daily operations, not often used in offerings
<b>Background of Founders &amp; Leaders</b>	H	Health		MulPed/MulPhil	Multiple Pedagogy, Multiple Philosophies
	W	Wellness		SDE	Still Developing and Evolving
	Sp	Spirituality		Hu	Humanist
	Min	Ministry		Prog	Progressive
	SW	Social Work		Lib	Liberal
	FA	Food Access		Rad	Radical
	F	Farming		Beh	Behaviorist
	ECSp	Earth Centered Spirituality		PB/EB	Placed- based, Experience-Based
	MA	Mutual Aid	<b>How much is Environmental Education a focus?</b>	MF	Major Focus
	CD	Community Development		ModF	Moderate Focus
<b>Mission &amp; Vision</b>	T	Teaching		L/NoF	Little to No Focus
	CMV	Clear Mission and Vision		ImbF	Imbedded Focus
	CM	Clear Mission	<b>Popular &amp; Essential Offerings</b>	WR	Weekend Retreats
	Con/EvMV	Continuous/Evolving Mission and Vision		OTE	One Time Events
	UCMV	Unclear Mission and Vision		ME	Monthly Events
	Com	Community centered		RE	Recurring Events
	Ea	Earth centered		SLR	Self Led Retreats
	Sp	Spirituality centered		SBW	Skill Building Workshops
	Ed	Education centered		FP	Food Production
	Heal	Healing centered		TP	Tree Production
				OPP	Other Physical Products
<b>Finances: Start up and sustaining</b>	GG	Government Grants	<b>Finances: Prices for Offerings</b>	SS	Sliding Scale
	PG	Private Grants		SP	Set Prices
	PD	Private Donors		BD	By Donation

	PF	Personally Funded by founders		SA	Scholarships Available
	FF	Family or Friends Funding		MP	Market Price
	LCM	Land Conservation Model		AMP/BMP	Above Market Price/Below Market Price,
	App	Apprentices		EBT/Snap	EBT/Snap Accepted
	PTS	Part Time Staff			
	FTS	Full Time Staff			
	VS	Volunteer Staff			

**Table 2: Categories, Codes and Meanings for Data Gathered through Interviews.**

Topics	Celebration Tree Farm	Local Farm in Scarborough	Alcyon Center	The Whole Health Center
<b>Organization Age</b>	0-10	10-20	10-20	40+
<b>Founders &amp; Leaders: Age</b>	41-60	20-40 and 41-60	61-80	61-80
<b>Founders &amp; Leaders: Background</b>	Sp, SW, FA, F, ECSp, MA, CD	Sp, FA, F, ECSp, CD, T	W, Min, SW, F, ECSp, CD, T	H, W, Sp, SW, CD, T
<b>Themes of Mission &amp; Vision</b>	CMV, Con/EvMV, Com, Ea, Sp, Heal	CM, Con/EvMV, Com, Ea, Ed	CMV, Com, Ea, Sp, Ed, Heal	CMV, Com, Ea, Sp, Ed, Heal
<b>Pedagogy/ Philosophy</b>	MulPed, MulPhil, SDE, Hu, Prog, PB, EB	MulPed, MulPhil, SDE, Prog, Lib, PB, EB	OMPhil, MulPed, Uof, Hu, Lib, PB, EB	OMPhil, MulPed, Uof, Hu, Lib, EB
<b>Environmental Education</b>	ModF, ImbF	MF, ImbF	ModF, ImbF	L/NoF, ImbF
<b>Popular &amp; Essential Offerings</b>	OTE, ME, RE, SBW, TP, OPP	RE, SBW, FP, OPP	WR, OTE, ME, RE, SLR	WR, OTE, ME, RE, SLR
<b>Finances: Prices for Offerings</b>	SS, BD, MP	SS, BD, MP, EBT/Snap	SS, SA, MP	SS, SA, MP
<b>Finances: Start up and sustaining</b>	PF, FF, LCM, PTS, VS	GG, PF, FF, LCM, App, FTS	GG, PG, PD, PF, FF, PTS, FTS, VS	PG, PD, FF, PTS
<b>Color Coding</b>	Yellow: Present in all institutions	Orange: Present in 3 of 4 institutions	Green: Present in 2 of 4 institutions	Blue: Present in 1 of 4 institutions

**Table 3: Themes of Data from Study Interviews.**

## Background of Leaders and Founders

There are commonalities beginning with the people who lead these organizations. The first two questions were as follows, “What are the influences, professional or personal, that led you to your current work?” and, “What are the influences, professional or personal, that inspired you to begin the organization that is your current work?” Interviewees shared one thing in common, that they had done many things before their current work, mostly related to helping people. They were mutual aid advocates, high school physics teachers, farmers, social workers, small non-profit organization staff, one massage therapist and one minister. This leads to the theme of community development appearing in all four organizations. The literature review covered the importance of sustainable development and human development. When these two come together, they create community development, a multifaceted field of work. It is defined by Texas A&M Agrilife Extension as:

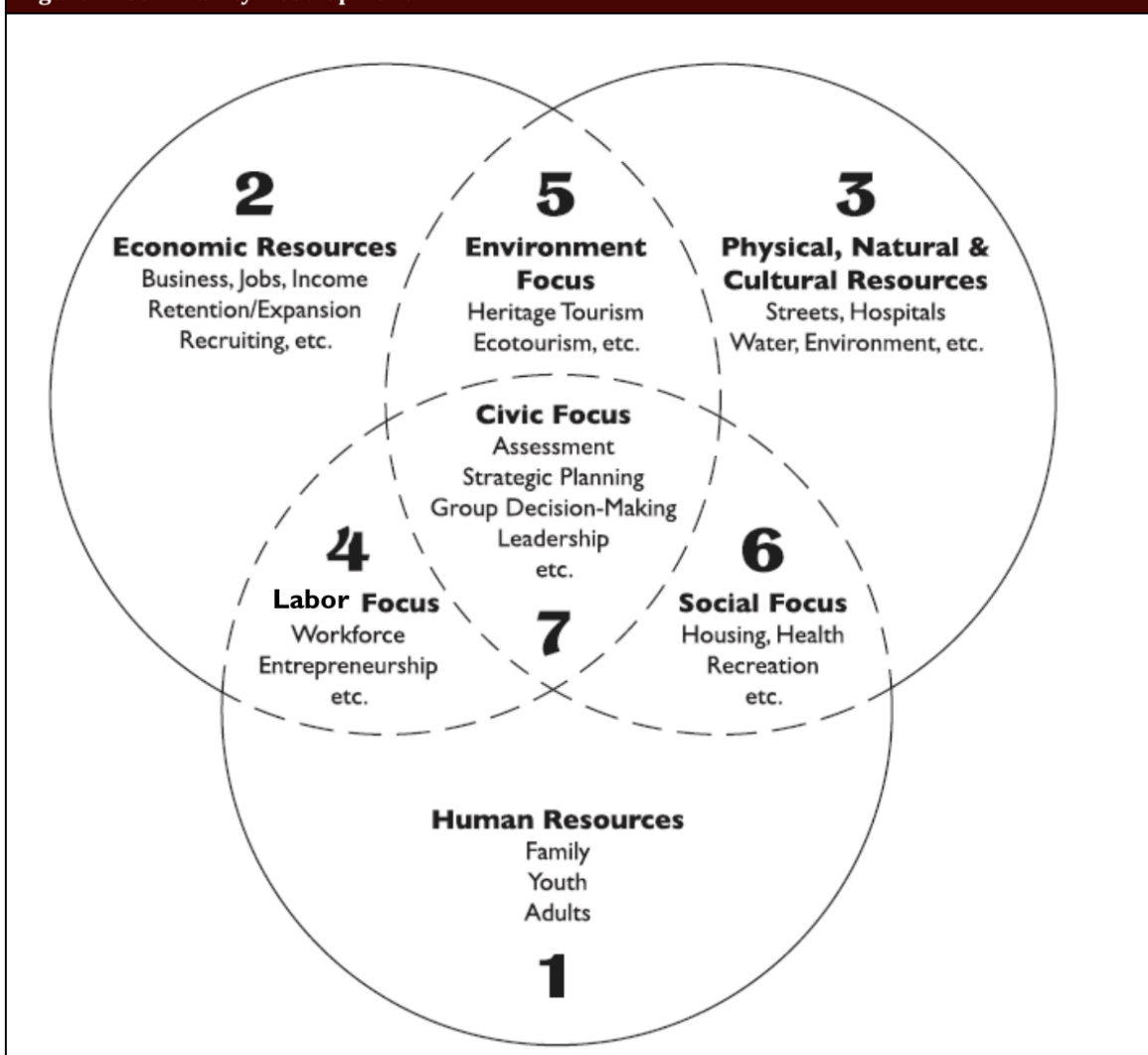
“...a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, equality, economic opportunity and social justice, through the organization, education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings.” (Taylor et al, 2021).

In addition to sharing diverse backgrounds, as well as a passion for community development, the founders and leaders of the interviewed organizations also share a particular hope for a positive future. Although this was not a direct question in the interview, all those interviewed talked about a world they want to live in. They talked about a collective imagination that integrates so many of the philosophies, spiritual paths and community development goals that they each hold close to the center of their respective organizations. The ingredients that have gone into the creation of the mission and vision statements for these organizations come from the tapestry of experiences and values that each



uses to inform the work that they do. Social work and community development are interwoven. Each in their own way, has participated in creating a more positive future by forming spaces where people can explore and connect. For example, Jonah of Celebration Tree Farm was part of an initiative called “People’s Free Bus” that traveled around Portland, Maine offering workshops on topics such as medicinal herbs, fermentation and political activism (J.Fertig-Burd, personal communication, April 9th, 2024). All together, the five leaders interviewed have more than 50 experiences like this one, showing their commitment to accessible, safe and engaging learning spaces.

**Figure 1: Community Development**



**Figure 1: Diagram of Overlap and Distinctions of Community Development Aspects. (Taylor et al, 2021)**

The figure above (Figure 1) demonstrates how the work that those who now run the four organizations interviewed have had a hand in different aspects of community development work since the start of many of their careers. For example, the leader of The Local Farm was a physics teacher, which brings together civic focus, human resources, social focus and environment focus. The other leader of The Local Farm has spent most of their career as a farmer, which brings together environment focus, physical, natural and cultural resources as well as labor focus. Kathryn Booth served as a minister before she and Joan Grant began The Alcyon Center. “Ministry” also touches on more than 3 of the categories of community development in the figure above: human resources, social focus, civic focus, physical, natural and cultural resources.

What stands out in the responses to these questions is how starting their respective organizations gave each person an outlet through which to use their diverse skills. The findings in the literature review showed that building a multifaceted organization takes a breadth of knowledge and experience. This leads into the common theme of each organization requiring sustainable vision and passion from its founders. Jonah, from Celebration Tree Farm in Durham, Maine, exemplifies this finding well. After working in food access, he worked at the Boys and Girls Club and a local non profit called Preble Street doing work in food security and education (J.Fertig-Burd, personal communication, April 9th, 2024). With his many interests, he started a vegetarian cafe in Portland that was popular until he decided to close it 7 years later (J.Fertig-Burd, personal communication, April 9th, 2024). In 2015, with his partner, Jonah began Celebration Tree Farm. It brings together so much from Jonah’s personal and professional experiences. The homepage of the organization’s website says, “Celebrate Community, Creativity, Wellness & Connection to the Earth” (Celebration Tree Farm, 2024).

Paul Wiess also brought together diverse experiences in his personal and professional life that prepared him for running a center like The Whole Health Center. Before going back to school for his Master's degree in Counseling Physiology and Holistic Wellness, he worked as a social worker, at a group foster care program that was a homestead and as a shoe repairman (P.Weiss, personal communication, May, 29th, 2024). After that, he began working as a massage therapist, focusing as well on herbal healing modalities. He spent nearly 15 years in wellness work. He said in the interview that what inspired him to begin the organization was just a natural progression of what he was interested in and what he wanted to offer. Through the Whole Health Center, Paul was able to “encourage people to take care in all ways” (P.Weiss, personal communication, May, 29th, 2024). The other leaders and founders interviewed have diverse personal and professional backgrounds as well. A holistic approach to education is needed through applied pedagogy as well, embodied and modeled by those who are teaching (Aljabreen, 2020). When those teaching are modeling the values held at the center of the guiding teaching philosophy, learners have an experience in line with the vision of the organization. Not only does it feel more aligned to have instructors who embody the values of the school, but it is practical in the way that this creates a sense of trust and community for those participating. This will have ripple effects in the future, as the organization becomes better known and starts forming a reputation in the local area.

A school such as the Maine School of Wonder or an expansion of Overland Apiaries has the potential to touch on many of these categories as well. Personnel are the factor that brings passion to a project or organization. Through the people, previous experiences and passions are channeled - creating a specific variation of community development in which each is engaged.

## Mission and Vision

Each organization considers their mission and vision to be important to both everyday operations and to the bigger picture of their relevance to the modern world. The interview question most related to mission and vision is, “How did you arrive at the current mission and vision of this program?” Through responses to this question and gathering information from the websites, themes of spirituality, relationship with the earth, and concern for holistic wellness of people. Three of the four organizations have a clear mission and vision while one has adopted a more fluid approach to their mission and vision, allowing for the needs of each season to inform the specifics as it employs new people yearly. Both farms have a continuous/ evolving mission and vision. For The Local Farm and Celebration Tree Farm, this is intentionally done to adapt to the changing needs of the community they each are creating as well as the expansion of offerings. The themes at the core of the missions and visions of the four organizations are: Community development, connection with the earth or land, spirituality and holistic healing. Four out of four use community development and a connection with the earth as a center point for their mission and vision. Three of the four include spirituality in their mission statement, with the fourth organization beginning to expand their offerings and vision to include spirituality as well. For direct educational experiences, three of the four lead workshops in which participants can learn specific skills. Celebration Tree Farm is the fourth in this category that is expanding towards offering educational workshops as well.

The Local Farm is a dynamic place because it has begun to expand its offerings to the community through more events open to the public. Of the organizations interviewed, it is also the most focused in the sense that it functions primarily as a vegetable, herb and flower farm. The Local Farm states, “Our mission is to build soil, increase biodiversity, and strengthen community through the growing of wholesome food” (C.Nate and R.Court, personal communication, May 31st, 2024). The

mission covers food production, a positive relationship with the land and community-building efforts. This allows for the expansion of the community meals, solstice gatherings, workshops and other new offerings the Local Farm is envisioning they will include in the coming years. There is a stability and a flexibility to this mission statement. The Whole Health Center brought together many modes of healing and philosophies from around the world, from Ayurvedic principles to Buddhist teaching. Below is their mission statement.

“The mission of The Whole Health Center is to be an agent of integration and deep healing, through promoting both the integrity and self-realization of the individual and genuine reciprocity and conscious communication between people. We see both together as essential to wholeness.” (The Whole Health Center, 2024).

At the center of the Whole Health Center is the combination of the self and the community. This mission statement is written in a way that explains some of the vision the organization has for the world they hope to help create.

The Alcyon Center began with a letter to a group of people who Joan Grant and Kathryn Booth knew for years before. It was a group of friends, mentors and colleagues who Joan and Kathryn trusted to help them move forward with the vision they held. In 2007, they wrote a detailed letter that outlined their mission and vision for the center. One of the most notable sections, relevant to this research, is the “articles of incorporation,” which are shown in Appendix C. These encapsulate not only the mission and vision, but the pedagogy, philosophy and goals for the organization.

“The Alcyon Center is a nonprofit spiritual and cultural research center in Seal Cove, ME. The vision for the Center is rooted in a desire for bold and practical ways to meet the spiritual hunger of our times. Providing a peaceful setting and an experience of living a daily rhythm of work, prayer, study, and rest constitutes the main way of bringing this vision to life. We welcome all who are willing to undertake the hard work of awakening.” (The Alcyon Center, 2024).

Above, The Alcyon Center’s vision statement uses language that gives space for changes through time that are adaptable to what the modern world needs. Celebration Tree Farm uses similar language.

“Mission Statement of Celebration Tree Farm & Wellness Center is a growing community through the forest, wellness, food, creativity, and connection. Vision Statement: We envision a community that is living in harmony with the earth and supporting one another’s wellness and creativity.”

The mission and vision are often considered together for these types of organizations that have a diverse set of offerings, participants and goals. The example the Celebration Tree Farm sets by distinguishing between the mission and vision offers a clear path forward for them. The mission states what the core of the organization is right now, while the vision looks forward to a world Celebration Tree Farm would like to create. As a model, this allows for frequent revisiting of what is being done and where they are headed. Information gathered through each organization's websites and interviews, two of the four have a clear mission statement but do not specifically include the vision.

### **Underpinning Pedagogy and Philosophy**

The responses to the question about mission and vision often overlapped with participants’ responses to the question about pedagogy. The two farms share similarities in this category with honoring the cycles of the earth and using place as a teacher. Both use multiple pedagogies and philosophies to inform the educational aspects of the operation, some more defined than others. When asked, Paul Weiss responded that the Whole Health Center is guided by the idea of “putting the tools back in the hands of people” (P. Weiss, personal communication, May 29th 2021). This is coupled with Buddhism and meditation studies guiding the pedagogical direction of the Whole Health Center. On the website, the organization explains in detail part of the philosophical lens through which they view learning,

“Throughout four decades of educational and therapeutic work with individuals and groups, and extended workshops, retreats, and community conferences, The Whole Health Center has been an agent of such awakening and self-realization, conscious communication, integration and deep healing. Our programs have always put a premium on cohesive intellectual structure; practical and experiential immersion; a deeper sense of contact and community among participants; and transformational intent and results.” (Whole Health Center, 2024)

Alcyon is the organization that has the clearest pedagogical foundation, as they are deeply rooted in the teachings of Rudolf Steiner. However, similar to other organizations interviewed, Alcyon incorporates a wide range of philosophies and pedagogies into their educational approaches.

“Alcyon’s founding directors Kathryn Booth and Joan Jordan Grant embody the teachings, posture, and spiritual hospitality of the Christian tradition. Other major streams flowing through Alcyon are experiences with contemplative prayer and spiritual direction, the work of Rudolf Steiner, Robert Sardello, the Twelve Steps, and in intentional communities with integrity and a practical approach to spiritual life that Alcyon itself seeks to model.” (The Alcyon Center, 2024)

Figure 1 in the Literature Review section examines the different adult education pedagogies in greater detail. In ‘The Nature of Transformation’, the authors write, “Adult education must now include not only the social, economic, cultural, and political spheres but also ecological discourses and spheres” (2013). After reading through the four interviews again and revisiting the philosophies of adult environmental education, the top two most applicable pedagogies were chosen for each organization. It must be noted, if the interviewees were to choose their top two, they might be different. These choices use the information from the interview conversations conducted with each organization into how each approaches teaching and learning. Three of the four use a Humanist approach, which focuses on “Transcendence; human happiness; social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development”

(Walters, 2009). Two of the four organizations use progressive pedagogies to educate participants, “education for democracy and social reform, liberation of talents, experience, knowledge of adults, betterment of human condition” (Walters, 2009). Lastly, three of the four organizations use a liberal pedagogical lens to approach teaching and learning. The liberal lens focuses on, “Expansion of knowledge and understanding, rigorous, intellectual training, development of spiritual, moral, and aesthetic sense” (Walters, 2009). As mentioned, teaching through just one of these lenses is near impossible, because humans are complex and good teaching takes multiple approaches to reach a wide range of students. All four of the organizations touch on the radical lens defined as, “liberation of humans from social, economic and political oppression; humanization of learners and society; social transformation”(Walters, 2009). The topic of social transformation came up in the interview with all four organizations, most notably with the Local Farm and Jonah of Celebration Tree Farm. The community gatherings each farm hosts are done so with the intention of creating a space for people to enjoy themselves as well as look inward and question the realities of the US society as a whole. Gathering with intention is an age-old practice, though often in the modern world it is not

An examination of the area of ‘community development’ reveals there are connections to be made between the adult education pedagogies outlined by Walters in his article, “Philosophies of Adult Environmental Education” and the seven distinct focuses or resources that make up ‘community development’ as outlined by Texas A&M (Walters, 2009; Taylor, et al. 2021). The table below (Table ) is from an article from Texas A&M Agrilife, breaking down the more specific aspects that create a holistic definition of community development. These can be connected to the purpose of each type of adult education Walters outlines.

One example of connecting pedagogy to community development is its “human focus”. Community development has a goal of, “developing self efficacy, knowledge and interpersonal skills,”



which overlaps with the humanist philosophy of adults, environmental education, which states its purpose as social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development (Taylor et al, 2021). Here's where the theory from two different parts of an organization's structure come together to support each other, in this case the pedagogy and the mission. Community development's emphasis on "labor", as well as a "civic focus", (See Figure 1) both weave together the same goals that some of the philosophies of adult environmental education do. For example, the goal of "labor" related community development is to "create a high skill, high value, workforce and enterprising, knowledgeable entrepreneurs" (Taylor et al, 2021). Here, high skill and high value workforce refers to work that takes intentional education to learn, either through specific degree programs or apprenticeships, which leads to work that is valued highly by the local community and by society as a whole. All of the purpose statements for the five philosophies have some connection to this goal of community development in relation to labor. Creating a high-skill and high-value workforce is a way to help humans achieve happiness, liberate them from oppression, aid social transformation, ensure survival, and expand knowledge (Taylor et al, 2021). With skills-based workshops in mind, this aspect of community development is important to think about in the context of the model for a school offering workshops like these. It brings up questions again, as discussed in the literature review, about the value of work, what work can teach people as well as how work benefits culture in society

For the majority, these pedagogies for adult education cannot be used in isolation. Even at educational institutions like Montessori and Waldorf schools, educators use a variety of approaches to teaching. The same can be said for the organizations interviewed for this research. Though each is led by a core set of beliefs, a core set of educational aspirations, their approaches are multifaceted. In the Humanist philosophy of adult education, learners are seen as having unlimited potential and being inherently motivated and self-directed (Walter, 2009). This can also be applied to the way work is seen

in the United States. Often work is seen as practical, devoid of enthusiasm (Morgan, 2020). Bringing the humanist philosophy of work to skills building workshops lets learners feel appreciated, as well as feel there is space being created from the instructors that allows each individual to explore, problem- solve and learn at their own pace. These four organizations center holistic approaches to adult learning, naturally counteracting the way people are taught to learn in traditional, industrial schools. Like philosopher and educator Simone Weil, these organizations have a common theme in their focus on attention and joy (Morgan, 2020). Not only does this approach encourage participants to put more care into their own expansion of knowledge, it instills into the work and skill building a dignity undeniable to society as a whole. Another benefit is showing participants life at a slower pace, in which each person can use their time and energy to focus on a particular skill they are learning or experience they are having. The Local Farm offers community dinners that last hours, allowing for those in attendance to slow down for awhile, to take in life with less stress, to enjoy the food and the company.

Table 1: Community Development Goals and Objectives.		
Focus/Resource	Goals	Possible Objectives
Human	Develop self-efficacy, knowledge, and interpersonal skills in youth and adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivate healthy living habits</li> <li>• Develop leadership skills</li> <li>• Stimulate youth interest in science</li> <li>• Create family disaster preparedness plans</li> </ul>
Economic	Sustain existing levels and create additional economic activity (jobs, businesses, income streams)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain and expand existing businesses</li> <li>• Recruit new businesses and industry from elsewhere</li> <li>• Plug the leaks that cause capital and profits to leave the community</li> </ul>
Physical, Natural and Cultural	Connect the community with distant markets Ensure public health and safety Preserve and enhance the natural, cultural and historic environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure adequate water, sewer and other utilities</li> <li>• Provide transportation and telecommunications services to link the community with distant markets</li> <li>• Build community consensus on appropriate land and environmental uses</li> </ul>
Labor	Create a high-skill, high-value workforce and enterprising, knowledgeable entrepreneurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upgrade the skills of adult workers and keep them at competitive levels</li> <li>• Provide under-skilled adults with strong, job-specific skills, linking training and work</li> <li>• Develop new value-added business enterprises</li> <li>• Promote entrepreneurship</li> </ul>
Environment	Create economic enterprises using locally appropriate management of natural, historical and cultural resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop heritage, cultural and ecotourism opportunities</li> <li>• Consider the environmental consequences of development activities</li> </ul>
Social	Ensure strong human and social services to support working people, families and those in need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide for adequate child and elder care</li> <li>• Provide recreational outlets for all ages</li> <li>• Foster the development of affordable housing</li> </ul>
Civic	Build a visionary, accountable and inclusive culture of civic decision making and problem solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure open, competent and accessible governmental and civic institutions</li> <li>• Deepen and broaden the leadership pool across ethnic, class, and age groups</li> <li>• Promote participation in civic affairs by all sectors of the community</li> </ul>

Capitals framework adapted from: Emery, M. & Flora, C.B. (2006). Spiraling-Up: Mapping Community Transformation with Community Capitals Framework. *Community Development: Journal of the Community Development Society*, 37, 19-35 (Spring).

**Table 4: Community Development Goals and Objectives. (Taylor et al, 2021)**

### Environmental Education

Though stewardship of land and a reverence for the earth are both aspects that the four organizations share, none identify as environmental education centers. All four organizations have a common interest in informing participants and attendees about what it means to care for the earth and all approach the topic differently. One example that Kathryn Booth brought up is how Alcyon uses a prayer at each morning meditation that is known to many indigenous people as a powerful prayer that

brings people together, it is called “Words before all else” (K.Booth, personal communication, May 29, 2024). Respectfully, a part of the prayer is below to exemplify the reverence for the natural world that Alcyons aspires to pass on to those who attend workshops and events.

“We are all thankful to our Mother, the Earth, for she gives us all that we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk about upon her. It gives us joy that she continues to care for us as she has from the beginning of time. To our mother, we send greetings and thanks. Now our minds are one” (Wilbur, 2024).

The Local Farm holds weekly classes for their farm workers that cover a wide range of topics about environmental education. These lessons help those working on the farm add to their knowledge and skills related to the environment and the land. The Local Farm has a major focus on environmental education due to the values they hold through their mission and the fact that the business's financial sustainability is based on growing healthy food in healthy soil (C.Nate and R.Court, personal communication, May 31st, 2024).

Celebration Tree Farm and The Alcyon Center both have a moderate focus on educating about the environment directly through the events, workshops and retreats offered regularly. For example, The Alcyon Center has weekends twice a year where volunteers come to care for the ground, waking up the gardens and outdoor spaces in the spring and closing things down in the fall. Through this, volunteers are participating in a ritual that honors the seasonal cycles of the earth (K.Booth, personal communication, May 29, 2024) . The Whole Health Center also has an embedded approach to teaching about the earth. Paul Weiss gave the example that the center held a sacred relationship to the nature around them, encouraging others to do the same (P.Weiss, personal communication, May, 29th, 2024). Since the Whole Health Center focuses on meditation, wellness and spirituality, their programming integrates learning opportunities for participants “to awaken their senses to nature,” says Paul Weiss (P.Weiss, personal communication, May, 29th, 2024).

### **Attendees, Equity, Local community**

With relation to the information gathered from each organization about who the populations are engaging with them, there are three major themes. First, the two farms tend to bring together people who are within an hour's drive. This makes sense, as small farms are usually hyper-localized with who is able to take the time to visit and/or purchase from them. The commonalities between the retreat centers is that they both have more specific teachings, weekend workshops and guest speakers who tend to gather attendees from a wider geographical range. Both Alcyon Center and Whole Health Center spoke of people coming from New England and beyond. The Whole Health Center specifically had well-known guest lecturers, meditation experts and spiritual leaders in the space, not only gathered people from the Western coast of the United States, but even people from parts of Europe. In terms of equity, it comes in the form of financial flexibility for these for organizations. The local farm is connected with gleaning efforts based out of Portland, this takes any imperfect produce, and brings it to soup kitchens in the area. The (Alcyon) center is known for being a hub for people in the recovery community around New England. Catherine Booth mentioned those from the recovery community who end up at workshops tend to be people who are contemplative and spiritual seekers. She also mentioned that "contemplative souls are marginalized in a capitalist society," which sparks a conversation that can connect back to the backgrounds of the people who began, and or lead these organizations today. This work, no matter if it is through the lens of a farm or a formal retreat center, requires the belief in a collective imagination and vision for a better world.

### **Popular and essential offerings**

Each organization has their own set of most popular and essential offerings. The two retreat centers quickly answered this question, as they have been established for more than 10 years, which

has allowed for information gathering on what their clientele and attendees were most responsive to for offerings. Besides the agricultural products, both farms continue to build their set of community offerings. Three of the four organizations host one-time events, for example, a special speaker comes from outside the state to host a lecture. Three of the four organizations host events that consistently happen once a month. The Local Farm is beginning to host recurring events, but does not yet host them once a month. Both farms host some type of skill-building workshops (code: SBW), from practicing no-till farming to reiki energy work. Additionally, Celebration Tree Farm and the Local Farm both produce agricultural products and other physical products such as potted perennial plants and evergreen wreaths as a main attraction for people who engage with them. The two retreat centers offer options for self-led retreats (code: SLR). This is where individuals can rent a room or the space to do their own type of retreat. For example, Alcyon has what it calls the “Simple and Silent,” during which the hosts are available for questions but the participants are on their own journey (K.Booth, personal communication, May 29, 2024). This wide range of offerings shows many ways to create successful community events to which people feel connected and excited about attending. All four organizations use their philosophical approaches to underpin most of the events, workshops and retreats they host.

### **Financial Insights: Prices, Grants and Sustainability**

Coming into this project, the main goal was to learn more about the financial sustainability of existing skills schools. Therefore, a series of questions were posed to interviewees about the topic. They were as follows: “What financial resources and support did you have to start the organization? What kinds of support did you get?” and “How do you sustain the finances of the organization? For example, what is your fee structure?” These questions allowed respondents to speak to a whole picture of the financial situation at the organization, which proved to be helpful in creating a model for Maine

School of Wonder. Often, finances are not put out in the open. Despite this, all those interviewed were open and clear with their answers. This is a way that important knowledge is passed down through community connections.

Two of the four organizations have received at least one government grant in the past and used those to help sustain finances. Two of the four donors have received large donations from private donors, both from one-time donors and those who give regularly. The commonality they all have is assistance with start-up money from a close friend or family member. This is significant because it shows there is some level of pre-existing affluence and connections that need to be in place for someone to have a real chance at starting an organization of this type. This also brings up a question of equity and access to attendees. Usually, the people who are attending events are those who have similar income levels as well as interest as those who run the centers. As Overland Apiaries begins to expand into community events and workshops, intentional effort must be put in to gather people from a wide range of backgrounds if the mission includes serving the whole of the Portland community.

Prices for programming are part of the income for all four of the organizations. Every interviewee said there is a sliding scale for all programming, from one-time events to regularly occurring monthly workshops. For one-time events, such as a community dinner or a one-day silent retreat, the cost is anywhere between \$20 and \$100. For longer programs at the retreat centers, prices range between 250 and \$600. Both farms hold events that are by donation. And both the retreat centers have ample scholarships available for those who feel the call to attend but are unable to afford the full price. This is where we see through the data that one form of equity comes through financial flexibility of the organizations. The private donors, private grants, government grants and other income streams, allow for the heart of the work to be more accessible to a wide range of people. After researching average prices for different types of events and programs, the data showed that all four of the

organizations have prices that are on par with others in the industry. This can be attributed to the sliding scale options.

As organizations who all value environmental sustainability, relationships to the land must be discussed. The two farms have some sort of land conservation model as part of the ownership of the property. The Local Farm is zoned as a farm and Celebration Tree Farm The Alcyon Center also has a special relationship with the land, as they steward it with care. Though this topic was not a direct question in the interview, all four organizations ended up talking about it in relation to either environmental education or finances. Leaders from The Local Farm, Celebration Tree Farm and Alcyon all spoke with distinct passion and appreciation for the land on which the organizations are run. It is important to note the relationships to the land are not a “conventional” extractive approach, rather a stewardship model of caring for the land as a critical part of the operation.

The organizations have different approaches to staffing. The local farm has a work exchange program that could be considered an apprenticeship. This program hires people interested in learning how to farm or deepening their skills in farming, pays them an hourly wage and provides housing and some of their food. It is a seasonal position. All four of the organizations have staff who are part-time, doing everything from in-house bookkeeping to cooking meals for the other staff members. The local farm and (Alcyon) center have full-time staff, whereas Celebration Tree Farm and the Whole Health Center both have part-time staff. All of the people who run the organizations live on site. Paul Weiss has since moved off of the location of the whole health center because it has been sold, but he and his partner lived there while it was open and fully operational. This ties into finances because it brings down the cost of living for those who are running the organization, coupling housing with work. Three of the four organizations use volunteers to help move forward their mission. Volunteers do not usually work more than a few hours a week, however, they can be crucial to the operations of the organization.



### **Themes from Data Analysis:**

- Original creation: having a clear vision. This may not necessarily include all the details of how the organization will be started, but what the founders envision it to look like and feel like
- A multifaceted background for those who are leaders and founders of these organizations.
- Each has a variety of events and offerings that are consistently recurring, helping to create a community following
- Community Development, in multiple focus areas, plays a significant role in the philosophies that have informed the creation and growth of all four organizations
- Curiosity is an underpinning philosophy for all four. Curiosity is seen as a critical part of staying open minded as an organization and for encouraging those who are engaging with the farm or retreat center to do the same.
- Missions and visions evolve. These are living documents that evolve with an organization. Values stay the same, mission and visions adjust to the needs of the organization and community.
- It takes a group of people to create a sustainable organization, it cannot be done alone. Interconnection is required.

### **Discussion: How Gathered Data Informs the Model for an Expansion of Overland Apiaries to include Environmental Education**

The data gathered provides helpful information to aid in the formation of an education center that focuses on skill building and strengthening community. Despite the interviews including a range of different organizations, the themes about how to build a successful earth and people centered organization are clear. Two of the interviews were with farms that also offer community events. There are many commonalities between these two places. As Overland Apiaries begins creating a model for the expanded organization, the insight gained from these two interviews helps give guidance for how using farm zoning and farm related income can create a sustainable model.

The original idea for the project was to create a business plan for what it would take to start a skills school from the beginning. Since the research and project have begun, this idea has evolved into a proposal about how to move an already existing small farming business into offering a wider range of public educational events, workshops on back-to-earth skills and community gatherings related to honoring the sacredness of earth and the changing seasons. Overland Apiaries is a 5 acres farm in Portland, Maine. It is one of very few farms this size within the borders of the city. The land is zoned as a farm, with 50 active beehives, 12 raised beds, a half acres of other cultivated land, more than 15 fruit trees, a pond, goats, chickens and geese. With a farmhouse that has a large kitchen and open floor plan, this unique property offers immense potential to slowly start a skills school.

Leigha Hart sat down with Erin Evans, the owner and director of Overland Apiaries, on June 6th, 2024 to discuss the findings of the research and how it can apply to the future of Overland. Erin Evans is a person with many interests as well as work experiences. She is a Master Beekeeper, has her Permaculture Certificate and has a huge knowledge base about the flora and fauna of Maine. After becoming a Master Beekeeper, Erin's first goal was to build up as much infrastructure as she could to ensure the apiary and farm had all the supplies and tools it needed for years to come. Another goal was to make as much honey as she could, which is what Overland has focused its efforts on since its founding. Up until now, Erin has not considered expanding the farm into something more community oriented. However, this research paper is inspiring her to think about the opportunities that would exist if steps were taken to expand the educational aspects of the land and farm. Erin, the founder and owner of Overland Apiaries, would like to eventually have the farm make enough money to pay her. However she says, "Relying on the income of the farm to keep it running changes the way decisions are made, as it requires more practicality and less room for envisioning the biggest dreams for the farm" (E.Evans, personal communication, June 7th, 2024). A helpful way to look at the expansion of Overland Apiaries

towards an educational center with a sustainable business model is through the same table used to analyze the characteristics of the four organizations interviewed for this project.

Topics	Overland Apiaries	Topics	Overland Apiaries
<b>Organization Age</b>	11-20	<b>Environmental Education</b>	Major Focus and Imbedded focus
<b>Founders &amp; Leaders: Age</b>	41-60, 21-40	<b>Popular &amp; Essential Offerings</b>	Skill Building Workshops, Monthly Events, Food Production, Other Physical Products: honey and flowers, One on one apprenticeships
<b>Founders &amp; Leaders: Background</b>	Food Access, Farming, Earth Centered Spirituality, Community Development, Teaching	<b>Finances: Prices for Offerings</b>	Sliding scale, Some by donation community events, Market Price and Below Market Prices, EBT/Snap accepted
<b>Themes of Mission &amp; Vision</b>	Clear Mission and Vision, Evolving, Earth - centered, Education centered, community centered	<b>Finances: Start up and sustaining</b>	Small Government Grants, Personally funded by founders, Land conservation model in the form of being zoned as a farm, Apprenticeships, Part Time Staff
<b>Pedagogy/ Philosophy</b>	Multiple Pedagogies, Multiple Philosophies, Humanist, Liberal, Used often in offerings, Place-based and experience-based	<b>Attendees</b>	60% from Greater Portland Area, 15% from Maine, 25% from out of state, focus on local people first and creating opportunities for participants of many backgrounds

**Table 5: Core Characteristics of Overland Apiaries Vision**

### **Mission and Vision**

The farms have taken a more open approach to the mission and vision. The Local Farm hinges on a community-created vision built every season with those working there. These are rooted in the

mission of the farm. Celebration Tree Farm is less than 10 years old, so it is still finding the mission and vision that work well for what they are trying to do in the community. Their work involves using asset-based approaches to determine what would be helpful to the local community members, as well as those living slightly farther away. This approach to community practice and development begins with taking into account the asset-based community development approach Chupp, Hirsch and Malone, 2023). The asset-based community development (often called ABCD) approach used by both retreat centers created solidified mission statements at the beginning of their incorporation. The Alcyon Center has changed “very little,” says Kathryn Booth, from the original articles of incorporation (K.Booth, personal communication, May 29, 2024). The Whole Health Center has a similar story, of creating a mission that encapsulates much of the work that happened there (P.Weiss, personal communication, May 29, 2024). One of the main goals of Overland is to demonstrate that this kind small farm and connection with bees and land can be achieved by normal people in the real world. Overland strives to be and grow more into being a living example of regenerative agriculture and holistic beekeeping. It is a place where people can learn. The cottage is a different type of example.

The expansion of Overland Apiaries into an organization that hosts workshops and other community events will require a combination of both approaches to the mission and vision. Given that Overland is an already established business with land and customers, the mission statement must include the current operations while being open enough to include all that will be added in the coming years. This means creating a mission statement that can serve Overland Apiaries now in its current model, while being flexible enough to withstand shifts to the potential offerings to come. The approach will need to be similar for the vision statement. The sentence frame that Celebration Tree Farm uses for their vision statement could also serve Overland’s expansion well: “We envision a community that...” (2024). As mentioned in the data analysis section, the Alcyon Center began with a trusted group of

advisors (K.Booth, personal communication, May 29, 2024). Although Overland Apiaries has a relationship with some organizations in the area through selling honey wholesale, it is not a widely known name in Portland. This expansion of offerings will bring more attention and intention to Overland. Using the example that the Alcyon Center set with bringing together a group of friends, experts and trusted advisors could be an excellent first step to forming a stronger, more focused and more impactful organization.

**Mission:** The mission of Overland Apiaries Nature Education Center is to be a living example of how regenerative agriculture practices, as well as holistic beekeeping, can be done at a variety of scales and geographical settings. In addition, Overland Apiaries strives to educate attendees about the ways in which stewarding the land leads to a stronger connection to place, a sense of confidence in oneself and greater peace.

**Vision:** Overland Apiaries Nature Education Center envisions a world in which urban pollinators have diverse food sources; where humans are living in harmony with the flora and fauna around them; and where all people have access to learning opportunities that aid them in their liberation.

### **Pedagogy and Philosophy**

The Maine School of Wonder, or the expanded Overland Apiaries will use a combination of pedagogies to inform its approach to teaching and learning. Overland Apiaries will use a combination of humanist, progressive and liberal pedagogies for adult education to support the teaching and learning at the organization. The workshops will primarily use a progressive approach to create a learning space that is about experimentation, problem- solving, and is learner-centered (Walters, 2009). The instructors will be guides for learning as well as the source of knowledge, holding the belief that learners have unlimited potential for growth, connecting to the Liberal philosophy (Walters, 2009).

Bringing this approach to the workshops, will not only empower learners, but cultivate a space of intentional learning and community.

Apprenticeships are one of the progressive instructional strategies, an option that would be a great fit for Overland Apiaries. Apprenticeships and work exchanges offer people a way to get hands-on experience with skills that they're interested in learning. Farm work exchanges are common, they often offer housing and some food as part of the pay. A beekeeping apprenticeship is also an option for Overland as it could help increase the capacity for honey production on the land. As of right now, the owner and master beekeeper works a full-time job off of the farm.

### **Environmental Education**

The mallards that live in the Fore River Sanctuary also call a small vernal pool on the Overland property land. There are hundreds of species of flora and fauna on the land, from fruit trees intentionally planted, to invasive species now common to Maine. In the deep of winter, the land is quiet and bare of leaves with the exception of the evergreen trees. As the spring begins to open, early flowers bloom and the trees show buds. By the time the summer comes, everything is lush and green. The garden beds are planted with vegetables, herbs and flowers. The land is a teacher all the time. The complex ecosystems that exist on the 5 acres of Overland Apiaries property allow for relationship building with this place. Environmental education and place-based education both function on the same principles of using the outdoors as a classroom through which humans can understand their place and themselves more profoundly. Although general ideas about the flora and fauna of a place can be taught in a classroom, hands-on experiential learning is the best approach to learning about the environment. Overland Apiaries will hold environmental education at the center of its mission and philosophy as an organization because it values sustainability and stewardship of the natural

environment. Bringing people to the land also allows for a stronger connection to the place, that some who live in apartments do not have the opportunity to get to know a piece of land well. Through educational tours, workshops and eventually an apprenticeship program, Overland Apiaries will be a leader in Portland for environmental education experiences. A workshop like gardening is held outside, putting learners in contact with the soil, plants and weather. In addition, for workshops that are less obviously focused on the environment and how to care for it, there will be an embedded focus on these topics. However, a workshop such as making lip balm with beeswax would be inside and be focused on a particular craft. There would be an opportunity here to talk about climate change, pesticides, and invasive species' effects on the bee populations.

### **Attendees, Equity, Local community**

Overland Apiaries has a particularly unique trait in its location. Amidst a vibrant city of just under 70,000 people, Portland Maine is a hub for the entire state. First, the airport is here, where people from around the large state drive up to 6 or 7 hours to access air travel. Plus, the city is host to musical events, environmental organizations, famous promenades, a highly praised food scene and access to numerous islands in the Casco Bay. Overland Apiaries occupies a unique piece of land that boasts a peaceful, private and naturalized landscape. People who are drawn to the skill building workshops and other opportunities will also come to explore the land.

The likely attendees and customers for workshops, apprenticeships and farm products would be people from Maine and New Hampshire. There is potential for Overland to eventually have accommodations, however, for the beginning stages of the expansion, the only option for lodging will be to camp on the land.

To draw on an approach the Alcyon Center took to begin their organization with intention, creating a board of people who are interested in the farm, leaders in the greater Portland area and believe in the mission. The data gathering showed that having a supportive group like this, people that can help hold the vision, helps with staying focused on the goals set out for the organization

### **Popular and essential offerings**

The data gathered shows there are ample opportunities to create a range of offerings of experiential learning to the public as a way to create new streams of income for Overland Apiaries. The three main offerings that are relevant to Overland Apiaries' goals are: monthly skill workshops on earth and practical homesteading skills, a summer farm apprenticeship program, renting space out for other groups to use and hosting events that are open to the community such as nature walks and music on the lawn.

As in the original idea for Maine School of Wonder, skill-building workshops could be a consistent, experiential offering that would call in those who are interested in learning a wide array of practical skills. Regular operations at Overland already hold potential to become workshops. People would pay a fee to come use the facilities to learn, led by a teacher or instructor that has knowledge in the particular skill being taught. These workshops will use a combination of pedagogies, including humanist and liberal, to challenge participants in expanding their knowledge base. The primary draw of the workshops would be to learn and experiment with new skills, however, making connections between participants will also be part of the experience. Participants would leave with knowledge, something small they created (for example, beeswax chapstick) and connection. Some examples of workshop topics Overland is already equipped to teach and host are: beeswax chapstick making, beeswax candle making, vegetable gardening 101, pest management and soil building, making herbal



teas, tree pruning, making permaculture garden beds, bread baking, fermentation classes. Each workshop invites a different group of people to it, based on their interests. All four of the organizations mentioned that a common reason people attend offerings is because of connections they make with other people. In a world where genuine connections can feel few and far between, experiences like the weekend workshops at Overland can offer a safe, focused space in which to practice playfulness, curiosity and joy with other like minded people.

The data gathered from the interviews showed that consistency with recurring events is important to create a more solid base of people coming regularly and it offers a sense of longevity and abundance of opportunities to come. This is a way that all of the 4 organizations build on the community ties and connections. These events are low cost, open to the public. An example is a few times a summer, the Local Farm hosts bands from the area to come play outside. These events include a sliding scale cover price, drinks for sale and a beautiful setting to enjoy the land and the warm weather. This type of event will be important to the way Overland continues to build its foundation of connections to customers and participants in the Portland area. Community development does not happen overnight. It takes intentionality, it takes time and consistency. Kathryn Booth said, "We knew it would take at least 10 years for the community to begin to know who we were and accept us as part of the fabric of Mount Desert Island" (K.Booth, personal communication, May 29, 2024).

Something that generates passive income for all four organizations is renting out of community spaces. Celebration tree farm has a yurt that is available for rent: (Alcyon) allows outside groups with similar values to rent out the entire retreat center: the local farm has a room as well as a large barn area available for rent: and The whole health center Was also available for renting two outside groups. Right now, Overland Apiaries has a small barn that, if cleaned out, could be a functional and aesthetically pleasing space that could be used for a wide variety of activities. There are a number of spaces on the

land that could be used for outdoor gatherings as well. These spaces would first be used for workshops and events led by Overland, eventually renting them out if there were interested parties. Just as The Alcyon Center and The Whole Health Center do, there is potential for offering self-led retreats in spaces around the land at Overland. With ample space to camp, trails and many private spots to contemplate in nature, this option would allow for a low effort way to create an income stream. Infrastructure would have to be put in place to make a comfortable experience for participants such as toilets, showers, kitchens and potable water .

### **Financial Insights: Prices, grants and sustainability**

Alcyon Center and Celebration Tree Farm both use volunteers as part of their model. Volunteers are hugely helpful in providing assistance to organizations through skilled and unskilled labor. The Local Farm in Scarborough does not engage many volunteers, though uses their zoning as a farm to create simple housing for those who work on the farm in the summer. This allows for lower labor costs. They also provide food from the farm for those working. The model for working with room and board provided is not a one-way relationship though, since The Local Farm highly values a sense of community among the staff. As mentioned, at the start of each season, the crew meets to write the core values they will live and work by for the season. These values include centering compassion, joy and connection with the earth. The holistic vision for 2024 also includes connection within the staff and the greater community. Overland could benefit greatly from this type of apprenticeship program. Erin Evans is a Master Beekeeper. She offers great insight, knowledge and mentorship to novice beekeepers.

The local farm in Scarborough has their financial backbone coming from farm income (personal communication, May 31st, 2024). The community gatherings are new in the past two years, something they are excited to be expanding into more.

Overland will not plan to rely on private grants or private donors for its financial sustainability, however, will be open to both options if opportunities present themselves. This is due to the evolving nature of the organization. Private grants and donations will be more relevant as the mission and vision of the organization are strengthened and there are more concrete examples to show donors about the work being done at Overland Apiaries.

### **Overland Apiaries Expansion into Overland Apiaries Nature Education Center 5 year Business Plan**

<b>Parts of the Business</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Mission and Vision</b>	<p>The mission of Overland Apiaries Nature Education Center is to be a living example of how regenerative agriculture practices, as well as holistic beekeeping, can be done at a variety of scales and geographical settings. In addition, Overland Apiaries strives to educate attendees about the ways in which stewarding the land leads to a stronger connection to place, a sense of confidence in oneself and greater peace.</p> <p>Overland Apiaries Nature Education Center envisions a world in which urban pollinators have diverse food sources; where humans are living in harmony with the flora and fauna around them; and where all people have access to learning opportunities that aid them in their liberation.</p>
<b>Offer and Value Proposition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Skill Building Workshops</li> <li>● Tours</li> <li>● Honey</li> <li>● Apprenticeships</li> <li>● Pick Your Own Flower gardens</li> <li>● Dried Herbal teas</li> <li>● Two day, skill building workshops</li> <li>● Beeswax Products</li> <li>● Other Farm products (produce and baked goods)</li> <li>● Master Beekeeper Shadowing Weekends</li> </ul>
<b>Audience and Ideal Customer</b>	<p>The ideal customer is someone who has interest in learning about earth skills, an appreciation for the natural world and is curious about how to reduce their impact on the planet. The ideal customer has some background knowledge in topics related to homesteading and has expendable income to pay for the workshops. Customers and participants are welcomed from all backgrounds. Scholarships will be available for those who express need.</p>
<b>Revenue Streams</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Product sales: Online, mobile, wholesale and in-store sales.</li> <li>● Webinars and online classes: Monetize coaching-style webinars and online classes related to holistic urban beekeeping</li> <li>● Mobile point-of-sale (POS): Mobile and remote sales at Woodfords Corner farmer's markets</li> <li>● Brick-and-mortar location: In-store sales through Maine Audubon and Maine Botanical Gardens</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E-commerce platform: An online store on an e-commerce platform.</li> </ul>
<b>Sales Channels and Marketing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informative blog content</li> <li>Website</li> <li>Social media via Facebook and Instagram</li> <li>Email and/or SMS marketing: Once every three months, seasonal newsletters from the farm with upcoming events</li> <li>Flyers and Posters</li> <li>Local business partnerships</li> <li>Name exposure through organizations such as Maine Organic Farmers Gardeners Association (MOFGA), Maine Audubon and Maine Botanical Gardens</li> <li>Partnerships with other farms in the area on workshops</li> <li>Creating spaces that are rentable to the public</li> </ul>
<b>Structure, Suppliers and Operations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business structure: Limited-liability Company (LLC is a type of business structure where owners have limited liability for the company's debts and obligations. This means that their personal assets are typically protected if the company faces financial issues or legal claims.)</li> <li>Permits: Business Permits, building permits</li> <li>Education or certifications: Bachelor's degrees and diverse, relevant experience in running similar operations</li> <li>Roles and Responsibilities: Owner and CEO Farm, Events and Education Coordinator Farm Help and Apprentices</li> <li>Supply chain: Most of the goods will come from the farm. Packaging will be bought from outside sources, as well as marketing materials.</li> </ul>

**Table 6: General Business Plan for Overland Apiaries Nature Education Center**

Offerings	2025 Season	2026 Season	2027 Season	2028 Season	2029 Season
<b>Workshops</b>	Pilot season: 3 workshops with 6 attendees each \$250/person = \$1500 Total: \$4,500	4 workshops with 6 attendees each \$250/person = \$1500 Total= \$6,000	5 workshops with 6 attendees each \$250/person = \$1500 Total= \$7,500	6 workshops with 6 attendees each \$250/person = \$1500 Total= \$9,000	7 workshops with 6 attendees each \$250/person = \$1500 Total= \$10,500
<b>Apprentices</b>	1	2	2	2	2
<b>Products</b>	Honey, Eggs, Beeswax products, herbal teas and	Honey, Eggs, Beeswax products, herbal teas and	Honey, Eggs, Beeswax products, herbal teas and	Honey, Eggs, Beeswax products, herbal teas and	Honey, Eggs, Beeswax products, herbal teas and

	tinctures, crafts, vegetables	tinctures, crafts, vegetables	tinctures, crafts, vegetables	tinctures, crafts, vegetables	tinctures, crafts, vegetables
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**Table 7: Five Year plan for Income Generating Activities**

Product or Service	Retail Price	Actual cost	Gross Profit
Honey	\$16/lb	\$5/lb	\$11/lb
Two day, skill building workshops	\$200-300/person	\$400	\$250x 6 = \$1500 Gross \$1100
Beeswax Products	\$2-22	\$2-12	75% of retail price
Other Farm Goods	\$2-15	\$2-8	60% of retail price
Master Beekeeper Shadowing Weekends (4 days)	\$600-\$800	6 hrs/day @\$25/hr = \$600	\$2400-3200

**Table 8: Income Generating Products and Services Offered**

Expense Item	Cost	Income Item	Revenue
Staff	\$13,7063	Sales of honey, vegetables, farm products	\$5,500
Chicken Feed	\$2138		
Supplies: Tools	\$701		
Seeds and Seedlings	\$672		

**Table 9: Expenses and Income from June 2023- June 2024**

Expense Item	Cost	Income Item	Revenue
Staff	\$20,000	Honey - 2,000 lbs at \$12/lb (average of wholesale cost and retail cost)	\$24,000
Chicken and Goat Feed	\$2,500	Vegetables, Flowers, Herbal Teas	\$4,000
Supplies: Tools	\$800	Workshops	\$4,500-5,500
Seeds and Seedlings	\$400	Space Rentals	\$1,000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$23, 700</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$33,500</b>

**Table 10: Ideal Expenses and Income from June 2025- June 2026**

## Conclusion

This research showed the array of ways to create an impactful, sustainable business that includes teaching people skills, bringing together community and stewarding the earth. Primarily using the humanist philosophy of adult education fits well with the mission and visions of Overland Apiaries because it focuses on transcendence, human happiness, as well as social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development. The goal of this newly founded education center will be that exactly, to encourage and inspire participants to look more deeply into themselves through learning in a space of curiosity and appreciation for the natural world around us. Walters also defines the nature of humanist adult learners as complex, autonomous beings with an inherent sense of freedom and dignity who also have unlimited potential to learn (2009). In some ways, the humanist philosophy has potential to get lost in the practical aspects of this business plan, however, it can actually inform the business plan and make it stronger because it brings in the essence of the mission vision for the business. The goal will be to let the mission and vision for Overland Apiaries be part of every event, workshop and learning experience. Maintaining a strong connection to the humanist philosophy of adult environmental education will not only create learning spaces of acceptance, personal growth, and self-awareness, but will aid in the overall strengthening formation of this new expansion of the organization. As the community learns that overland prioritizes experiential learning with an emphasis on students as leaders of their own education, more and more people will be drawn to this work. Hands on learning does not only offer a one time experience with one learning goal or outcome. Hands-on learning offers a complex set of problems to solve, conversations to have, new lines of inquiry for each learner, and a feeling of satisfaction, not only with the product created or skill gained, but with the connections made between the group of participants.

“Community, however, aspires towards stability. It strives to balance change with constancy. That is why community life places such a high value on neighborliness, love, marital fidelity, local loyalty, the integrity and continuity of family life, respect for the old, and instruction of the young. And if a vital community draws its life, so far as possible, from local sources. It prefers to solve problems, for example, by non-monetary exchanges of help, not by buying things. A community cannot survive under the rule of competition.” (Berry, p. 95, 2010)

This section of writing from Wendell Berry in his book “What Matters: Economics for a Renewed Commonwealth” ties together some of the aspects of the mission statement of Overland to the core value of community building through pointing out that strong communities are about bringing people together, not putting them in competition (2010). I also appreciate that Berry spotlights how locality plays an important role in a vital community as well as people coming together to solve problems from the resources they already have, which aligns with concepts in this paper previously discussed such as asset-based community mapping (Berry, 2010; Chupp, Hirsch and Malone, 2023). The word “community” is easy to use freely in this type of research. It offers optimistic potential for building connections among people in a local area. It also can include one of the more difficult aspects of building a business, and in this case an educational center, that serves a particular locale because it assumes that everyone is plugged into the same modes of communication, hubs of conversation and ways of getting information. This is not consistently true. What came to light during data gathering, is that it takes concerted effort to bring a wide range of people together. The greater Portland community consists of hundreds of smaller, niche communities. As Katherine Booth noted in the (Alcyon) interview, it takes a long time to establish an organization that is known by many people in the area for the work that they’re doing (K.Booth, personal communication, May 29, 2024). Although overland has existed for more than 10 years, this will be a new step into outreach to the people who live in the greater Portland

area and more accessible opportunities that cover a wider range of topics. This connects back to the “attendees and local partnerships” section of the discussion. Continuously putting effort into creating community is a way to increase attendees as well as strengthen community partnerships. According to the guiding principles of asset based community development, this can be done by focusing on relationship building, putting citizens at the center of offerings, discovering what motivated people in the area, and asking “What is working? What is needed? How can we work together to make our community a better place to be?” (Collaborative for Neighborhood Transformation, ND). Of course, the main mission is to offer impactful education offerings rather than be a community development organization. Yet there are many education organizations that end up naturally playing this role in the community because of what is being taught, the physical spaces they have and the philosophy behind their functioning. Overland is currently somewhere between an association and an institution, either way, this is another place where the theoretical, intellectual and practical can come together to embody the mission statement of how overland wants to function within the Portland area.

As with all research, there are questions that come up that could aid a deeper study if it were to be continued. All four organizations interviewed talked about having a niche or finding a specific need of the community to conduct their business within. The question I wonder is, “what advice do you have on finding a niche or need? Is this something that comes organically or through another avenue?” Similarly, conducting an anonymous survey of potential attendees in Maine could offer important insight into what people are interested in doing more of around learning skills and understanding the local land. Another aspect that could be expanded upon is being more specific about what pedagogies exist, so those being interviewed could respond with which felt the most relevant to their pedagogical approach. The question about this topic was open ended, leaving three of the four organizations not sure where to start with their response.



This research project outlines a preliminary plan for how to create an earth skills school in Maine. It was remarkable to watch how the vision changed and shifted as I learned more about the theory behind these types of organizations as well as the operations, pedagogy and people behind four real life farms and retreat centers who are doing similar work. All four organizations renewed my hope for a future where people feel they belong, are worthy of love and where caring for the future of the planet is not in vain. Curiosity is a main take away from this research. The founders and leaders talked about the humility, along with joy, curiosity and determination that it takes to start a school such as the one proposed in this paper. It is not a short term endeavor, it evolves over time. So too will be the case for Maine School of Wonder and Overland Apiaries.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### Interview Guide for Capstone

Maine School of Wonder:

Developing a School for Earth Skills and Sustainability in Maine

*Date of the Interview:*

*Time of the Interview:*

#### Research question:

What will it take to start a skills school in Maine, with a focus on earth skills and spirituality?

#### List of Questions:

1. For the purposes of this research, I would like to ask some basic questions about your background.
  - A. What's your name?
  - B. How old are you?
  - C. Where do you currently reside?
2. Prior to starting this school/institutions what paid work were you engaged in?
3. What are the influences, professional or personal, that inspired you to begin the organization that is your current work?
4. How did you arrive at the current mission and vision of this program?
5. What are the pedagogical considerations underpinning the program? Why are these considerations important to you?
6. Tell me more about the people/communities your organization caters to. Who did you aim to reach when you first started this organization and why? Who are you reaching/catering to right now? (Probes: their geographical locations, Social class, Ethnicities, Languages they speak, Age groups do they belong to, Genders)

7. Are there any marginalized groups that you give provisions or scholarships to? Do you make a specific effort to include folks of marginalized groups as both participants and teachers?
8. How do you engage with and include the local community in the offerings of your school or organization?
9. What are your most popular offerings? Who are the people/communities who engage with those offerings the most?
10. Is environmental education part of your teachings? If so, how is it built into your programming?
11. What financial resources and support did you have to start the organization? What kinds of support did you get? (Examples: private investors, grants, loans, friends, cash/in kind?)
12. How do you sustain the finances of the organization? For example, what is your fee structure?
13. What advice do you have on maintaining robust income or funding streams to ensure longevity?

**Appendix B:** Map of the 5 acres of land in Portland, Maine that Overland Apiaries currently stewards





## Appendix C: Article of Incorporation of the Alcyon Center

### The Alcyon Center

#### Mission Statement

The Alcyon Center brings to life our desire for bold and practical ways to meet the spiritual hunger of our times. We offer both a place of hospitality for body, mind, and soul and a transformative path of guidance, teaching, practice and training in the Christian contemplative tradition.

#### Our Purpose and Goals as stated in our Articles of Incorporation

- to offer spiritual hospitality, rest, and renewal of body, soul and spirit, especially for those engaged in service to the world
- to share a small spiritual community life and daily rhythm of work and rest, prayer alone and together, solitude and shared meals, conversation and silence
- to create new forms of worship, festivals and celebrations, grounded in the Christian tradition, that are speak to our times
- to offer study, conversation, resources and training in spiritual life and practices of the Christian contemplative tradition
- to offer guided retreats and workshops for spiritual growth and transformation
- to participate in a contemporary conversation about the renewal of culture through practical, spiritually grounded paths of individual and planetary transformation

#### Roots

The Alcyon Center is co-founded by Kathryn Booth and Joan Jordan Grant, ordained pastors in the United Church of Christ.

The Center has its roots in three traditions:

- 1) the monastic Christian tradition of service and hospitality based in study and prayer, alone and together
- 2) the inner (esoteric) Christian tradition that offers wisdom and training in the path of transformation that lies at the heart of the Christian journey
- 3) ordained Protestant ministry as a call to re-form the church as a spiritual community committed to contemplative prayer and action: that is, to bringing about a "new heaven and a new earth"

We are grounded in the study and practice of the contemplative and inner Christian tradition. We seek to bring the wisdom of this path as a modern way of transformation. We bring a wide range of experience in ministry and spiritual direction,