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Building Creative Capacity in Conservationists: One Facilitator’s Exploration of Training and Art in Belize

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BUILDING CREATIVE CAPACITY IN CONSERVATIONISTS:
ONE FACILITATOR’S EXPLORATION OF TRAINING AND ART
IN BELIZE

Adriana Azalia Guzmán
PIM 72

A Course-Linked Capstone Paper in
Training Design in Experiential Learning and Training for Social Action

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Intercultural Service, Leadership and Management at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

August 15, 2016
Advisor: Ryland White
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Student Name: Adriana Azalia Guzmán
Date: August 15, 2016
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ABSTRACT

This Capstone is an exploration of my journey as a training practitioner, starting from my time at SIT and progressing through my role as a Creative Facilitator for ArtCorps Creative Conservation Project. It details the connections between my practical experience in creative conservation training with theoretical frameworks and principals of adult and experiential learning I engaged in during the Training Design in Experiential Learning and Training for Social Action courses. During this journey I’ve learned that the challenges we face today are in need of highly creative individuals who apply alternative solutions towards problem solving. These individuals can take the necessary action to positively transform our world; “in a world of strained resources, creativity is an unlimited, game-changing resource that lies dormant within each person, organization and community” (ArtCorps, 2014). As Creative Facilitator, (2014-2016) my focus was to build the creative capacity of environmental conservation leaders and educators. Through training them in the use of creative approaches and art tactics, we worked to equip Belize’s leading conservation organizations towards effectively responding to the social and environmental challenges they mitigate. The valuable lessons learned during my practicum are presented in an analysis highlighting the role played by intercultural communication and my art education background. The personal reflection and recommendations aim to contribute to the training field from my merging perspective of a social action based artist, educator and developing trainer.
PART I
PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

Introduction

The summer of 2006 changed the course of my life. After years working in New York City public schools with the arts, I began to crave the world outside of the city. My interest was not to explore the United States, but rather to explore other countries. Highly influenced by my multi-cultural city, the time came to explore the roots of my family and that of my immigrant friends in their native countries.

With no plan, no contacts, and no tangible reason other than to satisfy my craving—to understand the world through culture—I simply went. My destination was Brazil, a dream trip of mine ever since finishing a school project in the fourth grade. My time in the school system was spent developing art curricula and coordinating arts programing for summer camp, but this summer I would be eating Brazilian food in Brazil, not the Manhattan neighborhood of “Little Brazil”. From Brazil I went to Colombia and from Colombia back to work in NYC. This short time in South America changed my worldview, seeing the world as it is rather than how it was culturally represented in my city.

I returned that fall full of ideas and ambition, but they were not met with matching enthusiasm or interest by the staff and students. My stagnant work environment did not provide the adequate space I needed at the time for creative growth, so it didn’t take long for my craving to return. I was determined to work with art as a tool for cultural expression, outside of the public school system and outside of the country. This led me to discover ArtCorps, an organization whose mission resonated highly with me: “ArtCorps believes that creativity has a leading role to play in building a vibrant, just and sustainable world. We develop the creative capacity of
social changemakers to innovatively address the challenges of our time” (Shell, 2014).

By January 2007 I was living in Guatemala working with art as a tool for social change through ArtCorps.

In this paper, I define ‘social change’ generally as a shift in society and ‘art as a tool for social change’ to be that which we can use to shift society and its perception of the world. In the words of Bertolt Brecht, “art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it” (Office of the Arts, 2016). The reality I experienced abroad was markedly different than my own, yet the joy and pain arising from injustice in both pushed me to start hammering. The idea of making a career out of doing what I already loved was exhilarating. During this transition my self-esteem increased and I felt very empowered by working with communities that were looking to shift their perception. It was then I understood how powerful art was.

Guatemala set the tone for whom I would become. I continued to work abroad with different organizations in various countries, embedded in different cultures and languages, and often with different objectives and outcomes, but always with art. I knew what it felt like to be an agent of change, one embodying social justice, individual and community empowerment, peace, and sustainable development, and all the while emphasizing cultural exchange and creativity. Through this I learned that:

The arts are a powerful medium of expression for communicating with the larger society. It can help mobilize participation by raising consciousness about particular issues, provoking powerful emotions that tap into the spirituality and reinforce the value structure of society, providing a feeling that social and political change are possible, and keeping people active and committed to a movement once they have already joined. (Shell, 2014, p.9)

A fundamental part of my paradigm shift when first working outside of the United States is also due to having witnessed various forms of injustice to people and the planet as I traveled. Art was a chance to document and comment on that. As I
worked with people of all ages, I found that I was always learning from them although I was there to “teach”. Such encounters increased my sense of empathy and compassion, as well as my interest in culture and its role in creative learning, all of which are discussed in detail below.

After many years of work as an arts educator with an interest in social justice, I began to develop curiosity about the theoretical foundation for the practical work I had done. Having spent a number of years witnessing the power of art through its use towards achieving social change within marginalized communities, I questioned how this came to be. My desire to learn was driven by the ambition to do more as an artist, an educator and a global citizen.

SIT Journey

After earning a Bachelors in Fine Arts, I had no intention of returning to school, but learning in an academic setting amongst like-minded individuals began to sound appealing. SIT’s self-designed Intercultural Service, Leadership and Management (SLM) program steered me towards pursuing a Masters Degree. Within this program, I would be able to study the themes that were woven into my work abroad, such as: International Education, Conflict Transformation, Sustainable Development and Non-Profit Management. I believe they affect today’s world tremendously and are interlaced, just as our various cultures are and struggle to be. An opportunity to study them as a unit would allow me to develop a cohesive perspective by building upon my practical foundation.

With its international student body, mission towards responsible global citizenship, and inspiring professors, SIT was pivotal in re-defining my career goals and most importantly in rediscovering myself. The SLM program introduced me to literature and history, spurring animated discussions about international development,
gender and human rights, conflict and identity, social entrepreneurship, post-war development, peace building, non-profit management and training. I discovered training to be one of the missing links for me, the means to do more with art. I focused on training knowing it would be my new tool, a super tool that would enable the sharing of everything with which I was introduced academically at SIT. Excited, I now envisioned myself incorporating the use of art and creativity towards any area of focus, specifically the ones I had just embraced.

Previously as an art student, I felt that in regards to my development, the creative process I embarked on was more important than the material product I created. As a professional, I carry that message with me in this form: my journey is more important than my destination. Although this journey thus far has taught me much, I practiced without concrete theory up until I gained some new perspectives in SIT’s fertile environment. The roots I planted long ago can now sustain and nurture my growth. Building this stronger foundation will allow me to metabolize my experiences, and bloom.

In the Training Design for Experiential Learning (TDEL) and Training for Social Action (TSA) courses, I found the connection between the arts, education and creative empowerment through the art of facilitation. I came to SIT with teaching experience, and I learned that a facilitator is not a teacher. Rothwell (2008) explains how teachers are considered to be subject matter experts, telling learners what they should know about the subject, whereas facilitators ask learners what they think. Facilitators believe that knowledge already exists within the group and it is their role to make it easy for the group to work together in order to reach a level of agreement about the challenge with which they are faced. Interestingly, I found my teaching style to be in line with Rothwells’ (2008) description of a facilitator, which confirmed that my interest in
becoming one was inevitable.

I became roused to facilitate. At some point during my second semester at SIT, I wrote that I wanted to be a creativity coach, aspiring to work one day with various populations in bringing their creative best out of them. Although art was my original communication medium, through practice I became aware that creativity, defined as “the act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality” (“What is”, 2014), was the driving force behind what and how to communicate, bridging art and communication. The path I chose since childhood kept me inspired on this meandering road of creativity. Opportunely I was able to find a practicum that matched my commitment towards art, social change and creativity, and so seven years after my initiating experience in Guatemala, the stars aligned back over Central America and with ArtCorps, this time working as a creative facilitator in Belize.

Belize

In order to dive deeper into my exploration on culture, creativity and learning, a general understanding of Belize’s history and the country’s current state of cultural affairs is important. During my time there I developed friendships with Belizeans native and nationalized, all of whom gave me an intergenerational perspective of their home country. Belize, known as British Honduras until 1973, is only 35 years old, a relatively new country that gained independence from its British colonizers in 1981. As a result, many of my friends lived through the country’s transition from British Crown Colony to independent nation.

An important vantage point with which to consider Belize is by its location, nestled between Mexico, Guatemala and the Caribbean Sea. Dually influenced by its neighboring mainland and island countries, “Belize has historically been regarded as a West Indian nation in a Hispanic region. Therefore, subject to both the political,
economic, social and ideological issues of both cultures, West Indian and Latin” (Lewis, 2000, p. 3). Language also distinguishes Belize from its neighbors, being the only Kriol speaking country in Central America. Although English is the official language and formal education is conducted in British English, Belizeans speak Kriol. The Kriol language developed during the late seventeenth century when British settlers began preparing the area for international commerce and brought slaves from Africa. As Africans and Europeans intermarried, the Belize Creole was born and Kriol, the language of the Creole people, became the day-to-day language used amongst Belizeans (Decker, 2005). All of the major ethnic groups in Belize (Garifuna, Maya, Creole, Mestizo, Mennonite, East Indian and Chinese) have their own language or dialect as well, making Belize an ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse country. I entered such a milieu as a bilingual Hispanic American, remaining alert from my cross-cultural training to potential disadvantages from not speaking their native language. This was important to me since American English and ArtCorps’ creative lingo had the potential to cause a lot of misunderstanding. This awareness helped me as a facilitator and improved my intercultural communication competency.

Based on my resources in the history of Belize, the history of Belize’s educational system, and my newfound Belizean community, I learned that the subject of multicultural cohesion is still a taboo and that the various ethnic groups of Belize were long encouraged to remain autonomous of each other due to pre-independence political agendas. A unique trait of Southern Belize, where I worked, is that it houses all of the Belizean ethnic groups; while they live the most cohesively of all, I’ve come to understand that it has taken a great deal of time to reach this point and it will take much more effort to reach a point of true cultural cohesion. Accepting this is pertinent to understanding the role that culture plays in creative learning since Belizean culture is
comprised of these various ethnic groups, each bringing their own creative flavor to the pot, and uniquely supporting one of its “National Goals for Education”: an appreciation of and participation in artistic ventures, particularly within the Belizean culture (UNESCO, 2006). I believe therefore that the more creative learning is encouraged, the more possibilities there will be to develop multicultural connections and education.

Despite Belize’s independence in 1981, over three hundred years of British presence has shaped many aspects of Belize, including its educational system. This system is still based on the British colonial model, a model that did not aim to educate the colonized, and especially not ethnic minorities within the colony, whose access to true educational opportunity was limited throughout British rule (Lewis, 2000). Alongside the colonial model, another major player in shaping the educational system is religion, since schools in Belize—although primarily funded by the government—are run by churches. These two major influences have created an educational system that today seems antiquated to me and in need of a transformation. Something to consider as evidence towards this is how “as of 2010, corporal punishment was prohibited in the Education Act” (Education in Belize, n.d., para. 5). This is extremely recent in comparison to the progress most of Europe (including England) has made on children’s rights in banning corporal punishment.

Lewis (2000) references various sources including historical documents dating back to the early 1900’s on colonialism and the educational system in Belize. Her research clearly illustrates education in Belize before and after independence, yet what stood out the most from her findings and perspective as a Belizean woman was this statement: “The primary teaching method involved rote learning instead of critical thinking” (p.9). As an outsider who was never a student in the Belizean school system,
Lewis’ conclusion was a critical discovery in my research since my own experiences there as a facilitator led me to see the effects of a similar realization.

Practicum Description

My role with ArtCorps was directly linked to their Creative Conservation Project. As creative facilitator, I supported Belizean and Guatemalan environmental conservation organizations in fortifying their creative capacity. The Creative Conservation Project aims to help train organizations that manage protected areas to creatively communicate, collaborate and work effectively with community stakeholders. The project was born out of longstanding relationships between ArtCorps’ founding organization and its grantees in the field of environmental conservation. Their relationship demonstrated a need for financial support, yet as these organizations aimed to be more self-sufficient, and identified the need for building their staff’s capacity. This created an opportunity for ArtCorps to provide training that would enable these conservationists and educators to take creative action.

The method used to achieve this is by equipping these leading environmental groups with tools to transform themselves into creative hubs that generate people-centered, innovative strategies for sustainably protecting ecosystems (ArtCorps, 2014). To further prepare for the job, I familiarized myself with the partner organizations I would be supporting. I also took time to understand the underlying causes of some of the major global environmental issues we are currently facing and our partners’ relationship to them.

In Coming Back to Life, Joanna Macy (1998) examines how the Earth’s dire ecological state is a reflection of human behavior and our disconnection to the planet. Through her examination, she illustrates how humans have the capacity to transform ecosystems positively and negatively. ArtCorps and I trust that creative solutions
provide us with the possibility to change the environmental degradation humans caused. It is in the best interest of conservation leaders to explore creative strategies that enable them to shift negative behaviors and create positive change. ArtCorps’ work is not limited to conservation; rather, it has a Creative Leadership-based approach that can be applied here and to any field.

Upon arrival, I was the only ArtCorps staff based in Belize. There was a certain amount of self-imposed pressure to represent the organization accordingly, as well as the necessity to put into effect all of the skills I had learned in my TDEL and TSA courses. With nobody physically by my side to offer immediate guidance, my role as creative facilitator became the definition of learning by doing.

Punta Gorda Town, the center of Toledo, was my base for two years. It is the least developed and most southern district in the country, often referred to as the “Forgotten District” (see Appendix B). Interestingly the South houses many of the environmental conservation organizations that manage marine and terrestrial protected areas throughout the country. These organizations are instrumental in advocating for policy development and change, aiming to conserve the beauty and bounty of Belize. Their staff and volunteers would become my trainees over the next two years; they represented various departments such as research, administration, management, enforcement, education and outreach.

My day-to-day focus on the job was multifold. One main area was to implement ArtCorps’ Creative Leadership for Social Change Course (CLSCC), in turn building in a group setting creative capacity in the trainees to take a more active role in sustainable conservation management. The next was to work directly with the trainees on identifying areas of weakness within their work that could benefit from a new fortifying perspective or approach. This is where I was able to design and implement work plans
using creative tools such as team and trust building exercises, the use of art tactics, participatory initiatives, and creative leadership activities; this area of my work I’ll refer to as technical assistance. In addition, I was responsible for collecting and sharing behavior change and project outcomes with the U.S.-based team. I also documented and shared stories of projects through photos, videos and narrative writing. Such documentation proved to be a valuable tool in assessing the overall impact of the project over the two years. This CLC is a continuation of the documentation process, yet it focuses much more on my own experience and development as a trainer.

As I took the time to reflect on my practicum, the first guiding area I chose to revisit was the learning objectives I had posed for myself. I entered this Reflective Practice Phase (RPP) with four distinct intentions: 1) gain a better understanding of the role culture plays in creative learning; 2) facilitate an exchange about creativity and implementing my findings in a cultural and context appropriate manner; 3) systematize group facilitation and communication skills specific to the local context; and 4) deepen my awareness of trainee needs and expectations while facilitating and providing technical assistance.

Faced with so many areas of interest to explore, I narrowed my focus to the following in order to meet my learning objectives: intercultural communication and the relationship between process and product when using creative approaches. My previous experiences abroad are interlaced with that in this RPP as they all share the core characteristic of intercultural communication. Also, the artist in me values the process people partake in during creative expression, with less focus on the end product of this process. Yet, working for a non-profit that appreciates both, but is also driven to prove the impact of their work through concrete products or “outcomes”, demonstrated our difference in priorities, positioning me to make decisions that either
compromised their or my ideals. I have chosen to focus on these particular areas over others because they have been repetitive themes both during the Creative Conservation project and in my life. I believe exploring these components of my RPP and making connections in how they affected the work will bring forth the highlights, challenges, and lessons learned from this experience.

In this time I also worked on my competence as a TSA trainer in the area of “knowledge of literature around training in social action”, my favorite being the works of Paulo Freire and Joanna Macy. Both of these educators, trainers, activists and authors embody the “how to” of creating the world I desire to live in. When working with conservationists, I was constantly reminded of the state of our planet and Freire and Macy’s work were woven into ArtCorps methodology, allowing me to combine my world experience with my development as a trainer, and now with creative conservation work.

**Exploration Focus**

This CLC is a reflection of my collective experience as creative facilitator, co-facilitator and curriculum designer for ArtCorps, with a focus on my personal and professional learning and growth. I will be exploring my journey of *Building Creative Capacity in Conservationists* using a trainer’s lens. This experience exemplifies the fusion of art and training, which is a true reflection of my education and professional experience thus far and also grants me the opportunity to gather and reflect on the learning and insight I have gained as a trainer. Guiding me through this is the idea that we experience something and learn from it only if we reflect upon it afterward (Wurdinger, 2005). This self-reflective, descriptive research will also include trainee testimonials, referenced literature describing the effects of creative approaches and the incorporation of theoretical frameworks in the field of training.
As a new facilitator with an arts education background, it was curious how training non-profit professionals to tap into their creativity seemed to be just as new of an experience for me as it was for them. I worked with at least six organizations and over eighty individuals during this project. Given that the work was implemented over the course of two years, this scope of time allowed me to witness shifts in behavior in the trainees with whom I’ve interacted repeatedly. Our collective experience became a case study of sorts; therefore I am situating this CLC as a contribution towards understanding creative training and its impacts, alongside its reflective nature. I will share some of the processes as well as the products of this project, and their influence on my journey as a practitioner.

This paper contributes to my own professional development, by posing questions that deepen my awareness and understanding of my role as a training practitioner. It also serves as a means to illustrate why I am an advocate for creative learning in all fields, not just within the arts. I aspired to achieve my learning objectives through observation, adaptation, practicing empathy, actively listening, collaboration, building trust, and effective communication. These are the qualities I am here to promote as a trainer, and yet, I am also here as a learner, an ever-evolving being in an ever-changing society.

PART II
ANALYSIS BACKGROUND

Education

From my Belizean friends and colleagues, I learned that the small percentage of students in the country who are financially capable of receiving a higher education choose to study abroad. Pursuing a higher education in Belize is a new concept: Belize
did not have a four-year university education system until the 1990’s (Education in Belize, n.d., para. 12). When my landlady spoke disapprovingly of her sons’ choice to study Natural Resource Management at the local university, referring to it as not being a real university, I did not comment on her feelings. In my mind, I applauded him for pursuing a worthy cause relevant to his country, but I also knew how few employment opportunities he would have post-graduation. In working with my partners—the leading environmental organizations in the country—I witnessed the limited turnover of staff and saw how new hires such as qualified graduates in Natural Resource Management are dependent on new funding, something all too rare. What I learned working with Belizeans who attended university abroad is that, in the eyes of employers, they return to Belize more qualified than candidates who attend a Belizean university. They face their own challenges such as being overqualified for positions, reverse culture shock, discrimination and the difficult adjustment to a shift in their worldview. For example, the term “Yankee” is used by Belizeans to describe someone who has gone to the United States and returned apparently more educated and influenced by their time abroad, and therefore now acting and sounding like a US-American. Sadly there are instances when a negative attitude develops towards these Belizeans based on other people’s perception that the ones who have come back seem to think they are better than those who haven’t left the country. These assumptions have led such Belizeans to feel unwelcome and foreign in their own culture and country, a situation that may influence them to return abroad.

With critical thinking often lacking in the national education system, many but not all are trapped within what Freire (1970) calls the banking concept of education. Freire describes this as education becoming an act of depositing—when teachers look at students as containers to be filled—or as previously mentioned by Lewis, “rote
learning”. Some of the trainees I worked with are examples of those who have refused to remain collectors of what was being fed to them, and instead chose to inquire and analyze. Also there are the Belizeans who have chosen to discover a more like-minded community outside of their country—something helpful, but which at the same time can perpetuate the problem of brain drain. This phenomenon causes countries such as Belize to lose their skills and expertise. As discussed in *The Caribbean Papers – No.2,*

Within the small, developing economies of the Caribbean, increasing numbers of skilled workers moved abroad and brain drain was identified as a serious impediment to economic development at home. More recently, there has been recognition - or resignation - that highly skilled Caribbean nationals will continue to seek opportunities abroad and that this dynamic must somehow be harnessed to also improve conditions at home (p.2).

I interviewed a dear Belizean friend to gain a better understanding of her educational path. She briefly described her journey as the following:

I graduated Valedictorian of my elementary, high school, sixth form and undergraduate college graduating classes. My path up to my undergraduate education is not so atypical as I attended the regional university- the University of the West Indies (UWI), in Trinidad & Tobago. This is where many Belizean go to pursue a Bachelor’s degree. I was lucky to get a scholarship to attend UWI, which truly helped. At the time I was enrolled at the University of Belize and became increasingly frustrated by the lack of structure, offerings and support. I decided to pursue graduate studies abroad for a more comprehensive education that would expose me personally and professionally to a larger world of opportunities. My acceptance into Yale for graduate studies was definitely a rare case for a Belizean.

I concluded the interview with the following question: Did your Belizean education inspire creative thinking / learning? If so, how? She answered: “Absolutely. It grounded me in real-world perspectives of the challenges in balancing economic development with conservation.” This friend recently graduated from Yale University with a Masters in Environmental Management and has chosen to remain in the United States and seek employment outside of Belize.
Just as my friend’s experience in higher education has defined a path for her professional future, attending SIT was transformational and path defining for me. The TDEL and TSA courses were the highlight of my time there, and combined they reinforced my training as an educator and artist, sparking again an activist flame that had been slowly burning out. I am grateful for the opportunity to pursue a higher education; it has enabled me to continue working abroad within the realm of my passion. Similarly to the Belizeans that leave their homes with the intentions of returning but who find it difficult to do so for various reasons, I too have found comfort in living away from my birthplace within other cultures; this has also been part of my practical learning.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Since returning to school was in the interest of supporting my practical experience with theory, I would like to briefly explore three different theoretical frameworks that molded my RPP experience: 1) *Experiential Learning Process*: what I learned in the classroom; 2) *Integral Theory*: what I learned from ArtCorps; and 3) *Socially Engaged Art (SEA)*: what I am interested in learning more of as well as pursuing as a trainer and artist. All three frameworks guided me during my time as a creative facilitator in Belize. They intertwined seamlessly, making innate the incorporation of my theoretical knowledge into my facilitation practice.

*The Experiential Learning Process*

David A. Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Model is the most vital introduction to this, taking the learner through the stages of Concrete Experience, Reflective Observations, Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation, which together are the full Experiential Learning cycle. I recall making the connection between the model and my strong feelings about the relationship between process and
product. Kolb proposes that learners go through the steps of a complete learning experience, which values each component of the process equally. I was drawn to Kolb’s visual representation of something theoretical; illustrating its cyclical nature helped me fully understand the process since I am a visual learner. The definition of experiential learning varies from academic institutions to practitioners of the process; however, scholars suggest that experiential learning is a reactive process in which learning occurs by reflecting on previous experiences. In short, we experience something and learn from it only if we reflect upon it afterward (Wurdinger, 2005).

**Integral Theory**

What is unique to ArtCorps are their full-day and multiple-day workshops which take individual activities, mostly open source, and design them using Integral Theory as a guide. I learned about Ken Wilber’s Integral Theory (2008) as I familiarized myself with ArtCorps methodology and curriculum. Our Training and Education Director created the *ArtCorps Integral Model for Behavior Change*, which links three stages of behavior change to Wilber’s Integral Model: 1) Educate and Motivate 2) Prepare and Act 3) Sustain and Advocate (Shell, 2014).

According to Wilber, ‘I’, ‘We’, and ‘It’ dimensions are part of every experience in the world. “You can look at any event from the point of view of the ‘I’ (how I personally see and feel about the event); from the point of view of the ‘we’ (how not just I but others see the event); and as an ‘it’ (the objective facts of the event)” (Wilber, 2005, p.27). In ArtCorps’ Model, these three areas of human development are described as ‘I’ - Individual Empowerment, ‘We’- Community Development and ‘It’- Systemic Change (ArtCorps, 2014). The flow of moving from ‘I’ to ‘We’ to ‘It’ was already demonstrated in ArtCorps existing trainings. Part of my work and learning opportunity was to infuse
the model into what I designed in order to best meet the needs of my trainees and simultaneously remain consistent with ArtCorps model.

**Socially Engaged Art (SEA)**

I came across Pablo Helguera’s name when I began looking for literature to review for my RPP and read his book *Education for Socially-Engaged Art: A Materials and Technique Handbook* (2011). Helguera is a public performance artist and currently the Director of Adult and Academic Programs at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Although I understood that the connections between activism and the arts go way back, as highlighted in the TSA course and in ArtCorps work, reading Helguera’s book introduced me to a structured lens with which to look at this Social Practice work. His handbook guides us through what SEA is and how it has and can be used. According to him, “what characterizes Socially Engaged Art is its dependence on social intercourse as a factor of its existence”(Helguera, p.2). After reading it, I viewed it as a user’s manual for what I would like to do more of.

One of my favorite examples of this is one of Helguera’s own works called *Librería Donceles* (How the Art, 2014). He created a mobile Spanish-language bookstore that served as a hang out spot for Spanish speakers. It has moved to various locations, in all of which there are no dedicated Spanish-language used bookstores. The act of people coming together inspired by a location that spoke to them in their own language became art. The lessons learned and outcome of their interactions is the social action. SEA depends on social interaction; the interaction itself is the art.

Although SEA is not directly connected to the field of training, my view of looking at facilitation as an art form in its own right is reinforced by SEA’s perspective that the “interaction itself is the art” and facilitation itself, is interaction.
PART III
TRAINING PRACTITIONER ANALYSIS

I have chosen to approach the analysis of my creative facilitator experience by using the feedback-giving format I learned in TDEL: 1) co-creating effective learning environments, 2) training design and 3) co-facilitation. Both of my main areas of work will be included in the analysis, the co-facilitation of the Creative Leadership for Social Change Course (CLSCC) developed by ArtCorps, and the technical assistance I provided for the partner organizations.

The CLSCC consisted of four three-day trainings with a range of 20-25 participants representing the six partner organizations involved in the project. These trainings brought together the trainees with whom we would work individually at each organization, two times per year. It also brought ArtCorps’ Education and Training Director to Belize, who co-facilitated a course she designed. I will refer to her as our “Coach” throughout the paper. Eight months after my arrival another creative facilitator joined the Creative Conservation Project, making co-facilitation for this course between two or three facilitators at a time.

Providing technical assistance (here the use of creative tools to build institutional capacity in the area of creative conservation) fostered my role as trainer. During the CLSCC I was mostly a co-facilitator, yet during the time between the four trainings I designed, co-designed, facilitated, co-facilitated, monitored/evaluated, and documented the project. Every day presented itself differently along with providing opportunities to grow in the areas of design and facilitation.
In this part of the paper I will connect my experience to training competencies and the participants’ and my learning related to experiential education, TDEL’s foundation, and to social action via training, TSA’s core.

**Co-creating effective learning environments**

Many factors went into the creation of an effective learning environment for our participants. Although some of the components came directly from ArtCorps, other aspects of the co-creation became an integral part of the training experience for me.

The needs assessment for the CLSCC was conducted about a year before my arrival and program commencement. Since the CLSCC was pre-designed for ArtCorps work within various contexts, and so was not specific to working with conservationists in Belize, it became imperative to make each training context and culture specific. This created an opportunity for me to infuse my newly developed local knowledge into the trainings. I was able to contribute context specific components, such as popular and traditional music and dance, political references, geographical locations, folkloric characters, and food references. This knowledge proved to be favorable for me as a facilitator, opening the door to develop deeper connections with my trainees by establishing myself in their community and culture. Also in line with my learning objectives, I gained a better understanding of the role culture plays in creative learning.

Keeping the creation of an ideal creative environment in mind, the first day of each training was designed using this particular flow: Registration, Creative Name Tags, Welcome, Objectives, Agenda, Zones and Agreements, all of which take the trainees from introductions to an overview of what we would be doing together. “Zones” refers to The Comfort Zone Model, which “is based on the belief that when placed in a stressful or challenging situation people will respond, rise to the occasion and overcome their hesitancy or fear and grow as individuals.” (Brown, 2008, p.3) We
used this model to describe three different spaces participants may find themselves in during training: 1) the comfort zone - where we can be at rest and be ourselves, a safe place were we do not tend to learn 2) the stretch zone - where we try to look at things in a new way, we may be uncomfortable, but are in a position for optimum learning 3) the panic zone - when we move into unfamiliar territory that sparks fear, which leads us to freeze, therefore learning cannot take place. The discussion concludes by emphasizing that we want to find ourselves in the stretch zone during training, challenging ourselves not to be driven by the safety of the comfort zone but to be self-motivated in growing and learning.

I believe such discussions emphasized the importance of participant safety by putting it in their own hands. By bringing awareness to the zones in which they may find themselves, we hoped to encourage a shift towards the stretch zone although we did share some strategies to use if the panic zone was reached, such as taking deep breaths, asking for help, taking a short break, and talking with the facilitators.

Safety, a major component of an effective environment, was also emphasized through creating group agreements. The stretch zone could be enjoyed if the group reached a consensus as to how they would like to experience their time together. We began by asking the trainees what they agreed would create a pleasant, vibrant and safe training environment.

Location was something else to consider in creating the ideal environment. Our trainees were spread throughout Belize with some even from Guatemala, making a reasonable central location important. We were fortunate to have acquired a beautiful space that catered to the training needs by accommodating large circular sitting formations, break out group space, tables to work on, scenic outdoor areas, wall space to utilize, and even delicious catering on location. As part of our planning we would set
up the space each day prior to the participants’ arrival, incorporating their entrance into
part of an introductory activity, and so creating a fun and welcoming environment from
the start. I held a strong logistical role during the trainings as well by living in Punta
Gorda (our training location) and having spent the most time with our trainees, our
trusting rapport naturally put me in the position of liaison between their organizations
and ArtCorps.

As a facilitator, something I found to be very important for me whilst facilitating
was to have fun and, based on our trainees’ reactions, I believed it was important for
them as well. In my research I came across the term “Playspace” and correlated it to
having fun although it specifically refers to a space where people are free to take on
new roles, improvise and experiment with new perspectives, step outside their comfort
zone, to see and be seen differently, to make new discoveries, think creatively, respond
effectively to the unexpected and engage all participants’ talents in collaboration (Myer,
2010). Learning in Playspace allows individual capacities to emerge because
participants are developing an acceptance and appreciation of themselves, their
colleagues and their work in action (Myer, 2010). Our learning environment was a
Playspace: a new and innovative environment for our trainees, valuing their process not
just their product, supporting this through consistent encouragement throughout our
time together and not just while presenting outcomes. The trainees and myself valued
this space as the home of new ideas, shared perspectives and action planning (all
processes) that enhanced their creative capacity as social changemakers.

Despite creating what we believed to be a fun yet safe space, there was resistance
covertly expressed by many of the participants in the beginning of the trainings, mostly
on the first day. Participants also contributed to creating their learning environment just
as much as we did. What they brought into the space and what they left at the door
highly influenced their level of participation and openness to listening and learning. It was challenging for some to put aside who they are in their role at work, and be themselves sans that role. We encouraged this in order for them to be as open to new ideas and as comfortable with their fellow trainees as possible, putting hierarchies and working relationships aside. In time a cultural understanding was brought to my attention that explained the hesitation some participants demonstrated. It was told to me as follows: if you do not behave as your role at work or how you are known to be, and choose to act differently (meaning to be silly, which was requested during some activities), then people will not take you seriously and may even lose respect for you. I did not address this with the group as a whole, but with individual trainees directly if the hesitation surfaced. In order to create a new kind of space for learning I suggested “taking a risk” by being silly, artsy, spontaneous, outspoken, fun, and all of the other characteristics they may be suppressing.

In time, participants’ demonstrated growth in the KLAAS competencies (knowledge, language, awareness, attitude and skills) by gradually becoming more comfortable in the training environment and with each other. I witnessed them entering their stretch zone gracefully by slowly shedding particular cultural perspectives. They stretched in the areas of skills and awareness by increasing their level of participation and becoming more open to being silly, an identified risk. One of the most serious trainees, who held a managerial position, demonstrated this stretch perfectly: on day one he barely smiled, but by day three he volunteered to bring in a turtle mascot costume and wear it for his role in an activity. Based on what I have learned, these skills—amongst others such as art—were not highly emphasized in most of the traditional methods familiar to them in their classrooms growing up or currently in their workplace. Developing these skills supports the idea of taking the control away
from the facilitator and putting the expertise in the groups’ hands, which also is the opposite of the local teaching style. This is a perspective I have fully come to embrace. For me letting go of the expert role has increased my ability to be myself and transparent, resulting in more meaningful communication with my trainees and colleagues. During the post-training testimonials of many participants, it was brought to our attention that learning through active engagement rather than passive listening of presentations and lectures was a new method for them.

A noteworthy outcome of the course was its ability to inspire action through collaborative learning. Based on my observations during the four workshops, a consistent highlight for the trainees was the chance to come together with their colleagues from other organizations. These workshops became a physical reminder that they are fighting for the same cause and are not alone in working towards it. After attending a training focused on collaboration, a trainee shared: “No one person has the answer. The answer is in everyone working together.” He elaborated and added that “this training is very engaging and inspiring. The principles and creative tools provided are very valuable and will not only make our work in the communities easier but with other organizations as well.” The trainees enjoyed collaborating during the course; this was made very clear through their animated level of engagement, strengthened sense of teamwork, and positive testimonials. What we discovered to be most challenging for them was to collaborate outside of our training time. A theory as to why was shared with me by my Belizean trainees: many believe the culture suffers from “crab in a bucket” syndrome, meaning a crab will not help another crab get out of the bucket, it will prefer to keep you in with the rest of them and will even pull you down if you start to crawl out. Collaboration would exemplify helping a collective of individuals rather than just yourself. Yet the environment we all co-created fostered collaboration. I
wonder what would it take for them to carry into their everyday lives the essence of the environment in which they thrived?

As I look back at my contributions towards creating an effective learning environment during the first training and compare them to where I am now, I can see how much my ability to strengthen group participation through encouragement and reassurance has developed. For example, now when possible I would pair or group participants with those people most different to them in terms of personality or participation level. I have also found that grouping them with people they don’t know well pushes them into the stretch zone, and rarely does anything but positive results come out of that space. Lastly, in order to keep the environment effective as well as safe, what has worked the best is to emphasize to them, “what gets shared here, stays here,” everything except for the learning outcomes of our work together which should be applied and implemented.

Training Design

The ArtCorps Education and Training Director designed the CLSCC. With her as my coach I was privileged to study design and facilitation from her, reintroducing me to theory I picked up in the classroom as well as new concepts. The course was designed to address all three intersecting dimensions of the human experience: individual, collective and systems (ArtCorps Education and Training, 2014).

The body was used as a metaphor to name each Module (three day training session) of the course, which were meant to build on each other and take participants through various training approaches. For example, the Feet Training is foundational, the Hands Training is described as hands on, the Heart Training as relational, and the Head Training as action oriented (Education and Training, 2014). Appendix C presents a description of what each training offers to its participants. The activities of the CLSCC
are mostly open source activities found within the areas of leadership training, trust and teambuilding, outdoor education, creative training, environmental activism and participatory education, amongst others.

The purpose of the CLSCC is to “offer in-depth learning and practice through participation in all four trainings, delivering participants the deep experience, support and portfolio of creative methods that will equip them to become a Certified Creative Leader in the field” (ArtCorps Ed & Training, 2014). In this context, working with conservationists in Belize, the CLSCC will support meeting the Creative Conservation Project’s objectives, which are: 1) Develop institutional capacity of select conservation organizations and equip them to effectively design, replicate and implement creative community education and outreach projects and/or campaigns; and 2) Increase the number of effective community education and outreach projects and campaigns implemented by the organizations. This course aimed to enable our trainees to reach the overall goals of the project by immersing them in an experiential environment where they participated in activities and learned to facilitate them as well. This was crucial to my technical assistance work by familiarizing the trainees with the creative approaches we may use in their work in order that they experience first hand what and how they can apply what they learned.

Another connection based on learnings from the TDEL course that was clearly demonstrated in her design was in using activities that catered to various learning styles. These activities came in the form of interactive group work and reflective individual work, specifically through movement, art making, video/slide shows, music, presentations, games, reflective writing, participatory discussion and role-play. TDEL introduced me to various learning style theories; Chapter two of Workshops: Designing and Facilitating Experiential Learning (Brooks-Harris and Stock-Ward, 1999) was
memorable. I quickly recognized the Dunn and Dunn Model of learning styles used in this course, with it being one of the models that resonated with me the most. The Dunn Model highlights four perceptual styles that categorize different types of learners and their preferred approach for being introduced to new materials. I enjoy referring to myself as a visual learner, (learning by reading or viewing), one of the four perceptual styles. It supports the use of my artistically trained eye and how it uses what it sees and reads. The other styles are auditory (learning by listening), tactile (by touching) and kinesthetic (by doing).

The design also touched on sociological factors in the learning styles incorporated. As described by Dunn and Dunn (1993), these factors include preferences in learning alone, in a pair, and in a small group, as well as defining preference in learning from peers of equal status or an authority figure, such as a workshop facilitator (Brooks-Harris and Stock-Ward, 1999). Each activity took you either through working individually, in pairs or in a group, or was distributed in such a way throughout the day as to vary the learning and working styles. The CLSCC apparently was structured to appear as if the participants were learning from an authority figure, in this case creative facilitators, but indirectly the activities were set up for participants to learn by discovering things about themselves and each other. For me this also became a learning opportunity, developing my intercultural communication skills by fostering their relationship building, which entailed lots of observation. It was an opportunity to use the newly obtained cultural knowledge I acquired. I hesitated at times thinking: how do I do this without appearing as that American trying to be the Belizean that understands us? I grounded myself in the idea that the more they would look at me as guide and not as an expert, the more they will cohesively build relationships without my influence.

The course extended an invitation to three to four individuals from each
organization: a perfect opportunity for deeper relationships to develop inter- and cross-organizationally. Ideally, in order to receive the benefits of attending all four trainings the organizations would have selected staff that could commit to the project and the CLSCC over two years. Several circumstances may have made this impossible for the organizations, but two were certain: 1) Staff availability was unpredictable; and 2) Management felt obligated to share training opportunities amongst staff. I learned that our partner organizations’ executive directors preferred to take the equitable route, choosing different staff members to attend each training. I felt torn between the two approaches and saw benefits to both. Sending the same trainee gives us the time to build more deeply their creative capacity at each training and implement the possibility of technical assistance work in between, thus reinforcing the previous efforts. Yet having multiple trainees attend just one workshop would increase the number of individuals introduced to the courses’ activities and giving them the chance to participate in a unique collaborative experience.

Despite of the unpredictability of who would attend, registration forms participants filled out before coming helped me get a sense of who would be in the room. This allowed me to be more in tune with their experience and what each brought to the group. I enjoyed reading the forms, which again revealed my true visual learner nature. I discovered that the attendees who did not work closely with us during the project, such as administrative staff, still benefited from the CLSCC. One of the organizations’ Operations Officers shared that “this training was eye-opening and brings out the basic principles to build stronger relationships, whether it be in your family, workplace or community. I’ve never been to a training such as this and it helped me to come out of my box and contribute!” This testimonial, amongst others, confirmed the positive outcome of having staff members who were not actively involved attend
the trainings, despite this not being part of the original project plan. Although my interaction with them in-between trainings was minimal, an introduction to creative conservation was established, furthering our intentions in fusing training and art.

While designing my own trainings during the RPP, I looked back at the lessons learned during TDEL and TSA when I designed individually and collaboratively for the first time. Communication challenges such as providing clear instructions and evaluating shortcomings quickly came to mind. Now I can apply those lessons to my design process as well as incorporate the theoretical learning from the classroom and any new learning from the field. I found myself fusing Kolb’s Cycle and Wilber’s Integral Theory together. My design brain became focused on two things: 1) How to weave individual, community, and systems stages with a specific focus on how individual experiences combined create collective experiences. This was particularly important since I was working with staff members who were not often collaborating with each other or with other organizations; 2) How to encourage active experimentation to support participants’ concrete experiences, reiterating the importance of the experiential learning cycle. The first focus linked to Integral Theory is also linked to art. Previously as a teacher and currently as a creative facilitator the most interesting and successful projects/activities I’ve designed (as based on participant engagement) have been when they worked individually before coming together to create something collectively from what they made individually. These collective works embodied individual, community and even systemic stages.

As creative facilitator I also implemented pre-designed activities that I felt supported our objectives. Having this creative freedom gave me the space to connect my classroom learning such as the topic Listening Skills in TSA with the organization’s needs (in this case effective communication) and existing activities. During a two-day
training, I facilitated an activity called “Monologue, Dialogue”. Participants had the opportunity to illustrate the differences between one-way communication (monologue) and two-way communication (dialogue), to experience the importance of clarity and to uncover the ways we often misinterpret things. The outcome of the exercise demonstrated how even if the message may appear to be clear, sometimes the interpretation of the message may not be. It showed the participants the importance of how we listen. The reflection sparked examples of how and when this happened to the participants, leading them to create strategies for overcoming it such as: asking clarifying questions, avoiding monologues, and developing their active listening skills. Everything the participants shared happened to be the same as what my co-facilitators and I remind ourselves to incorporate when communicating with the participants and each other. Such things as this took me back to my own introduction to developing active listening skills during the Listening Project for the TSA course. I remember how my view on conversation shifted during this course, specifically my identifying how strongly I dislike making assumptions. As a facilitator of dialogue, I want to pride myself in active listening, questioning and in avoiding assumptions in order to honor the speakers time and space.

For instance, when designing either individually, with my co-facilitator, or with a trainee, I always placed a high value on what the participants would receive and what their process would entail. In the beginning of the project, I would support trainees with what they requested such as help with designing agendas and facilitation, but as the project progressed my goal became to have trained the trainee thoroughly enough for them to design and facilitate independently. Although it took longer than anticipated to reach this point, there was a progression of skill building taking place and that was what mattered the most to me. ‘Taking longer than anticipated’ was a
result of ArtCorps making assumptions on what skill building would look like as well as on my part by having put expectations on my trainees. I worked on actively checking these assumptions and expectations within myself and with my supervisors, finding them to be an unhealthy approach to reaching our goals.

Referring to lecturing as a teaching style, bell hooks shares, “since most audiences lack the skills of active listening, much information offered in lectures is missed. And I often find that what is not missed, is misunderstood. The future of learning lies with the cultivation of conversations, of dialogue.” (hooks, 2010, p.44) The “Monologue, Dialogue” activity also demonstrates that dialogue is a better means of transmitting information. I share this as an example to connect the purpose and outcome of the activity with Wilber’s theory, now tweaked to work within ArtCorps curriculum. Monologue is taking an individualist; “I” approach to communication. A dialogue is more community oriented, “We“. To reach a systemic shift, “It”, in communication may seem overwhelming, but we are heading in the right direction when more individuals participate in dialogues versus monologues and start listening as a means for change.

A principle of adult learning I have chosen to use in guiding my training practice is that adults learn by doing. This principle and other theoretical frameworks of adult learning found within my design and facilitation experience, was strengthened from studies on Paulo Freire’s work. His belief in the value of group dialogues is one perspective I now carry with me throughout my trainings. In Freire’s terms, group dialogues are liberating for everyone involved. I enjoy facilitating as well as participating in them because they foster inclusivity. This contrasts with how teaching based on monologues leads to silence and thus is the greatest form of oppression. The two works Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1971), introduced to me prior to SIT, and
Culture Circles Across Contexts (Souto-Manning, 2010), introduced during TSA have both played an integrative role in my learning by emphasizing a Freirian social and educational vision of justice and confirming the strong role culture plays in all types of learning.

Facilitation, Intercultural facilitation and Co-facilitation

Due to our difference in location, my coach trained me via Skype in the various activities that made up the CLSCC. There were a handful of activities I found familiar having experienced them previously as a participant or a facilitator as well as during my time as an educator, trainee and student. But the majority were new to me, and learning how to facilitate them over video or audio calls was not an ideal way to learn. Although our coach provided us with space for questions and concerns, this situation demonstrated the value of in-person interactions. My co-facilitator and I would be exhausted and at times even unclear as to what material we had covered by the end of those calls. By the time the training date approached, it was clear how much we depended on our face-to-face experiential run-throughs of the activities with our coach.

As an art educator, I quickly learned the value of having experienced what I would teach and how I felt the need to be authentic in what I was presenting to my students at all times. I found myself committed to designing lesson plans based on personal connections to the subject matter and to create examples of the physical work that resulted from the lesson. I would emphasize to the students how the example I presented to them was my take on the lesson, a personal interpretation, and how it was their task to do the same rather than duplicating what they saw.

This translated into my work as creative facilitator in two forms. In watching the difficulty participants had in creating original work, I could see the residue mentioned by Lewis (2000) of the impacts of the colonial education system, specifically her notion
that it is based on the memorization and regurgitation of information instead of critical thinking. As I am not here as a researcher on that topic, I can only infer that it is true based on my experience as a facilitator. Encouraging participants to be authentic in this way is a reflection of my training philosophy given that I believe there is nothing to hide or lose and all to gain through being authentic.

Secondly, I wanted to avoid implementing an activity in which I had never participated or facilitated. This proved to be challenging in regards to the CLSCC given that our facilitator run-through sessions were often the closest I could get. Joanna Macy (2014) speaks of demonstrating your own emotional authenticity as the capacity of an excellent guide. She emphasizes the importance of guides (in this instance facilitators) having previous engagement with the work they do with others: “It is important for the guide to take part, whenever possible, in the experiential work rather than directing it from the sidelines or staying aloof from it as an observer” (Macy, 2014, p.77). In doing so, you avoid the possibility of appearing to be disconnected to the participants emotions since you haven’t or aren’t experiencing and processing your self. Despite not being able to fully participate or facilitate in the pre-training stage, I felt like I did enough to prepare so that the trainees received a credible experience, although I would recommend avoiding this if possible.

An example of what Macy describes above as “staying aloof from it as an observer” manifested for me during the following experience. In one of the CLSCC trainings co-facilitated by the three of us, we implemented the activity “Together We Trust Fall”. The learning objectives of this activity are to build trust and practice accountability amongst participants. We set up the activity by bringing the entire group together and introduced it as a dynamic and strong way to build trust in a group, requiring everyone to be accountable. The large group was then broken up in to three
small groups, each having one facilitator that explained the process of the activity, emphasizing the shared goal of ensuring everyone’s safety. Participants were to form tight circles standing shoulder to shoulder. The facilitator would then ask for one volunteer to stand in the center of the circle with their eyes closed, arms crossed and body rigid. When prompted the person in the center falls and the circle of people gently catches them and moves them around to others in the circle. Each participant was to take a turn in the middle, falling. After everyone had participated each group would take five minutes to reflect on their experience in being in the center and in the circle of catchers. Then all three groups would come together for a large group reflection.

In my coach’s group, one participant experienced being in the panic zone; she dropped someone. She blamed herself profusely for it although the dropped participant was apparently unharmed physically as well as emotionally. Soon after, I learned that my coach continued managing the group gracefully and tended to the affected participants during their group reflection; through this she supported the group in processing what just happened. The participant who dropped became very distraught; therefore after their reflection my coach took her aside to console. It was a cue for my co-facilitator and I to wrap up our small group work and regroup all the participants for the final reflection. We were not exactly sure what had happened, but we knew it was time to move forward without them in order to keep the entire group engaged and active in their experience.

During our large group reflection the participants as well as the facilitators gathered that this process generated a lot of emotion and discussion about what it takes to establish trust. It also made us question the important role of accountability in effective collaboration, an area we had not previously discussed. The group consensus was that each person who is part of team needs to be individually responsible, in this
case responsible so that no one falls and gets dropped. This insight could now be applied to the important role each person plays in making their teams and organizations strong. When our coach and the participant she consoled joined us, the conversation shifted to address what happened in their small group. With her (the participant) permission, my coach shared the experience with everyone and prompted a conversation on how to repair trust when we make mistakes, and the importance of learning from them together. The emphasis on creating safety was touched on again by exploring strategies in how to create it, during this activity and in everyday life. My coach shared how actions such as: asking for help if needed, communicating with each other, making eye contact, recognizing personal limitations and providing encouragement contribute towards creating a safe situation.

Personally I questioned how to repair trust if it was broken, something I struggle with in my personal life. The participants did not provide much insight on the matter making me question if it was something they struggled with as well. Also, I thought about how I would respond if a participant were dropped in my group. Since I was participating and co-facilitating this activity for the first time, I was definitely not in a position to react from gained experience, bringing me back to what Macy emphasizes about participating in as much as possible before you facilitate. I believe my awareness to my groups needs would have been compromised by my motherly instinct to cater to the dropper and the dropped. This was a high-risk activity that took all of us into our stretch zone; as a facilitator who does trust, I was not concerned about being dropped, but was challenged in the area of providing safety for my group.

This experience was the perfect reminder for me to take responsibility in fostering the relationship between safety and trust. Macy (2014) says that trainings offer safety and group work provides support. She states that the first task of the facilitator is
to “create a safe setting in which people can come to trust themselves and each other” (p.75) and I whole-heartedly agree. This activity also illustrated the importance of co-facilitators understanding their specific roles while simultaneously being in tune with what is happening during the training as a whole. I believe that in bringing this level of awareness to a co-facilitated environment you create a sense of safety for the facilitators in trusting that they are all accountable for what takes place.

During the CLSCC, with three co-facilitators it became imperative to clarify our roles and find a balance amongst us prior to the training. Our routine was to do a run-through of the entire training and choose who would facilitate each activity. This allowed each of us to narrow down our focus to only those specific tasks and better prepare for our activities and areas of responsibility. Through this we began to learn each other’s preferences, and more fully understanding our personal comfort zone. I chose to challenge myself periodically and choose a few activities that would take me into the stretch zone, yet I felt comforted in doing so knowing that my co-facilitators would be there to provide support if needed.

In Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice (2007), the authors express the benefits of co-facilitation, one being how the multiplicity of the facilitation teams’ social identities can provide more opportunities for participants in exploring identity as it related to the training. This dynamic seemed to enable stronger connections between the facilitators and the participants. Another benefit to co-facilitation is how the co-facilitators can support each other during challenging times. The expectation created was that any of us could jump into assist each other, whether that be during a challenging moment or just to add our perspective. I believe that clarifying our roles and identifying some expectations beforehand created a more cohesive co-facilitation experience. Clarifying our role as facilitators to the participants was of equal
importance in order to set the appropriate tone for the trainings; we emphasized to the participants that it was our role to guide a process in bringing ideas, solutions and action plans to the surface, rather than being seen as subject matter experts (Rothwell, 2008). At various times I recall sharing my thoughts on this with the entire group and individual participants, and sometimes would even scribble my thoughts in my notebooks. They tended to sound something like this:

> Although we were trained in the use of arts and in facilitation, there is no right or wrong in art or in the creative mind. I am not here to tell you what to do or how to do it, but to bring out what is already within, and support you in expressing it. We are also here learning from you and your knowledge, and it is within this exchange that we will grow and stretch together.

I was lucky in identifying my dual role as a facilitator and a learner early in my work, never putting myself in the position of expert, and that resulted in mutual respect amongst my co-facilitators and our trainees.

As observers, we began to discover each other’s strengths and weaknesses while co-facilitating. My co-facilitator believed that I was a natural at leading reflection circles; I would easily re-introduce pieces of information the participants shared during the day, weaving them into the reflection while illustrating concrete connections between their contributions and learning. Throughout the CLSCC, my co-facilitator learned that reflection was an area where she did not feel comfortable and when given the chance to she would pass it on to us. Our coach encouraged us to practice what we preached and step into the stretch zone once in a while, resulting in the reflection circles being evenly distributed amongst us. Although not keen on the reflection circles, my co-facilitator felt strongly about taking action and making plans. It was in her nature to move at a quick pace and this is a quality I lacked. Although she did not exhibit as much patience as I did, her quick nature got the group producing. If done in balance with experiencing and analyzing, I found producing to be complementary to the participants learning.
There was also plenty of *attitude- and awareness- learning* taking place by the facilitators. In working with our coach—who had the most training experience and was the most knowledgeable of the content—my co-facilitator and I (the projects creative facilitators) at times felt nervous in thinking we were not facilitating correctly or as well as the coach. This shared feeling between us came from within and not from anything our coach did or implied, bringing heightened awareness to our insecurities. We quickly learned through our coach’s encouragement and support that bringing our own style to the training was a positive thing. According to Eitington (1996), there are merits in making the training process a balanced team effort; referring to them as the ABC’s in co-training, the letter G stands out to me in regards to having this experience with my colleagues. G= growth:

In the team-training situation one certainly learns from the ideas and approaches of the other trainer. Also, one learns how to work cooperatively. Given the fact that both trainers very likely have different backgrounds and personalities, one must learn how to work things out and how to “give and take” with another professional person. (p.515)

Our contrasting social and cultural identities gave the participants plenty of relatable characteristics from which to chose and our use of different trainer styles supported this as well. Eitington (2002) presented a study that identified four distinct trainer styles: The Director, The Listener, The Interpreter, and The Coach. I have identified my style as the Listener, although I found myself varying between styles depending on the setting. As the listener I encourage participants to take the lead and express emotions, exhibiting empathetic concern and making sure they feel welcomed and important (Eitington, 2002). I found my co-facilitator embodied little of the listener style, but has traits from the other three: from the Coach style she encourages experimentation through application; from the Director style she may limit group participation to focus on delivering particular learning goals; and from the Interpreter
style I found her sharing ideas but not necessarily displaying any of her personal feelings or emotions. Our coach, who has a multitude of training experience, does not fit into one box or four; she’s just not that type of person or facilitator. In our opinion, the three of us each brought a unique contribution towards helping create a balanced co-facilitation dynamic.

This dynamic, despite our greatest intent to be balanced, still faced its challenges and my RPP has demonstrated that challenges come hand in hand with learning. Challenges in facilitation help me by constantly taking me back to Kolb’s cycle in questioning, “where are my trainees and I?” One of my most memorable experiences highlighting the value of the experiential learning cycle was during a two-day training on creative communication I co-facilitated, which included an activity named “Appreciative Inquiry”. After working in small groups, participants regrouped to share what they accomplished. Each small group took turns sharing; their informative and colorful presentations proudly displayed the heightened sense of teamwork developed in a short amount of time. After the small group presentations, we would conduct a full group reflection, a standard component of our work and part of Kolb’s Cycle.

As co-facilitators having pre-designated each section, we nonetheless left each other the freedom to jump in, assist, or contribute at any time. I was designated to lead the reflection, but when the final presentation ended my co-facilitator decided to jump in say thank you to everyone and call it a day. Anger, sadness, and disappointment all immediately flowed through my boiling blood. While the group prepared to leave, a few participants approached me and questioned why we did not reflect on this activity like we did with the others. After they left, my co-facilitator explained how she felt the day was dragging and she wanted it to come to an end; I expressed as professionally as I could how the cycle was now incomplete, and therefore so was the participants’
learning. The participants did not reach the Reflective Observations part of Kolb cycle; this really bothered me and I felt as if I had cheated them of a complete experience. I am aware that the strength in experiential learning is not about perfectly rotating around a cycle, so I trust that there was still an ample amount of learning on their part. My co-facilitator seemed not to be as invested in the participants’ processing and felt satisfied with the groups finalizing their creative presentations, one of the activity outcomes. It was a long day and at this point we agreed to disagree; I took her satisfaction with the product and my dissatisfaction with the process as a reflection of our own trainer styles, and as a lesson learned in co-facilitation challenges.

ArtCorps’ Case Statement, a publication on their website that provides funders, supporters, and the general public information on their methodology, includes an overview of the theories behind their work and how it was designed. Referencing Paulo Freire’s theory of Popular Education, it states:

Our experiential and interactive trainings draw extensively on the experience and knowledge of the participants, using creative techniques to facilitate dialogue and incorporate critical reflection after every activity as a way to generate and capture the collective insights and wisdom of the group. (2004, p.9)

Unfortunately, in this case there was no collective insight shared through reflection. The participants’ and my own disappointment in this particular case seemed to highlight the central aspect of reflection in the experiential learning cycle.

The complexities of experiential learning cannot be explored in the length of this paper, but in the hopes of honoring its place in the field of training, I will share my biggest takeaway from its role during my RPP. As a trainer I learned that if I do not do it, I will not fully understand it. While that may sound simple, it always applied. This principle of adult learning was exhibited in my trainees as well, which to me confirmed its relevance. Reviewing a training agenda together did not mean that we knew how to
facilitate that training. In order to prepare it took implementing things together and using role-play to pre-facilitate. Even when facilitating the real training, we were still experiencing by taking in information, processing it, synthesizing and giving it back to the participants and ourselves, even until the evaluation later. I have chosen to remind myself of how integrated and important experiential learning will be in my work by remembering this moment: during a school trip to the Barrier Reef, a child experiencing it for the first time was asked, “What is your favorite fish in the Barrier Reef?” he replied, “Snapper”. I knew his answer was based on his experience, Snapper being the most common fish found in Belizean cuisine. Up until he visited the reef, Snapper was the only fish he had a concrete experience with, through his dinner plate as well as through his studies. Although he knew of other reef fish he had only personally experienced Snapper, and this is why it was his favorite.

The challenges of co-facilitation and collaboration also pushed me into questioning how to positively shift my behavior in order to be an example towards change. As I mentioned previously in the Theoretical Frameworks section, I recently learned more about Socially Engaged Art. Although I find the concept of “a social interaction that proclaims itself as art” (Helguera, 2011, p.1) to be too abstract for my trainees, I played with designs encompassing social practice as safely as I could. For example in honor of Reef Week (a national awareness week on the conservation of the Belize Barrier Reef), I designed an event in the town center with students parading in marine life costumes, as well as learning stations with experts in marine conservation and a variation of the Council of All Beings (see Appendix E) at the central park stage. The proposed plan was doable logistically and financially: not only did it meet the objectives of the project and the partner organizations involved in the plan, it furthermore satisfied my craving to build awareness using the social interaction of the
community at large, (students, professionals, passerby’s, store owners, etc.). It was an event motivated by experiences rather than by results.

The event did not unfold as I had imagined and became a prime example our eyes of the various challenges that occur in collaboration and communication that appeared during the project. While the design was practical, the execution fell short. In this case, tasks were evenly distributed amongst three different organizations but the gaps in communication, varying levels of enthusiasm and reluctance to collaborate was sadly evident. There are many areas about the process and product of this design worth analyzing, but I will touch on one: “Communication, the sending and receiving of messages, is an integral part of culture. Edward T. Hall, the noted interculturalist, has maintained that culture is communication” (Storti, 1997, p.83). If culture is communication, then just as there are various cultures there will be various communication styles. My co-facilitator’s communication style reflected her culture, one which is strikingly different than our Belizean counterparts. Staying true to my Listener training-style was not so much about my culture in this case, but about taking a more passive role in coordinating communication in hopes of the trainees taking an active role. The design and execution of this particular activity definitely were in need of evaluation although everyone else involved was not eager in taking the time to do so.

Evaluation was a key component of the CLSCC although it fell short at times during technical assistance. Since I was facilitating trainings as I was being trained (by my coach), making my learning dually rich, the dynamic created the opportunity to evaluate the overall training, our co-facilitation experience, and my performance as a trainee. At the end of each training, ArtCorps requested the participants to submit an evaluation form called Post-Training Survey. The questions were mainly about their training experience, learning, and outcomes. Their answers would assist us in assessing
what worked well in the training and what needed to be re-visited, in the areas of content, facilitation and logistics. It also gave the trainees an opportunity to share any highlights or challenges they experienced.

The evaluation amongst facilitators was conducted in the form of a daily reflection and a training report. After the participants left and everything was cleaned up, the two or three of us would debrief the day’s events. We focused on the areas of content, facilitation and logistics, discussing the highlights and challenges within each area. As co-facilitators, we had developed a relationship built on respect, trust and understanding, which helped us be honest during our evaluation time and share constructive criticism and praise in the hopes of supporting our fellow colleagues in their training development. We also used this time to rework activities for the following day based on how participants were responding to the training overall. Although our coach authored this curriculum, she was open to variations on activities and design-flow based on our feedback, and our collective experience. I began to see how each day of the training was taking us the facilitators through Kolb’s experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). Again, it was always present. The concrete experience was the facilitation throughout the day, the reflective observation and abstract conceptualization our debrief session, and the active experimentation was the next day of facilitation. I appreciated this time with my colleagues, and was in need of the space it created for supported learning and growth, since I spent the majority of my time outside the CLSCC working on my own.

Another tool used in evolution was the training report. It captured the essence, as well as concrete outcomes of the training. This format carried us through listing how the training objectives were met, writing a narrative summary of each day, sharing what worked best, what challenges we encountered, assessing facilitation dynamic, a
space for suggesting improvements, trainee outcomes such as next steps and key
moments of collective growth, and an area for trainee testimonials. My co-facilitator and
I would work on the report together, then we would pass it on to our coach who would
contribute her feedback, which mostly were in the areas of assessing facilitation dynamic
and suggesting improvements. The constructive criticism she would share reminded us
that “the best way to improve facilitation skills is to practice them, receive feedback on
performance from participants and from more skilled professional mentors, and then
use that feedback to improve subsequent facilitation experiences” (Rothwell, 2008,
p.126).

A major shift in my ability to speak publically took place during my RPP. This is
something I have always struggled with so I will attribute gaining more confidence in
doing so to the practice of my facilitation skills. Another reason behind this confidence
is my ability to be in tune with how I’d like to contribute to society. Since I studied art, I
believed society expected me to create and teach what they see art to be. Through
facilitation, I am guiding, coaching, enabling and inspiring, which feels more natural to
me. In my eyes, I am not expected to be an expert. In bringing out others creative best, I
also find myself growing creatively.

The trainees were developing their facilitation skills as well. In time they became
more open to the idea of using art as a means for social change, specifically in opening
the eyes of their stakeholders to see the conservation work their organizations are
responsible for. The processing of the activities gave us the opportunity to make
connections between what was done and how they can do it upon our (ArtCorps)
deptature, empowering the trainees with the tools necessary to take action. I have
created a chart (see Appendix D) to illustrate some of the work encompassing technical
assistance, outlining a brief activity description, participant learning and action outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE APPLICATIONS

Recommendations

During my time with the Creative Conservation Project, I observed that the relationship between my training design / facilitation experience and trainer competencies was ever evolving. I learned just as much or more from the challenges as I did from positive outcomes. In gaining a better understanding of the role culture plays in creative learning, I believe I became better abled to facilitate meaningful exchanges between everyone involved in the project, which was very important to me. As my communication competencies increased in general, my sense of awareness to trainee needs and expectations deepened, which strengthened my group facilitation and management skills. As a constant learner, my lessons ranged from personal growth in balancing my emotions while facilitating, all the way to a developing a deeper understanding of non-profit politics.

With these newfound learnings spread throughout such a wide spectrum and timeline, even scribbled in my notebooks, I have managed to conjure a few recommendations to share with my colleagues.

• One encompassing recommendation for ArtCorps is to give more consideration to designing content with the country’s (Belize) cultural context in mind. To my advantage, this gap greatly contributed towards the discovery of my personal guiding principles and theoretical frameworks; it also challenged me to increase my own contextual knowledge. In short, incorporating an understanding of Belize’s history, socioeconomic standing, education system, and acts towards social justice
into their designs would, in my opinion, 1) develop stronger connections with our trainees; 2) strengthen creative communication through the use of methods that supplement trainees experiences as Belizeans; and 3) inspire critical thinking within a non-authoritarian environment.

- Acting as a liaison between ArtCorps and our partners felt like an additional job; someone else to manage the project was needed. Although not having a project manager it positioned me to become a better administrator and heightened organization and trouble-shooting skills, I greatly disliked the residual impact it had on my RPP by taking time away from developing my training practitioner competencies. As for myself, I identified many areas where I personally can grow and improve.

- I struggled with time management in regards to the participants as a group, during facilitation. Asking someone to stop sharing, or giving them a set amount of time to work on something felt very authoritative and controlling, an uncomfortable position for me. Although I understood the importance of time in working with groups and its contribution towards creating an effective learning environment, I would get caught in my self imposed expectation to be polite by giving people time.

- I lacked the ability to separate myself from the climate of the organizations and my work with the trainees. This took a heavy toll on my enthusiasm at times, struggling to not be affected the day-to-day drama of the non-profit world.

- My coach identified “guiding the group to make deeper meaning of the purpose, lessons learned, and applications of the activities during closing reflections” as an area for me to strengthen. When facilitating closing reflections, I thoroughly enjoyed active listening. I believe this led me to have one foot in the participant realm and
one as a facilitator. I agree with my coach saying I should be guiding the group, which entails me to be fully present as a facilitator who is actively making connections as well as listening.

In addition to weaknesses however, I also came to realize my strengths.

- One I carried throughout the trainings was my ability to improvise in real time. This became useful when our groups found themselves stuck and in need of a quick guided transition.

- Another strength was in using pre-designed curriculum as a guide and not as a body of work to replicate. My open interpretation of the materials provided space for me to infuse my own creative flavor as well as mold it to suit my trainer style and the learning style of my trainees.

  Overall, I trust that our trainees’ creative capacity has increased; many of the ideas that became fun activities and meaningful events were born shortly after we began working together. When I think of the shifts in their perception towards creating an environment they are proud to be part of, it brings a smile to my face. Although smiling is not a measure of impact for non-profit organizations, I believe acknowledging trainees processes is just as vital to demonstrating impact as showcasing their products; during trainings, I saw the participants processing time being the space used to deconstruct and recreate. Therefore, this is the final recommendation I would like to share. Similarly to Helguera’s bookstore, the impact of the project was not due to the store itself but to the space created for positive interaction.

*Future Applications*

Although ArtCorps work incorporated theories such as Popular Education and Conflict Transformation, all of which aim to transform social structures—since I worked
with conservation organizations holding co-management agreements with the Belizean government, there were some unofficial boundaries set in regards to our creative freedom. We were silently encouraged not to do anything that may damage the organizations’ relationship with the government, despite the government being the root of the same social structures we were aiming to transform.

A few ideas for SEA projects came to mind during my RPP. These ideas never came to light possibly due to them being too “out of the box” for the trainees I was working with, or possibly due to my own assumptions about our collective limitations. I do not want my future work to be influenced by assumptions, but to be driven by passion and create a space for me to always ask who does this training connect and how does it connect them? One of the major components of SEA is audience engagement, and participation. This happens to be an area that is not often emphasized in our partners’ work, and this is where I want transformation to take place.

With a better understanding of SEA and the practical experience of *Integral Theory* and *Experiential Learning*, I would like to continue collaborating with organizations and individuals who seek to build creative capacity in their field of work. Ideally I would like to design trainings focused on the participants’ processes in creative learning and in SEA work. Helguera (2011) shares an example that to me describes how all of these theoretical frameworks shaped my RPP experience and what I am aiming to embody as a trainer. A Chinese water painting or mandala is essentially about the process of their making, versus in a traditional painting where the execution of the brush strokes is not its main objective (the material painting is). The water painting’s eventual disappearance is consistent with its short-lived identity; from a conceptual perspective, the thought process behind the water painting is the artwork, the materiality of it is not as important.
PERSONAL REFLECTION

Looking back at some reflective writing I did on trainer competencies during the TDEL course, I clearly see what areas I felt least confident in and appropriately they naturally became areas of growth during my RPP. My need to dig deeper within leadership and management competencies was met specifically by the challenges I faced through ArtCorps not having a Project Manager, positioning me to take on the extra role at times. Oppositely, I felt strongly about my competence within Intercultural Communication when arriving and leaving SIT. Belize has tested that feeling numerous times, leading me to ask myself: how would a Belizean react, respond, or interpret? At times, when I am living outside of the US, I forget that I am a result of a Western perspective, despite of disconnecting from that part of me by not living there. In Belize, the Western influence is strong; positioning myself as someone who is trying to disconnect from that perspective, which is generally not understood by Belizeans.

Another moment of serious reflection came to me when I bumped into a trainee, now friend, on the bus. She mentioned how her six-year-old son is getting along with his current teacher, which is making him very happy since his previous teachers (from pre-k and kindergarten) disliked him. I found this very surprising. Who would dislike such a bright and well-mannered child? His mother explained to me that his previous teachers did not appreciate his inquisitive nature. They believed he asked too many questions; that he did not just accept what his teachers presented. From a social action trainers’ lens, I instantly defaulted to looking at this as the suppression of critical thinking, and an example of teachers using the banking system. I remember bell hooks quoting Freire, “human existence, because it came into being through asking questions, is at the root of change in the world. There is a radical element to existence, which is the radical act of asking questions... At root human existence involves surprise, questioning
and risk. And because of all this, it involves actions and change” (hooks, 2010).

Then I wondered, how will this six-year-old thrive and feel empowered to create change in his country and in the world if he is meeting opposition so early on? Luckily, his parents are actively involved in his learning academically, socially and emotionally, depicting this in ways such as his recent participation in a mural project about marine conservation his mother coordinated through our partner organization, with him being the youngest painter on the team. His mother is familiar with the benefits of using art as a tool for social change and through our work together I can proudly say she believes that this mural is the hammer that has shaped the mind of everyone it involves, from the artists to each person who walks by it.

Something that shifted during my time in Belize is my connection to nature, and in order to be authentic as a trainer, I recognize that I must process this shift since it stemmed from my work here. I am from New York City and nature to me came in various shades of grey: a mouse, a pigeon, and a squirrel; even green came surrounded by grey sidewalks. Belize immersed me in an abundance of nature and in the conservation of it simultaneously. I can now say considering nature in all aspects of my work has become an important guiding principle as well. I can recall the moment when the shift occurred; it was during an activity Joanna Macy uses in her work. I was able to join my trainees as a participant of “The Council of All Beings” activity (see appendix E) while my coach facilitated. When I embodied the ecological feature that chose me, the ocean, I spoke to the council and the humans with a genuine concern for all my inhabitants, mankind and the state of the planet. The experience brought me to tears. In processing, I understood that those tears reflected my newfound deep connection with nature thanks to the Creative Conservation Project, my role as a facilitator of conservationists’ creative journey, and living in and with the Belizean community. I
now know the ocean and the rain forest. I now understand their value in modern society and in traditional and cultural dimensions. Many Belizeans have not had the opportunity to experience the abundant nature in their own backyards they way I have; I am reminded of this when I accompanied our partners in taking students and their teachers on trips to the Cayes, witnessing the first time these children and adults experience their Belizean Barrier Reef. On the contrary, other Belizeans have never experienced life without being immersed in nature, easily taking it for granted.

While I never looked at myself as a conservationist until now, this project has exhibited that our trainees have never seen themselves as creative facilitators until now. Through reflecting I have come to realize that I have learned as much from them as they have from me. This experience has reinforced my belief in the importance of international exchange, another guiding principle infused into my personal and professional life. In all of my work outside of the U.S. this principle continues to be crucial for my engagement with other communities; to not be the foreigner that comes and tells people what to do, but rather one who is willing to facilitate an exchange that draws out the inherent knowledge for all of us to be the change we need to be.

My desire to work with art as a tool for cultural expression is what jumpstarted this journey in 2006. A decade later I am lucky to say that my work with art and now training and art has satisfied my initial craving of gaining a better understanding of the world through culture. The creative exchange I have been a part of in the field, in the classroom and currently in Belize has taught me valuable lessons. Now with a greater understanding of my contributions to the world as a trainer and specifically a creative facilitator, the biggest lesson I have learned is “my expertise is in knowing not to be an expert” (Pablo Helguera, 2011).
Appendix A: **BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Appendix B: Tourist Map of Belize

Punta Gorda via www.belize.com
Appendix C: Creative Leadership for Social Change Course (CLSCC)

ArtCorps Education and Training Services, 2014

Creative Leadership
In this foundational course, participants will experience and learn creative methods for building powerful leadership and inspiring behavior change at the individual, community and systemic levels. Trainees will learn how to:
- identify and strengthen personal identity and power, leadership styles, purpose and motivation
- cultivate collaboration, problem solving and collective visioning
- educate community groups, elicit crucial analysis, mobilize participation and plan strategic projects that incorporate creative expression

Creative Facilitation
In this hands-on course, participants will develop and practice their creative facilitation skills, gaining fundamental knowledge and confidence to effectively lead groups. Trainees will learn how to:
- identify their personal strengths and challenges as a facilitator
- apply best practices of effective facilitation and design
- lead innovative exercises and receive expert feedback
- develop a personal vision map
- envision an ideal future outcome for any issue and how to achieve it
- analyze an issue from different perspectives

Creative Collaboration
In this interactive course, participants will experience and learn creative methods for building stronger and more innovative teams, communities and organizations. Trainees will learn how to:
- deepen group identity and trust
- foster an appreciation for diverse identities and perspectives
- create an opportunity for shared risk-taking
- improve teamwork and collaborative leadership skills
- engage in creative problem solving, planning and visioning
- develop practices for group participation, innovation and play

Creative Systems
In this action-oriented course, participants will experience and learn creative methods for influencing systemic change. Trainees will learn how to:
- analyze systems and power structures
- align behavior with values
- identify obstacles and strategies to overcome them
- recognize the stories that shape our perception
- create more compelling messaging and campaigns
- generate innovative solutions and alternatives
## Appendix D: Technical Assistance Work – Sample Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Description</th>
<th>Participant Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Action Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Activity:** Art Code  
**My Role:** Trainee Coach / Curriculum Designer | • Received educational info to help open a dialogue and environment where they can relay their story and concerns  
• Gained an understanding that they are among many other communities facing climate change issues around the world  
• Have become more interested in engaging in community work since making personal connections to the people and content in the movie  | • Participants are equipped with a new tool to use in relaying their story and concerns  
• Used Art Code decodifying questions to analyze the movie and make valuable connections to the project they worked on  |
| **Activity:** Closing Activity for Expedition  
**My Role:** Facilitator | • Participants reflected on their experience and shared how they overcame challenges and assessed their personal and professional growth  
• They happily received “Super Hero” appreciations from their peers, demonstrating the strength of appreciation and encouraging the reciprocation of it  | • There are plans to use these activities again with the next expedition cohort  |
| **Activity:** Fishing Forum  
**My Role:** Facilitator | • After a few participants shared their answer to, “My dream for my work and my community is”, a fisherman spoke whole-heartedly about sustainability and how it effects his family  | • Icebreakers and creative exercises were used by trainers in their work with fishers  
• The forum was referred to by a trainee as the most |
participants standing, moving and reflecting on the days learnings and their experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity: Improv Sculptures</th>
<th>Activity: Improv Sculptures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>My Role:</strong> Curriculum Designer/Facilitator</td>
<td><strong>My Role:</strong> Curriculum Designer/Facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An interactive activity designed to illustrate individual and team contributions, as well as the power of collaboration</td>
<td>This activity sparked a conversation on effective communication, reviewing the current office communication systems in place and how to contribute towards positive change within the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participants were quite and attentive, which was a major positive shift in behavior at these forums</td>
<td>• Trainees have used other creative exercises in their work, including role play and a game involving fishing data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Based on the outcome of the activity, I gained further support to continue facilitating similar sessions during staff meetings specifically focused on sharing teaching tools and teambuilding activities</td>
<td>• The participants shared words such as teamwork, collaboration, and checking-in during debrief. They also asked each other questions, and agreed on the value of clear communication channels</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event: Reef Week – Parade and Council of All Beings Variation</th>
<th>Event: Reef Week – Parade and Council of All Beings Variation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>My Role:</strong> Trainee Coach/Curriculum Designer/Facilitator</td>
<td><strong>My Role:</strong> Trainee Coach/Curriculum Designer/Facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized a cross organizational collaboration to celebrate “Reef Week” (annual national event raising awareness about the Belize Barrier Reef) which included a parade and a workshop with students on mask making and character building in preparation for their presentation of a modified “Council of All Beings”</td>
<td>Students eagerly applied their knowledge on reef creatures towards creating vibrant characters who shared relevant information to the community at large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trainees experienced the positive impact of fusing a new creative activity with a traditional form of awareness building (parade)</td>
<td>• The parade presented the community with an opportunity to learn in a new, informal and entertaining way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trainees gained experience towards future event planning</td>
<td>• Trainees have used other creative exercises in their work, including role play and a game involving fishing data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project: Educational Signage</td>
<td>My Role: Trainee Coach/Facilitator/Project Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>This project supported the creation of child and adult specific education spaces such as interactive displays and artwork, to be installed in the Marine Reserve</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• One of the best outcomes of this collaboration is that the artists involved now see themselves as a team, whereas before they were each others competition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• They learned how their combined skills truly complemented each other and they would like to continue to work together.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The installed artwork is already receiving lots of positive attention and we all believe this will bring the artists more work opportunities, individually as well as collaboratively.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training: Foundations Course</th>
<th>My Role: Training Designer / Co-facilitator</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This training aimed to build and strengthen individual communication skills and develop creative representations of the organizations issue areas for community workshops and outreach</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>From the participants:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learned about each other on a personal level</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Realized that being in the stretch zone encourages us to challenge ourselves in order to be open to new things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Acknowledged that many of us have similar ideas, which was not known before</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the participants:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Keep working on our internal communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relationship building with stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Introducing creative activities in community meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stretch! Out of comfort zone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop creative ways to communicate within the office</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training: Placencia Staff Retreat</th>
<th>My Role: Co-facilitator</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The main objectives of this staff retreat were to develop stronger communication amongst colleagues, self motivation, problem solving skills and support the breakdown of barriers inhibiting teamwork</td>
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<td>From the participants:</td>
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<td>• “I enjoyed the idea that we were able to become equals”</td>
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<td>• “Paired up as similar animals (icebreaker) and interviewing each other helped us learn something personal from our colleague. This made it easy to be more expressive about how we felt about our roles and work dynamic”</td>
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<td>From the Executive Director:</td>
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<td>• “The processes we used were effective in guiding the extraction of information and opinions from the staff which will be beneficial for me in a leadership position”</td>
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<td>Participatory conversations turned into “Ah-ha” moments when participants were able to transition from reflection to action</td>
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<tr>
<td>From the participants:</td>
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<td>• “We are working on garbage problems at schools, so I hope to talk to local teachers and share ...”</td>
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This workshop shares various organizations environmental message through the creation of recycled art projects

- The flow from discussion to hands on worked very well; it was a fluid shift
- “I will plan a session with upper division students on identifying these problems and working on how to solve them together”

**Training:**
Theatre Skits and Radio Drama

**My Role:** Training Co-designer/ Co-facilitator

*This training provided participants a space for a personal and collective idea generation and reflection structure that can be used to generate skits/radio dramas and develop a written campaign and storyboard*

- Participants noted how these exercises could benefit them and their staff in opening up into a more creative way of thinking/being
- “I learned how to gain confidence in presenting. This helped me to speak more boldly, and acknowledge how emotion plays a vital role in my character”
- “I think we are going to work on some radio ads for my organization”

**Workshop:**
Puppet Show

**My Role:** Trainee Coach/ Curriculum & Workshop Designer/ Facilitator

- As a follow up to a Hicatee turtle release (endangered species the organization is educating its stakeholders on) trainees and I decided to use a puppet show as a means to bring forth their conservation message
- The workshop consisted of working with primary school students on creating a puppet show from start to finish; students were presented with content, developed a story
- The workshop changed the dynamic of the classroom. The students were assigned to work in small groups and truly collaborate. Sitting in a circle and having participatory conversation seemed new for the classroom; it was great to see them positively responding to the changes
- I found some students who were quieter during the first few sessions, open up through the process. All of the students took pride in the puppets they made, the story they wrote and their role during the performance. It truly demonstrated a team effort
- Puppet making was a first for the school, and with the newfound excitement, the trainees and I are eager to return when school commences to perform the show at new venues, pass the fun along to another class and have more workshops
inspired by the content, made puppets, stage props and performed the show

| Workshop: Researchers Retreat | • Through the use of the *Problem Tree/ Solution Tree* activity participants identified an obstacle towards team cohesion  
• The creative activities inspired the group to work on clearer communication, which in return improved the team dynamic and the program  
• Participants’ pledged to work on time management  
• They plan to develop a new checklist to use as a management tool - this will ease the team into defining their research routine and hold members accountable for their designated tasks |
| My Role: Trainee Coach/Curriculum & Workshop Designer/Co-facilitator | A teambuilding workshop which aimed to define a shared vision for the Research Team |

| Workshop: Lionfish Repetitive Images | • Participants learned how to create stencils and cutouts to use in replicating an image multiple times  
• Participants observed the passerby’s noticing the images and questioning staff about them. This proved the images to be successful in sparking curiosity, which aided in spreading the organizations message  
• The lionfish images have been saved and can be reused for other festivals and educational events |
| My Role: Trainee Coach/Workshop Designer/Facilitator | • This workshop entailed the creation of multiple large Lionfish images strategically placed around the community leading to an information booth on the subject matter  
• The images and the booth served as a means to build awareness on the invasive species (Lionfish) and the organizations work towards eradicating them |
### Council of All Beings

#### Activity Description
Participants began by choosing a non-human life form to represent in a circle process or "council." They make masks to represent their life form and assemble in a circle to speak as that being. The council has three consecutive stages. First, the beings address each other, telling of the changes and challenges they are experiencing in these present times. In the second stage, the facilitator invites humans into the center and the other life forms speak to them directly. In the third stage, the other life forms offer their gifts, strengths and powers to the humans.

#### Purpose
This process serves to expand our perspective of the ecological crisis and heighten awareness of our connection, belonging and interdependence with the web of life. It also helps us acknowledge and give voice to the suffering of our world, as well as to experience the beauty and power of life.

#### Intended Outcomes
To strengthen our sense of belonging and connection with the larger community of the natural world and strengthen our commitment to defend life in all its forms; to see an issue from diverse perspectives

#### Skills Developed
Spontaneous expression, empathy with non-human life forms, listening; perspective shifting

#### Total Time
2 hours

#### Number of Participants
At least 10

#### Materials
Pre-made masks or cardstock, pastels, markers, magazine, scissors, glue, elastic, music and sound system, bell, talking object (optional)

#### Setting
Large room or outdoors

#### Timing Overview
- Introductory Frame: 10 minutes
- Being Chosen: 10 minutes
- Mask-making: 30 minutes
- Council: 1 hour
- Debrief: 10 minutes

#### Introductory Frame (10 minutes)
Through economic systems, worldview and mass consumerism of the modern age, we have set ourselves apart from the natural world. We use the earth as a commodity for our goods and markets, resulting in an ecological crisis that affects all species. We are in the middle of a massive extinction due to habitat destruction, toxic contamination and the unraveling of the ecosystems upon which all life depends. A part of our work is to heal this split with the natural world, to remember our inter-existence with all beings, and to find in the web of life the power and strengths that will help us to take bold and innovative actions on behalf of life.

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Reimagining Social Change
Council of All Beings

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The Council of All Beings was developed in Australia in 1985 with Joanna Macy, John Seed and other environmental activists as a way to step outside of our human identity and speak on behalf of other life forms. They can speak on behalf of a mountain, rainforest, oak tree, honeybee, dolphin, coyote, or any non-human being that comes to their heart and mind. A Council is a process in which people sit together in circle and speak from the heart. It is a powerful tool to widen our lens, reawaken our sense of solidarity with all life and gain fresh perspective on the damage our modern society is causing other species. A talking object is often used to pass around the circle and it indicates the person whose turn it is to speak. It can be a beautiful stone or stick or feather, whatever holds meaning for the group.

BEING CHOSEN (10 minutes)
- Put some meditative trance music or nature sounds in the background to create the ambience if you are not able to work outdoors.
- Participants take time to walk alone in nature or meditate in silence and allow themselves to be chosen by another life form, for whom they will speak in Council. Ask people to relax deeply and open their minds and hearts. Encourage them to go with the first impulse that arises, even if they don’t know a lot about the particular species. Suggest that they visualize this being fully and from every angle, its size, shape and ways of seeing and moving. In their minds eye, they can ask the being permission to embody its form and ask how it wishes to be represented.

MASK-MAKING (30 minutes)
- Lay out materials such as cardboard, pastels, color markers, glue sticks, tape, scissors, strong fabric, etc. on tables or ground cloths. Let people also gather materials from nature if you are outside.
- Everyone works to make their masks in silence. People can attach their masks with string or elastic or by taping the mask to a stick to be held in front of the face. Be sure that everyone cuts holes to see and speak through.
- If time allows, invite participants to start moving as their life form and experience how it moves. You can ask questions like:
  - What shape are you?
  - How much space do you take up?
  - What is your skin or outer surface like?
  - How do you see the world?
  - How do you move or how are you moved by other forces?

COUNCIL (1 hour)
- Ring a bell or use a drum to invite participants to come to the Council “in character.”
- Once everyone is in the circle, the guide (also in her adopted life form), welcomes them to this Council to talk about what is befalling their earth and their lives.
- Invite everyone to identify themselves in a brief ceremonial way. Provide an example: “I am River and I speak for the waters of the world.”

THREE STAGES OF THE COUNCIL
1. Speaking at random or passing a talking object around the circle, the Beings are invited to express the particular concerns they bring to the Council. For example, “As River, I want to tell you about the mega-dams that are being built which block my flow and the migration of the fish who live within me. I have so many toxic and chemical substances that it is no longer safe to drink my waters. I used to be the source of life, and now I am the source of illness and death for so many.” The rest of the Beings in the Council are invited to respond with “We hear you, River.”

2. After a while, the guide reflects that all the suffering that the Beings describe seem to derive from the activities of the human species and their modern industrial ways. “It would be good for humans to hear what we have to say. Let us summon them to our Council to listen only. Would five or six of you put down your masks and move to the center to be humans?” The guide beats the drum and humans come to sit back to back in the middle, facing outward. From now on, they are addressed directly: “Hear us humans. This is our world, too. And we’ve been here...
a lot longer than you. Yet now our days are numbered because of what you are doing. Be still and listen.”

The humans listen silently as the Council continues. After a time when numerous Beings have spoken directly to the humans, the drum or bell sounds again and other humans are invited to replace the ones in the center.

When all the Beings have had a chance to address the humans, a major shift occurs. The guide may reflect, “For all their machines and apparent power, the humans now are frightened. They feel overwhelmed by the destructive forces they have unleashed. It does not serve our survival for them to panic or give up, for truly our lives are in their hands. If they can awaken to their place in the web of life, they will change their ways. What strengths and gifts can we offer to them now?” Now each Being has the chance to offer to the humans the strengths and gifts inherent in each life-form. “As River, I offer you my ability to flow and provide life-giving nourishment to all who come into contact with you.”

Ending the Council can happen in a variety of ways. Some wind up reflectively in silence. Others can end with vigorous drumming and dancing. In whatever way the Council ends, a formal releasing of the Being they adopted should take place, thanking them for the privilege of speaking for them and letting the identity go.

DEBRIEF (10 minutes)
• Invite the group to reflect on what it was like to embody and speak as another life form
• What insights did they gain about themselves and the world by taking a different perspective?
• What actions do we need to take in order to protect and restore our environment?
• How can this activity be applied or adapted in your work?

VARIATIONS
• If time is short, or materials are not at hand, drop the mask making. If desired, use labels instead to hang around the neck with a figure or symbol.
• You can also do an abbreviated form in which people simply step aside from their human identity and speak from the perspective of another being. They can work in small groups and each life form can respond to a series of prompts, for example:
  ❖ Describe what it is like to be this life form, the powers, perspectives and relationships you have.
  ❖ Describe the difficulties you are experiencing now due to loss of habitat, pollution, drift nets, clear cutting, factory farming, etc.
  ❖ Since humans are causing these difficulties and only they can correct them, consider what strengths of yours you can offer to the humans to help them make the changes necessary to your survival, and the survival of life on earth.

If your issue is not an environmental challenge, you can apply a similar concept to examine other social issues or conflicts. Ask people to speak from the perspective of all the other human beings who are impacted by the issue.