TRYING FOR A LEARNING CITY BEFORE MY COUNTRY LEAVES UNESCO: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF SETTING OUT IN A TIME OF TRUMP

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ABSTRACT: Over 200 municipalities from 48 countries belong to a global network of localities working independently and collectively to realize a robust concept of cities, towns and regions as ecosystems of lifelong learning for the well-being of individuals, communities, nations and the planet. What is the number of U.S. localities participating? Zero. This narrative describes the efforts of an Adult Learning educator and her colleagues to begin planting seeds for an American entry into the Learning Cities Movement and the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities. The framework is being employed around the world as a policy tool and as an organizing concept. The objective is to advance an agenda of inclusive learning opportunities, community vitality, and innovative solutions to global sustainability issues. The author concludes that while acknowledging conditions of domestic divisiveness and a bellicose head of state behaving intemperately toward other nations, American educators can go forward through people-to-people diplomacy and an undeterred commitment to the common good.

Keywords: UNESCO, Trump, global networks, narrative, adult learning, Learning City Movement

"I am so giddy with the possibilities that I'm having a hard time calming down enough to articulate; how to capture and put into words all the exciting ideas?"   − *Michelle*

I hung up from a conversation with Michelle, her words reverberating in my mind. Here we were, talking shop on a national holiday. The prompting for this burst of hopefulness and creativity at first appears to be happenstance; yet as Pasteur famously noted, "Dans les champs de I´observation, le hasard ne favorise que les esprits pre´pare´s", or, "chance favors the prepared mind" (Dousset, 2003, p. 195). I cannot speak for Michelle, nor the others involved in considering answering a request for proposals (RFP), as to why this particular RFP is serendipitous. But for me, it was the Third International Conference of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities that prompted me to jump at the Design Challenge opportunity Michelle and I were discussing.

Garden metaphors will not be denied. Given that I live atop a former stone quarry, I am well aware that the miracle of the small garden there is made possible by the loads of horse manure shovelled onto a plot of the land for several years by the previous owner. Since purchasing the place a decade ago, my family has continued the soil augmentation with household compost. The soil shaping of my prepared mind no doubt began long ago growing up on the Falls of the Ohio River. There a series of navigational locks and dams enabled my childhood explorations of fossil beds and instilled in me a delight of discovery in the ubiquitous spaces of my hometown. After an interval as a community practitioner focused on leadership development for the common good, my naïve experiential knowledge of pedagogy-of-place eventually led to more formal research into the yin and yang of the co-generative relationships of people and environs (Raymer, 2007, & Raymer and Horrigan, 2015).

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Teaching college students studying Adult Learning as well as working with employee adult learners themselves, these interests daily inform my andragogical practice. So it was that I travelled to the Learning Cities conference in Cork City, Ireland, and relished the seed exchange of ideas I found there. The fact that Cork City was hosting this international conference was a remarkable feat in itself, as the two prior gatherings were hosted by the much larger cities of Beijing and Mexico City. Cork City's extant Learning City infrastructure within the local government, and its annual Festival of Lifelong Learning, no doubt were key factors in the city's selection as the first European host. Although the UNESCO conference was held in the Fall, and Cork's annual lifelong learning festival takes place in the Spring, local conference organizers put together an impressive festival "sampling." The entire event, both the conference and the festival showcase were amazing. From trying out traditional dancing and Irish team sports, to meeting adult students at work in trade practicums, and seeing local schools integrating aspects of Traveller culture into the curriculum, the festival sampler gave an excellent taste of cradle-to-grave learning in both formal and informal venues.

On first contact after the conference, I put my students into small groups and divided among them the materials I had brought back from Cork. I told them they had an hour to find out about Learning Cities. They could use the internet and the items I had provided, and they had sixty minutes to put together a presentation to address five questions:
1. What is the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC)?
2. How is a Learning City defined?
3. What is the link between Learning Cities and the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs)?
4. Which SDGs especially pertain to adult and lifelong learning?
5. What are two ways the host city of the 3rd International Conference puts being a Learning City into practice?

Students were very excited about this activity, and quickly the room was abuzz. At the end of sixty minutes each of the four groups offered surprisingly good presentations. Naturally, much common ground was covered, and yet each group managed to find a few details the others did not. To the first question students readily uncovered that the Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) was initiated by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) as "an international policy-oriented network providing inspiration, know-how and best practice" (UIL, 2015, p. 3). Furthermore, they found UIL's purpose in doing so was to "support the implementation of lifelong learning" in that GNLC promotes policy dialogue and peer learning among member cities; forges links; fosters partnerships; provides capacity development; and develops instruments to encourage and recognize progress made in building Learning Cities" (UIL, 2015, p. 4).

For the second question, most of the student groups cited UNESCO's assertion that a Learning City "promotes lifelong learning for all," and:
- effectively mobilizes its resources in every sector to promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education;
- revitalizes learning in families and communities;

- facilitates learning for and in the workplace;
- extends the use of modern learning technologies;
- enhances quality and excellence in learning; and
- fosters a culture of learning throughout life (Valdés-Cotera, et.al, 2015, p. 5).

Class members were particularly energized to explore the connection between sustainability and Learning Cities, and it was here that the group presentations evinced the most variety. As the presentations progressed, the class seemed most enthused about one source in particular. Youth delegates of the second International Conference on Learning Cities had caucused in Mexico City and wrote a declaration, which, in part, stated:

> We recognize:
> - the holistic and multi-dimensional approach of learning cities, focusing on lifelong learning as a foundation for sustainable development;
> - the importance of learning cities for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in particular SDG 4 ('Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all') and SDG 11 ('Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'); and
> - the strategic directions for young people's involvement when building learning cities . . . (Youth Delegation, 2015, p. 1).

The fourth question, pertaining which of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 are most directly germane to lifelong learning, garnered variance as well as agreement among the students. The class referenced the same two SDGs noted in the 2015 Youth Statement, #4, quality lifelong learning for all, and #11, resilient communities. One group also included #17, which pertains to collaborative partnerships, and another team made a case for #3, good health and well-being. This team reasoned that good health was conducive to learning, and ill health was not. Another group included gender equity, SDG #5, noting that access to learning opportunities were often restricted for women and girls.

From their responses to question five, which asked them to identify two ways in which the host city of the 3rd International Conference of the GNLC made manifest their commitment to being a Learning City, I think every student was ready to head for Ireland as soon as possible. Several groups noted Cork's Festival of Lifelong Learning; one cited the area-wide, inclusive and intergenerational music program. Another group highlighted the idea of "learning neighborhoods," an initiative to put additional resources to support programming into more challenged neighborhoods. Cork, as of this writing, has established four such areas.

The interest piqued that day continued, and for the remainder of the semester students periodically asked whether any courses or study trips related to Learning Cities were forthcoming. Shortly thereafter my University put out a call for proposals for an initiative called Internationalizing the Cornell Curriculum, and with recent student enthusiasm in mind, I decided to submit a proposal. After conferring with colleagues, I

proposed to develop two courses to involve students with Learning Cities, and to seek an area locality that might be interested in pursuing the UNESCO designation. Being in upstate NY, a region more rural than urban, I came up with the term "Learning Locality." I saw partnering with a community as a way for students enrolled in an Introduction to Adult Learning course to engage with local residents to explore the prospect. For the second course, I envisioned focusing on how different member municipalities in the Global Network of Learning Cities are working on local solutions toward achieving the SDGs. I submitted my proposal in February and received a positive response in April.

At the start of this account I mentioned this being a national holiday; it is, in fact, that most patriotic of American holidays, July 4th, Independence Day. In the current climate, the thought of celebrating this public birthday stirs mixed feelings, as even the briefest reflection on just a few factors illustrates. Consider examples of nations and cities around the world resolutely acting to address the present and future consequences of climate change—e.g. the City of London Corporation's recent announcement that it will be switch completely to renewable energy in October, 2018 (Tisheva). Notable, too, is the European Union's energy ministers' recent agreement to rise the percentage in a binding renewable energy target of 32% by 2030, an increase of 5% from the previous goal of 27% (European Commission). Meanwhile, many American leaders are not only ignoring the daily portents of climate change, but are, in fact, not opposing the Trump Administration's actions to weaken or even revoke environmental protections (see, e.g., Hejny, 2018; Popovich, N., Albeck-Ripka, L., & Pierre-Louis, K., 2018.)

Consider, too, the present state of the U.S. in international and intranational relations. Even before declarations of "America First!" by the current U.S. President, international cooperation was not a viral dinner topic at many tables across this country. Actions and denouncements by the current administration continue to overturn basic ideals of collaboration among nations. Actions such as backing out of the NY Declaration for Refugees and leaving the membership as of December 31, 2018 (U.S. Department of State) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), now seem tame in light of more recent images of toddlers crying for their parents, and of children in cages at the southern border (Shear, Goodnough and Haberman, 2018). The President's undiplomatic attitudes, behaviors and tweets not only position the United States in opposition to allies and other countries, but also inflame divisions here within the country. Repeatedly, this President demonstrates an arrogant, isolationistic attitude, and yet he maintains a significant base of support. This grim state of affairs accentuates the dire need for appeals to better angels and clear avenues of meaningful connection with fellow human beings both domestically and abroad. It would be foolhardy to imagine an American entrance into the Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) would catalyze a national conversion akin to that of Saul on the road to Damascus. Yet, given the mission, focus and benefits of the Learning Cities movement, the complete absence of U.S. participation in the GNLC brings to mind the aphorism about cutting ones nose off to spite one's face.

What do we do? As educators, researchers and community practitioners, we can proactively construct learning environments and experiences that are open, hospitable, and inquiry-based—and provide students and lifelong learners with introductions to new colleagues around the world. With opportunities to connect with others on shared aims, we create venues where persons of different perspectives can gain experiential knowledge of honoring their own inclinations to respect others and seek common humanity. *Linking-through-learning*, which I define as "creating conditions for people to forge relationships of mutuality across differences while focusing together on learning aims," provides avenues for satisfying experiences and new connections. This principle is one that serves well on multiple scales–individuals, communities, regions and global networks.

Cornell University's Community Learning and Service Partnership, CLASP, is an example of linking-through-learning at the immediate and direct scale. Since its inception in 1990, CLASP has cultivated learning-focused relationships between Cornellians of differing walks of life on campus. Students enrolled in the Education courses of the Lifelong Learning curriculum are paired with CU service workers. Throughout the semester, students apply what they learn in class with respect to designing and facilitating adult learning, and they put that knowledge into practice as the educational mentors of their employee adult learners. That both students and adult learners find these partnerships mutually rewarding is apparent. A small sample of brief excerpts reveal students experience transformative learning. Their words also suggest being surprised by the deep human connections many make with their Learning Partners; relationships of mutual growth across differences in demographics such as age, country of origin, first language, orientation, race, social class, gender, religion and education. The following are some of their words:

- I have learned more in this partnership than in any other class.
- Hearing her talk about the sustainability with such fervor makes me feel as if what we are doing together really matters.
- I appreciate my Learning Partner for listening to me talk about what it is like to be a black woman in the United States and at an Ivy League University. . . She has made me a more patient and understanding person in the way that I teach and interact with people different from me.
- What I expected was to have a chance to make a difference on a Cornell worker's life. What I did not realize is that I would gain just as much – if not more – from this course as my Learning Partner did.
- Regardless of how my week was going, I knew that I could count on D to come into our meetings Tuesday mornings with a smile and an appetite to learn and to be challenged. While he may not know it, I learned as much from him as he learned from me.

The employee partners of these students also experience transformation. In addition to the achievements witnessed within the temporal constraints of the semester calendar, we periodically hear back from former CLASP adult participants months after involvement in the program. Following are some of their messages:

- I wanted to thank you for all your support and knowledge. I have been a cleaner on campus for over 4 years. I recently applied for a new position and I was offered the job. My Learning Partner's knowledge of Resumes and Cover letters proved to be a great success in my job search.
- Just to let you know that I had my interview and passed my civics test! My Oath ceremony is in August in Rochester. Thanks to you, I felt that I had a great help preparing for my civics test and in preparing my N-400 application. Also, I know of two more people who were in the CLASP course who passed. . . .
- Not only did I learn a lot, I made a new friend. I feel like I gained a new son.

Over the twenty-eight-year tenure of the program, major shifts in the demographics of the service employees have transpired. Where once the employee learner population was entirely US-born, now over half of the adult participants in CLASP are first- or second-generation immigrants. Increasingly in the classroom, too, the number of undergraduate international students taking the Adult Learning courses has grown. As noted by the Institute of International Education (IIE) in their most recent annual edition of The Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange, more than a million international students enrolled at American universities and colleges for the academic year 2016-2017. This increase of 3.4 % over the prior year continues an eleven-year trend in rising total enrollment by international students in the U.S. (Institute of International Education).
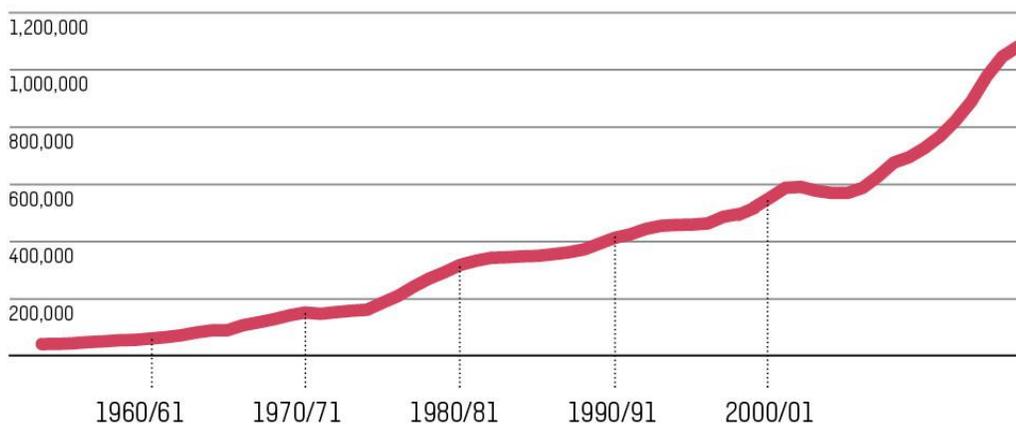
Figure 1: Trends Over Time of International Students in the United States

https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Fact-Sheets-and-Infographics/Infographics

The same report did note, however, a decrease of 3% in the number of new international enrolees coming to the United States. This was the first drop observed in the twelve years IIE has been tracking new enrollments. According to another IIE publication (Baer, 2017), the decrease is attributed to "problems with visa delays and denials, the costs of U.S. higher education, and the U.S. social and political climate" (p. 1).

Thus, while the student body has become more global, students are cautious about coming to the U.S. now. Today, with the Supreme Court ruling to uphold the travel ban on people from primarily Muslim-majority countries, this situation will likely to be exacerbated. Ted Mitchell, president of the American Council on Education, was quick to issue a statement on the Supreme Court's decision handed down on June 26, 2018: "We are extremely disappointed by the Supreme Court's decision to uphold the Trump administration's travel ban. In the current climate of harsh rhetoric on immigration, the travel ban contributes to the perception that this country is no longer a welcoming place for study and research . . ." (American Council on Education, 2018). This, then, is a moment when a concept such as Learning Cities is one of the bright ideas which, when enacted with other campaigns of hope and resilience, can counter the apparent zeitgeist of belligerence, xenophobia and intolerance expressed daily by the U.S. Administration in a country once known for welcoming refuges.

In the interim between submitting the application for an Internationalizing the Cornell Curriculum grant in February and the July 4th conversation with Michelle, I set about to get the Learning Localities project underway. I saw there were at least two undertakings: one, to initiate a curriculum design process, and two, to begin reaching out to community groups. I began by returning to Cork to meet with city officials and to experience for myself Cork's week-long Festival of Lifelong Learning. I hoped to learn from those directly involved in the initiation and development of Cork City's identity as a Learning City about how Cork acts upon the resultant commitments. Equally important, I wanted to see firsthand what the embodiment of those policy priorities looked like on the ground.

City leaders and civil servants were liberally generous with their time, despite my visiting during the annual Festival, a very busy week for them. With the city having hosted the UNESCO International Conference six months earlier, this year's Festival of Lifelong Learning included a daylong follow-up seminar called, "Leave No One Behind: Implementing the UNESCO Call to Action on Learning Cities." Between the Festival, the conversations with city officials and leaders, and the bonus opportunity to take in the seminar, this trip indeed constituted an information-rich site visit. Something I had not anticipated was that leaders from three additional member municipalities of the Global Network were participating in the seminar, the Learning Cities of Limerick, Ireland; Belfast, Northern Ireland; and Bristol, England. Further linking this Spring festival to the conference in the Fall, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning sent a video message which was shared at the seminar. I was impressed by the universal receptiveness and willingness of everyone I sought out with my questions. I also met another American who, like me, came to learn more about the Cork annual festival, and so I found a new colleague who shared my interest in nudging a U.S. locality into the fellowship of Learning Cities.

After this site visit, the second half of the semester still remained, and I put Learning Cities activities on pause for several weeks. Once Cornell's semester wrapped up, I turned my attention to the curriculum design aspect of the project. I first reached out to my local Community of Practice, a group composed of K-12 teachers, myself and one

teacher of ESL for adults. For our last meeting of the academic year I suggested we each bring something we were working on for next year and take time to provide one another feedback and suggestions. The method we agreed on for this was for each of us to take a table, lay out our work in progress, and, on a big flipchart, to write out the questions we wanted our colleagues to address. Without speaking, we each spent time reviewing the materials provided at each table and writing our responses to the questions, initialling our replies so that the questioner knew who to follow-up with if clarification or more information was desired.

This was one of my first attempts to present the Learning Cities concept, and what I spread out on the table were print copies of slides I had put together for this purpose. The questions I posed to my Community of Practice were four:

- What groups and people are apparent partners for this endeavor?
- What about this idea would most interest your students?
- What suggestions do you have for how I can present this concept in a way that is easy for people to understand?
- Thinking toward learning outcomes, if your students were in a course on Learning Cities, what would you like to see them gain from the experience?

Even though we had chosen to both present and provide comments in a written format without speaking, one of the main things I took from this first foray was the challenge of "talking" about the learning concept idea in a setting like this, i.e. one not specifically focused on Learning Cities. My Community of Practice colleagues were intrigued, but I could tell from some of their comments that the visuals laid upon the table had not conveyed a good sense of the concept. I saw that my slides contained a fair number of ideas not part of the everyday concerns in the K-12 world. Partly this is due to the Learning Cities beginning with a tripartite concept of learning that is lifelong, life-wide and life-deep. Most of the community of practice members were aware of lifelong learning, but the other two elements seemed to be unfamiliar. *Life-wide* refers to resources and opportunities for learning in all the spaces of our daily rounds (Cordie, Witt and Witt). *Life-deep* refers to transformative learning, learning that catalyses change in one's outlook, sense of self, prospects or spirit. In this expanded perspective, communities and environs are themselves understood as ecosystems of opportunities and resources for teaching and learning. Embedded within this concept are values of informed curiosity, enjoyment of learning with others, and learning about diverse neighbors and cultural communities here and abroad. In itself, the idea of Learning Cities is complex, and I was asking my colleagues to not only absorb the concept but also, in a short amount of time, to think about its application. Although not the same, I was reminded of the slow realization that dawns upon my students at Cornell, both undergraduate and adult, when they first recognize their shared assumption of equating learning with schooling.

Cornell, a university once renowned for Adult, Extension and Outreach Education, no longer offers a degree in Education, neither undergraduate nor graduate. The decision to disband the Department of Education was made during the economic shutdown of 2008. The very last graduate student completed his doctorate December 2017. Adult learning

as a subject of study and practice has a small presence within a handful of education courses that constitute a minor students can add to their majors. In general, undergraduate students are very eager for community engaged courses at Cornell, and so I find myself facing bright faces in my courses because students have heard it is a good class where you get to practice what you learn. My students, then, come from all seven of the colleges and schools that comprise the university. Most have little awareness of the existence of Adult Education, nor of lifelong learning, nor of formal learning existing on a spectrum of types and settings of knowledge acquisition. This is, in fact, one of the reasons I am so drawn to introducing students to Learning Cities. Not only will they gain awareness of Adult Learning as a field, but they will be exposed to some of the myriad ways in which Adult Learning is framed and practiced in other communities and countries where the discipline is more strongly established. Coming to the field via the idea of ubiquitous learning as embraced in Learning Cities, especially with the movement's emphasis on the UN Sustainable Development Goals, students can relate their own interests and passions to the discipline.

My next step toward undertaking curriculum development was to put together a small group of University colleagues for a brainstorming session, an Eat and Ideate working lunch. Marvin Pritts, a horticulture professor and the chair of the Leadership minor, kindly agreed to partner with me, as he is interested in increasing the number of courses available to Leadership minor students as culminating capstone experiences. Marvin and I put together a slate of a dozen good thinkers, a mix of faculty, professional staff, support staff, and service staff. Roughly half of the group were faculty and research scientists and the other half staff. In addition to an intention of having fun thinking and imagining together, the goals for the two-hour session were to:
1. Gain an introduction to the Learning Cities Movement;
2. Imagine what a possible Learning Locality could be like;
3. Generate ideas regarding curriculum; and,
4. Share thoughts on local coalition-building for a Learning Locality.

For an introduction I presented twenty slides in an Ignite format for fifteen seconds each. To establish a common base of information as a starting point, my aim was to address five questions in five minutes: a) What is a Learning City/Locality?; b) How does this concept resonate with your work and interests?; c) What might a snapshot of the Global Learning Cities (GLC) movement today look like?; d) What does the GLC movement have to do with Sustainable Development Goals 2030?; and, e) Where does course design fit within this Internationalizing the Cornell Curriculum project? Having learned not to make any assumptions about prior knowledge, I accompanied the slides with handouts so participants would have the information in two formats, and I built into the presentation "lingo clue" slides to explain unfamiliar terms. Early in the presentation, just after a lingo clue to define lifelong learning, I asked everyone to write down a word or phrase coming to mind at that point. After the Ignite we went around the room and shared those thoughts. I have condensed those thoughts below. Even in this quick exercise, at least a dozen substantive issues were raised; for brevity, only ten are included here.
- Inclusive –the word appears so many times. And we're a room full of predominately white folks?

- Lifelong –I got excited about the word because for me implies a place where we can bolster each other up. So, the idea that lifelong could be a principle or part of a mission statement.
- Resources –is it more about talking to people and getting them excited on a personal level, or is there a need for top-down resources?
- Municipality? – A lot of folks in my program may not live in or near a city, or want to get involved in a city, but would do so in local governments and in smaller towns and villages.
- Doing enough? I wrote this down because I focus on climate change; you can imagine any setting, and I'll ask the same question: Are we pushing hard enough? If all of us really contribute will it be enough?
- Opportunity. The way that our educational system is set up in this country right now, it's really hard to stop and then restart later in life. But the idea of a learning locality makes it easier for someone to pick up learning at any time and change careers, change paths, or just learn new things for your own growth.
- Change. It's a change from the way I've always thought of learning in a much more linear way – you have kindergarten, you go on, you leave high school, you go on to college. This is a very broad, spread-out, involved process, and I was just amazed in Ireland by how many organizations knew each other and how involved they were with each other and how excited they were. This reminded me of the whole change in way of thinking that you need to pull this together.
- Learning is for everyone everywhere. I think it's a really cool idea, and I think that Ithaca being a Learning City would be really awesome because Cornell's such a huge part of Ithaca, and I think it has a lot of potential.
- Motivation – I was thinking about what motivates a place like Cork to do that, and what's in it for the people that participate and the citizens? I'm thinking about why aren't there any learning communities in the United States, and do we have such a polarized society that we can't get together and decide what we have in common? Do we have enough critical mass . . . ?
- Process. How do you go about interesting people, or seeing if there is interest, in becoming a learning locality? How do you teach a process as course content? This is more like co-creating with communities rather than placing students in situations.

Participants spent the majority of the time working with a set of four questions similar to those I used with my community of practice. Valuable dialog ensued, and many solid suggestions were offered. I found, however, the issues first raised in the responses to the initial thoughts question to be the most timely and constructive for this early part of the process. Those comments provide a number of useful insights in that they: a) identify challenges in both campus and community contexts, b) divulge areas of misunderstanding, c) question the veracity of the project itself, and d) reveal the appeal of the idea and desires for reasons to be hopeful. All of these must be skilfully addressed going forward.

Turning to the community side of the project, I return to the phone conversation with Michelle that began this account. We were discussing prospects of submitting a proposal in response to a design challenge calling for innovative ideas to address barriers young adults without advanced education face in both obtaining work and succeeding on the job. I had discovered the request for applications just two weeks before the deadline, and began making cold calls to potential collaborators that same day. Over the next fortnight discussions unfolded over the course of three meetings which collectively drew in members and delegates of three dozen stakeholder groups and institutions. Local governments—city, county, multicounty agencies, and state-level representatives—came to the table, as did adult learners, employers, union leaders, librarians, workforce developers, adult educators, university faculty, nonprofit staff, and community practitioners. Many of these were people who had never met and whose organizations had never contemplated forming partnerships together. These were heady conversations, and one sentiment that came up repeatedly was, "Well, even if we cannot get a proposal accomplished in time, I am really energized to have all these groups together envisioning how we might work together." This echoes what I learned from Cork City leaders. The key to their success, I was told, was due in large part to the commitment made among community institutions to let go of turf concerns and to truly collaborate.

What happens if there is no American membership in the Global Network of Learning Cities before the official withdrawal of the U.S. from UNESCO? Fortunately, wisdom from those already involved in the Learning Cities movement reveals two truths. One, as a colleague in France noted, the United States, for all practical purposes, has been missing in action for years, a reference, in part, to the $500 million in unpaid dues owed to the international agency. I appreciated his plainspokenness on the subject. The second truth was given to me by an Irish colleague who gently reminded me UNESCO membership was not a prerequisite to creating a Learning City. The real work, he said, is primarily local.

Yes, the endeavour is local. Yet, as the American head of state continues to amaze with ever more outlandish and recalcitrant actions—withdrawing from the U.N. Human Rights Council being his latest as of this writing—it is nice to have to fellow travellers. Care to join me?

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