

Exploring Illuminative Systems in Informal Networks of Adults

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ABSTRACT

Are 'higher' and hard to define sensations like synchronicity, love, wholeness, and appreciation part of a pattern or illuminative system that is connected to a larger ecological network or evolutionary design meant to establish homeostasis within the planet? Meeting as groups, in person, or online posting to an interactive website, adults tracked, recorded and described in their own terms everyday encounters with illumination. Illumination in this sense could encompass both spiritual and/or secular significance. Participants built data files of illuminative sensation recorded in video, text, sound bite, drawing and/or journaling. This spatial and sensory awareness activity, initiating from an appreciative foundation, eventually leads to participants conducting informal skillshares in which adults teach one another the strengths they possess when illuminated. A possible outcome of such skillshares could be adults collectively designing new courses, programs, and products for their immediate community.

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ACM Classification Keywords: K.3.1 Computer Uses in Education: Collaborative learning. Miscellaneous.

General Terms: Design

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of a generative metaphor intervention within the context of a participatory action research project is an indirect, non-threatening way of building unity and trust among family and friends through creative recording, dialoguing, teaching and eventual collaboration with one another [1]. This presentation describes an exploratory study in which the metaphor of an *illuminative system* was introduced to prompt adults to engage in informal, networked learning exchanges and encounters. The purpose of the study was to test the feasibility of a system designed to increase individual and collective moments of illumination, as adult learners systemically report it. In this model, participants follow a seven-step process to construct their own meanings—both individually and collectively.

METHOD

Sample The convenience sample for this study was comprised of two groups of volunteer participants from an informal pool of friends and family within my social network. There were a total of 12 participants. Participant age ranged from 25-40, and the sample was 83% female and 58% African

American. All had at least some college education while 50% had some kind of graduate degree.

Data Collection This pilot study explored the interactions happening within the first three stages of this seven-step illuminative process. In a month-long study one group met in a face-to-face exchange in Minneapolis and the other an Internet mediated exchange with participants from Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Amsterdam. The face-to-face group met at a social gathering (dinner) at the beginning and end of the month long study, while the other group worked individually with the peer coordinator by submitting private emails. In the context of identifying what sensations potentially “held the planet together,” participants took at least 10 minutes one time a week for four weeks to record in their diaries where they felt any of their illuminative perceptions.

Data Analysis Content and thematic analyses were used to characterize the types of illuminative experiences, participants’ definitions of illuminative perception, and their reactions to the process.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

After qualitative analysis of the data, the following preliminary findings emerged: 1) A majority of adults in the study expressed interest in having more opportunities for sharing about illuminative moments with one another; 2) Participants were surprised and interested in the differences of how they interpreted illuminative perception; they found it was enlightening to reflect upon internally and to discuss with others; 3) Sensing, recording and discussing illuminative perceptions takes time and emotional investment for some participants, especially those inhibited by depressive or anxious behavioral pattern.

BIOGRAPHY

Amy Scatliff is an educational designer based in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She has worked within adult education for twenty years exploring creativity and how people build their learning around what they love. She studied Visualization at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and has a Master’s of Social Science from The International School for Humanities and Social Sciences (ISHSS) of the University of Amsterdam.

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