



A Project of the Corrales Institute for New Education
a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

Learning Parks: A New Vision for Public Education

A fresh start to a better, lifelong education for everyone

We invite you to join us in creating a new place of learning,
where education is an embodied, social, and lifelong process
among people of all ages collaborating in learning together,
and developing their personal abilities to create
a more humane, vibrant, and democratic society
and a sustainable environment for ourselves
and the health of the Earth.

The purpose
of the Corrales Institute for New Education
is to imagine, invent, and facilitate
the creation of
a new, public place of learning
for people of all ages.

We imagine a Learning Park.





Purposes of Public Education in a Learning Park *[Why]*

Reclaiming democracy

Saving and sustaining the planet

Developing social and personal efficacy

Living healthily

Respecting our humanity

Learning together with multigenerational people of all ages

Growing the esthetic, emotional, and spiritual aspects of social life

Using socially and economically valuable skills, understandings, and tools

Exercising civic responsibility, ethics, and duty

Making a good, satisfying, and sustainable personal life

Finding the joy in learning and living



What is a Learning Park?

A Learning Park is a public place of learning, where people want to be because it is vital and nourishing, where people of all ages and backgrounds go by choice to learn; to meet, do and talk, create and make all manner of things, experience and pursue matters of mutual interest; to meditate, to play, to think freely, to challenge each other, to experiment with new things and new ideas, to exercise mind and body in an environment that enhances their relationships with nature, tools and culture, and with their communities and each other as thoughtful, curious, creative, and enthusiastic human beings.

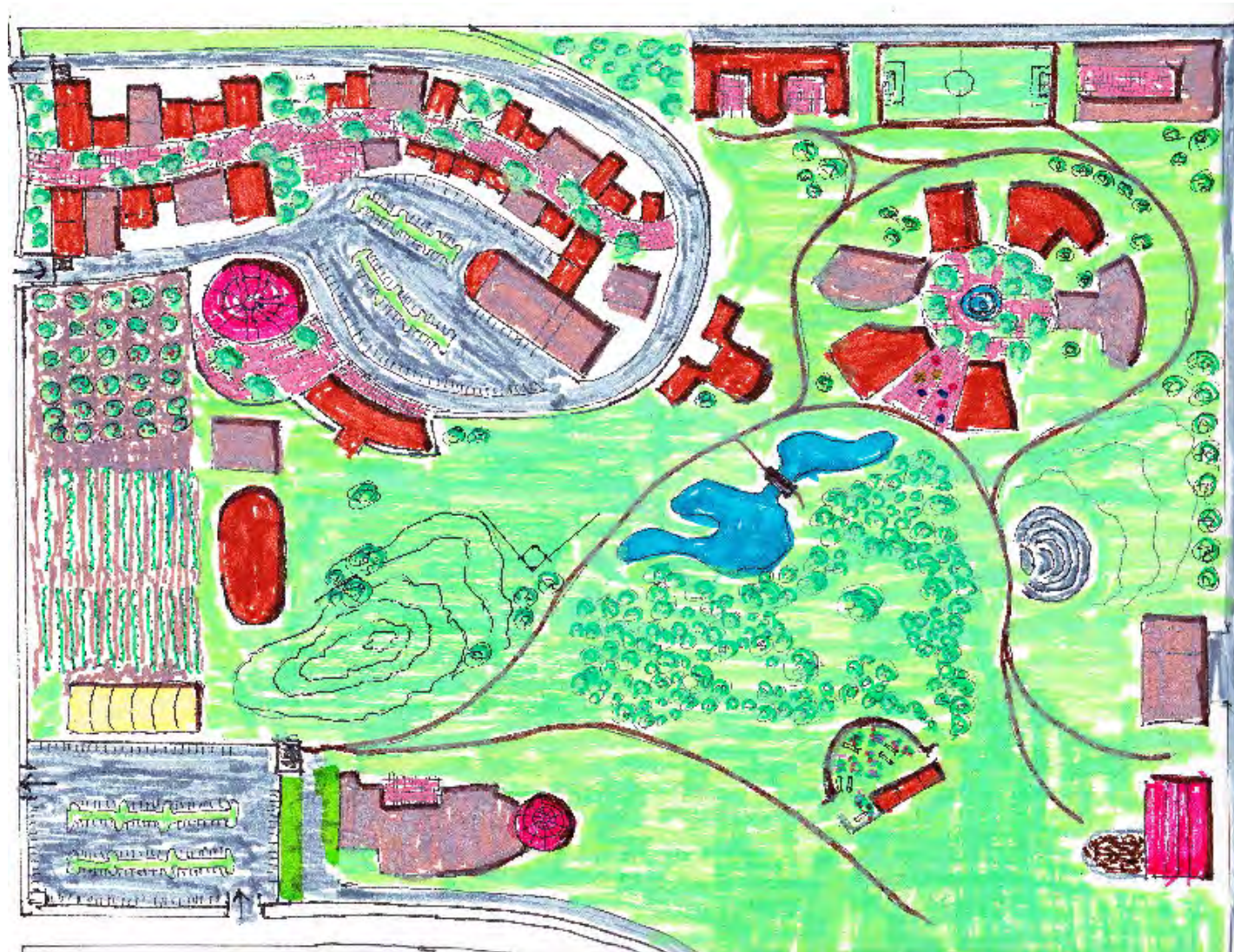
A Learning Park serves the 21st century educational needs of children, youth, and adults, similarly to how public schools were intended to serve educational needs of the 19th and 20th centuries. A Learning Park is a collaboration among local communities, local public education authorities, nonprofit organizations, and state agencies working together to create a new organization for a new education.

A Learning Park might look like this:



A Learning Park is a little like places you already know and love: a city park, community center, community garden, nature park, studio, research park, chapter house, main street theme park, health and wellness center, exploratory science museum, performing arts center, café. Learning parks bring together some of the best elements of these and other places to create something totally new: a public place of learning, developed and maintained by its participants and the community it serves.

A Learning Park incorporates, on a smaller scale, samples of the various environments and work places of the surrounding communities, as well as cultural, agricultural, and natural places. For example, a park's main street will house small businesses, like a health clinic, music store, restaurant, farmers market, electronic repair service, theater, architect's studio, and more. Each of these places double as learning labs with practitioners who serve as educators as well as proprietors. A Learning Park might look like this:

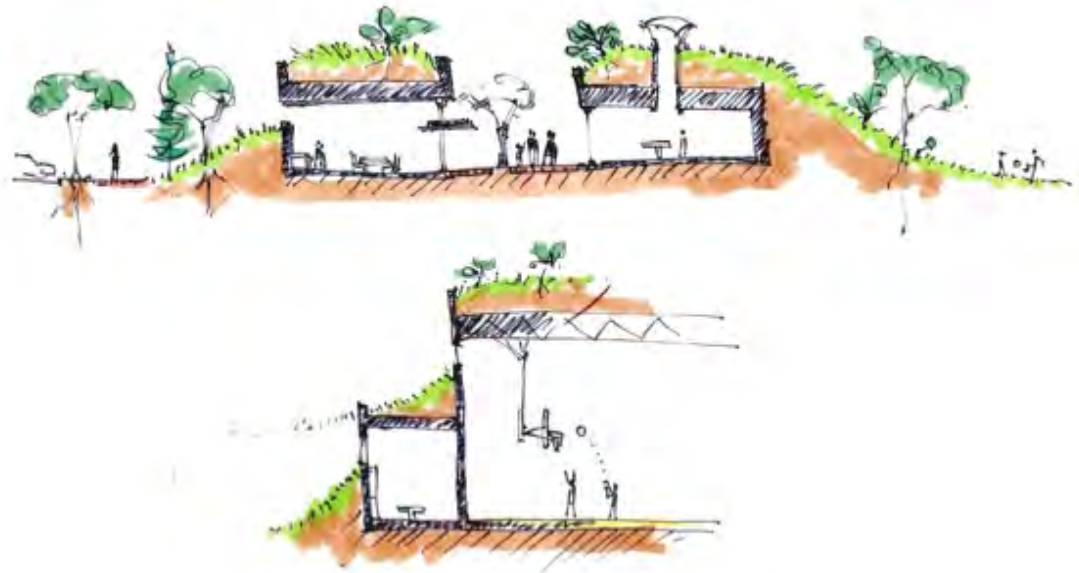


A Learning Park comfortably accommodates a multigenerational, multicultural community of learners who associate by choice in periodic and fluid groups of variable composition for variable periods of time, based on optimal learning conditions, interests, friendships, purposes, activities, or project scope and duration. This includes groupings of people with substantial differences in age, beliefs and opinions, previous experiences, and backgrounds. For example, ten-year-olds and sixty-five-year-olds might be learning together; republicans and democrats might be learning together; engineers and homeless teens might be learning together.

People of any age who have had some success doing what they love have a responsibility – even a social obligation – to pass it on, pass it down, pass it up, pass it around. Although it is generally accepted that elders have things of value to pass down, it is inarguable that youngsters have things of value to pass up. Everyone benefits and learns from these relationships.

A Learning Park provides freedom of movement and association, with on-demand access to tools, materials, instruments, equipment, information, workspaces, and help from facilitators. A Learning Park has various, transformable environments for making and doing and growing and repairing things: workshops, laboratories, gardens, ponds, kitchens, playrooms; music, dance, design, theater and art studios; and venues for events, performances, games, leisure, and physical education. All of these transformable environments are designed to support learners acting on their ideas and experiencing the results or consequences of their actions.

There is not only one model that works to create a new education in a Learning Park. Any gathering of people committed to this new dream might accomplish what is needed. Ultimately, Learning Parks are about creating the best possible environments for learning, about applying a new educational ecology of learning for everyone, and about fulfilling our nation's most cherished aspirations.



Practices of Public Education in a Learning Park *[How]*



Creating a place of learning that is as rich, dynamic, and complex as the world itself
Creating beautiful, convivial, and comfortable environments for learning
Engaging participants across the lifespan in facilitating intergenerational exchange
Practicing care-driven, nurturing and mutually determined learning
Learning widely valued social media like listening, literacy, and mathematics
Gaining experience with tools for making, creating, and communicating
Providing a safe place of learning for people of all ages
Being in one another's physical presence, sharing purposes, activity, and experiences
Emphasizing things that only can be learned through practice
Taking part in manual and fine arts to create, imagine, share, and understand
Practicing face-to-face, honest, open, attentive conversation at every opportunity
Designing and equipping for making: things to use, art, science, gardens, friends...
Evolving the place as needs, cares, and interests develop and change
Treating others as we would if we loved them
Valuing and accepting people for who they are, as they are, right now
Operating on natural time appropriate for human development and purposes
Practicing mutual respect, tolerance, inclusion, patience, grace, and kindness
Accessing and utilizing all the resources in the surrounding communities
Supporting and valuing the local community as a contributing member of it

Imagine you are walking into a Learning Park...

As you approach, you see a beautiful and verdant place where people come and go freely. Down in a valley, near the center of the park, there is a patchwork of buildings of different colors, shapes, and sizes. Beyond, there are gardens growing food and flowers, diverse natural spaces, fields for playing, and an amphitheater open to the cool evening air. You smell the flowers and the scent of something delicious cooking in the kitchen. You hear the sounds of birds and frogs, of laughter and live music in the distance.



As you walk the grounds, you see many people involved in conversations – talking while lounging in the shade, strolling along paths, watching their kids play, pulling weeds in the garden, organizing a pick-up game of soccer on the field, collecting samples at the pond. You head into the small-town main street, looking into the windows of the buildings you pass, and you see people working together on all kinds of things: work-shopping their creative writing, synthesizing chemicals in a science lab, painting a mural, fixing a broken-down bus, rehearsing for a play. You see a tax clinic, health clinic, and community meetings in progress. You see a cafe kitchen, a coffee shop, and a laundromat. And in every place, you notice that diverse people of every age are working together, treating each other with respect and kindness.

As you walk the grounds, you see many people involved in conversations – talking while lounging in the shade, strolling along paths, watching their kids play, pulling weeds in the garden, organizing a pick-up game of soccer on the field, collecting samples at the pond. You head into the small-town main street, looking into the windows of the buildings you pass, and you see people working together on all kinds of



What do we mean by Purposes and Practices of Public Education in a Learning Park?

Reclaiming Democracy

- Learning to participate in democracy by practicing it
- Practicing open, honest and attentive conversation as the essential core of democracy
- Learning to listen thoughtfully to others
- Practicing equality
- Learning to see from others' points of view
- Organizing, administering, and sustaining the Learning Park democratically, hearing everyone's voice
- Promoting societal change toward a more equitable, just, liberatory, and caring democracy, locally and nationally



Saving and sustaining the planet

- Understanding the entwined environmental and ecological systems of the planet
- Developing a long view of the consequences for future generations of today's policies and practices concerning climate change and the environment, recognizing current threats to health, peacefulness, and human life
- Practicing personal and organizational constraint in consumption
- Reusing, repurposing, and recycling
- Limiting use of carbon-based energy sources
- Organizing for government and civil action, and for international cooperation, on ending global warming and environmental degradation
- Taking local action based on understanding the long view

Developing social and personal efficacy

- Learning to cooperate, collaborate, and work collectively on shared purposes
- Helping people become better supporters, critics, dreamers, helpers, partners, parents
- Becoming effective not only at adapting to changing circumstances, but also effectively to alter and guide these circumstances as persons and as participating members of our communities
- Learning how to trust and to be trusted
- Contributing personal abilities to improving life in social, political, economic, cultural, and natural environments

Living healthily

- Understanding the integrated functions and needs of human bodies that include human minds and emotions
- Understanding the etiology or mechanisms of health threats to bodily functions
- Learning to act for the benefit and health of our bodies/minds/spirits
- Growing organic food in a community garden
- Learning to support each other's emotional, social, and mental health
- Solving problems together
- Valuing multigenerational conversation, mutual support, and sharing of ideas

Respecting our humanity

- Understanding the complexity of what makes us human
- Being in one another's physical presence because significant learning is a humanly intensive process
- Accommodating and respecting the biological and biosocial basis of human learning and education
- Respecting that because we are biological beings, learning is embodied
- Appreciating that good health supports our humanity, our humanness
- Appreciating that in order to function optimally people need to be as healthy as possible and understanding that health may mean different things to different people
- Understanding that ethical decisions are made in education every day; learning has a physically embodied basis and a social and interpersonal basis, and as a consequence education has an ethical basis as well
- Valuing and accepting people for who they are inclusive of their personal history, economic condition, amount of schooling, primary language, cultural background, race, gender, age and other circumstances of birth, residence or living environment

Learning together with multigenerational people of all ages

- Learning with and from people of all ages, across the lifespan
- Appreciating the skills and experiences of senior citizens as assets in mutual learning
- Engaging adults from all walks of life with diverse experiences to share with others either on site or in their places of work
- Overcoming the segregation of learners by age and the educational isolation of youth from a broad range of adults from the larger community
- Acknowledging that the broader the contact among generations, the broader the learning



Growing the affective, esthetic, emotional, and spiritual aspects of personal and social life

Practicing fine and manual arts

Learning to support each other's emotional, social, and mental health

Using emotion as a means of understanding

Learning to say what you feel and to feel what you say

Participating in music, song, and dance

Respecting expressions of the human spirit in art, religion, speech, meditation, exuberance, and joy

Using socially and economically valuable skills, understandings, and tools

Questioning and testing assumptions

Practicing methods for finding things out

Distinguishing truth from falsehood

Applying many uses of language in speaking, thinking,

reading, and writing in science and in art; of mathematics and logic in measuring and comparing, making, estimating value, predicting, understanding patterns; of illustration and graphs, hand tools, computers, and other machines or devices, meditation, mediation, etc.

Practicing civil discourse in raising questions, solving problems, addressing hate, racism, prejudice, violence and conflict, unfair practices, inequity, deciding how public money is spent, proposing legislation and executive action

Enacting generosity towards others in play, commerce, need, mutual aid, knowledge, grief, performance, and sharing of all kinds

Acknowledging the beliefs of others, and working through mutually acceptable adjustments to conflicting or incompatible beliefs





Exercising civic responsibility, ethics, and duty

Understanding that social, political, economic, and legal structures and practices are created and made by people either in concert through conversation, negotiation, mutual compromise and acceptance, or by decree of those holding economic or political power, or by habitual practice

Accepting that citizens are responsible for the behaviors and circumstances of living that are encouraged and manifested by the social, political, economic, and legal order

Acting on the ethical demands of the values claimed by local, regional, national, and international communities

Reconciling disputes when values are in conflict, and mutually determining which ethical claims have priority

Exercising the duty to participate continually in the processes of democracy

Finding the joy in learning and living

Understanding that how to make a life is different from how to make a living, and the requirements of both

Making and creating loving homes, friendships, families, neighborhoods; creating satisfying environments, art, useful objects, gardens, music, games, groups, time, solitude, reverie, respite in nature, etc.

Engaging in service to others; treating others as we would if we loved them; giving without gain

Learning lightheartedness, letting go, cooking and eating together, conversation, enriching wasting time



Practices in Support of the Purposes of Education in a Learning Park *[More About How]*

Creating a place of learning that is as rich, dynamic, and complex as the world itself

A Learning Park is a little like places you already know and love:

- City park
- Community center
- Community garden
- Nature park
- Studio
- Research park
- Chapter house
- Main street theme park
- Exploratory science museum
- Performing arts center
- Café
- Workshop

Learning parks bring together some of the best elements of these and other places to create something totally new: a place of learning open to all, developed and maintained by its participants and the community it serves. A Learning Park incorporates samples of the various environments and work places of the surrounding communities, as well as cultural, agricultural, and natural areas.

Creating beautiful, convivial, and comfortable environments for learning

We have known for decades that the qualities and characteristics of the immediate environment affect people's attitudes and behaviors. "Space matters. We read our physical environment like we read a human face" (Tom Kelley). However, it is surprising how relatively little has been done, as a result of this awareness, to improve or optimize environments for learning. A Learning Park is attentive to the beauty of surroundings, to designing spaces that feel lived in, are comfortable and conducive to thoughtfulness, conversation and shared activity; spaces where it is safe to suspend urgency and cultivate comfort with not knowing how something will turn out before it happens; spaces that invite transformation by their inhabitants; spaces that hold tools and evidence of previous activity so that people are drawn to ask,

"What have other people done here? What were they thinking? What can I do here?"



Engaging participants across the lifespan in facilitating intergenerational exchange

People of all ages engage in learning together in a Learning Park. They form learning groups according to interests, skills, shared purposes, needs, and roles they may contribute to the group. For some purposes five-year-olds and sixty-five-year-olds, or any other combination of ages, might be learning together. They may learn the same or different things from the shared activity or content. For example, while investigating how to distinguish truth from falsehood, some teens may be learning how to confirm information about friends from "social media" and some seniors may be learning how to confirm information from their friends about diet and dementia, but both could be learning similar strategies for discerning truth. A middle-aged person reading a picture book to a young child may be learning to read while the young child may be learning to imagine a world with dinosaurs. Children and adults participating in the same science experiment may notice entirely different phenomena yet share the same conclusions. In an environment of caring and kind sharing of intergenerational perspectives, subjects, observations and understandings will come up that never would if ages were segregated.

Practicing care-driven, nurturing and mutually determined learning

Learning parks are places where people are free to discover new passions and give free reign to their wonder, learning things that are relevant to what they need and care about today, with the suggestions and collaboration of other learners of any age, and the support of experienced and co-learning craftspeople, scientists, custodians, artists, parents, technicians, educators, farmers, builders, business people, cooks, athletes, etc. The focus of learning on any day is determined mutually by those participating together and according to what they care about, to what is motivating their interest and desire to learn, with spontaneous opportunities to nurture themselves and others. Participation in learning groups shift, or groups may split and regroup, according to changes in focus, experience, interest, or tools required.

Learning widely valued social media like listening, literacy, and mathematics

The media and tools with which society and culture organize themselves have a great effect on the quality of life. Some of these, like listening to each other, honest conversation, reading and writing, careful and truthful speech, some uses of technology and mathematics, eating together, parenting, making music and dancing, making things of beauty and utility, artistic performance, hospitality, giving to others, and many more, are widely valued and have an implicit ethic. Others may be widely valued but have a dubious ethic, like power that can determine the lives of others, perverse uses of computer technology, influence of great wealth, personal and corporate or political false advertising and deceptive marketing, unnecessary medical practices, and more. Participants in a Learning Park mutually decide on the appropriate uses of media and social tools that will be utilized in learning.

Gaining experience with tools for making, creating, and communicating

Understanding how tools work expands life opportunities for everyone. Everyone can use some personally satisfying skill, not necessarily good or great, with the socially and culturally developed tools for making useful things and art, for communicating feelings, perspectives, and ideas, for relating to others, and knowing oneself. The only way to learn these skills is to use these tools, and to use them with someone with experience. A Learning Park provides these tools and opportunities to use them frequently and in many contexts over long periods of time. Some examples of such tools are pens, guitars, electric drills, screw drivers, computers, paint brushes, measuring cups, car jacks and tire irons, needle and thread, smart phones, cafés, bank accounts, bicycles, scale rulers, maps, graphs, writing, and super glue.

Providing a safe place of learning for people of all ages

Places where multigenerational participants feel a sense of belonging already have an implicit degree of safety. Safety is emotional and spiritual as well as physical. Learners need to feel safe in being who they are, in taking intellectual, emotional, and esthetic risks, and in safely making mistakes. Developing friendships and personal relationships, caring for each other's social and emotional health, and looking out for each other, all contribute to being safe. In addition, certain architectural, technological, and design features support a safe place, as well as personnel prepared to be watchful. Controlling physical and electronic access to the Learning Park and its participants, knowing the participants, learning to be attentive to each other and to the immediate environment all contribute to a safe place for all ages.

Being in one another's physical presence, sharing purposes, activity, and experiences

Significant learning is a labor intensive, person-to-person activity for learners and educators. Education is most effective when participants know each other with depth and subtlety. Deep understanding of others comes from shared lives, from sharing different kinds of activity and experiences with them over long periods of time. We can never be sure that remote words on the internet or in print media mean the same as those words used for years with members of our community or our circle of friends. Belonging in close and secure relationships that develop over time and being in each other's presence are still fundamental, human educational needs. These are a source of trust, comfort, curiosity, interest, genuineness, safety, acceptance, and sharing resources. Developing personally meaningful relationships takes time, and a Learning Park, as a lifelong place of learning, allows this time as a necessary condition for significant learning.

Emphasizing things that only can be learned through practice

The purposes central to education in a Learning Park can only be learned adequately through practice: reclaiming democracy; saving and sustaining the planet; developing social and personal efficacy; living healthily; respecting our humanity; learning together with multigenerational people of all ages; growing the esthetic, emotional and spiritual aspects of social life; using socially and economically valuable skills, understandings, and tools; exercising civic responsibility, ethics and duty; making a good, satisfying and sustainable personal life; and finding the joy in learning and living.

Taking part in manual and fine arts to create, imagine, share and understand

The following quote from a caring teacher expresses the spirit of this practice: "Do I provide them a safe space, not only to make mistakes, but to know that they are a valued member of the learning community *even if they are ultimately not very skilled at their instrument?* Is there a place in my program for someone who does not want to achieve expert level – someone who wants to dabble?... Arts educators can have a vital role in building a more humane, joyous, peaceful, equitable, democratic society. We have the power to take learners through deep explorations of profound truths, showing them centuries of insight on the world and inspiring them to imagine something better. The mistake-free concert, the technically flawless painting, the immaculately synchronized dance performance can be exciting and even inspiring to young people, but they are not our only reason for existing. Allowing learners to make mistakes – or even to be mediocre at the work at times – may well open up space for us to guide them to a place of even greater truth, beauty, and humanity." (Tim Fawkes, Human Restoration Project)

Practicing face-to-face, honest, open, attentive conversation at every opportunity

Democracy can only be learned through practice, the common and essential core of which is conversation, face-to-face and listening conversation, not voting or political parties or policy platforms or elections or even particular constitutional details, but sensitive, empathetic, enduring conversation, side by side in each other's presence. A new education reflects this, fostering and utilizing the growth of open conversation at every opportunity. Conversation in each other's presence makes available a breadth of interrelated communication media, facial expressions, body language, gestures, eye contact, physical sense. Physical presence is a commitment to hanging in and trying to understand even difficult things, in contrast to the easy escape of hanging up the phone or clicking "Quit." And face-to-face, honest, attentive, respectful conversation, as well as travel, "is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness" (Mark Twain).

Designing and equipping for making: things to use, art, science, gardens, friends....

A Learning Park is a place where hands can think, a home for ideas you can touch. It supports the autonomy of the learner, independence, and self-determined purposes and interrelationships. Freedom to learn means guaranteed choice of privacy in learning, guaranteed access to tools, and guaranteed opportunities to create one's own learning experiences with others of one's own choosing. A Learning Park provides the means and opportunities for making of all kinds, and the support to learn from these makings.

Evolving the place as needs, cares, and interests develop and change

A Learning Park evolves its structure, practices and resources in response to experience, changes in society, challenges in the environment, new understandings, and the developing needs and interests of its participants. It is organized to avoid ossification and entrenchment in habit. It expects to take risks and experiment with new ideas. A Learning Park incorporates decision-making processes related to governance, management, and operations that allow the Park to be democratic, responsive, and nimble in the presence of compelling, new circumstances.



Treating others as we would if we loved them

The admonition to love others is something at which we always fail. It is difficult to pursue even in a small community, and hard to even contemplate as our human contacts expand to thousands. However, to behave ethically we don't have to love everyone. Instead, we can treat others as we would if we did love them. This is a practical guide in a scientific culture, but something we need to learn by practicing it and regularly using it. A Learning Park uses this as one practice in resolving disputes, addressing anger, insult, and personal injury.

Conversations addressing breach of trust or disruptive behavior, and especially with regard to personal need, rely on this practice. A great deal can be learned by acting on the outcome of a multigenerational and multicultural conversation, pausing to ask the question, "What would we do, how would we treat this person if we loved them?" It is a question that demands mutuality, listening without prejudice, and seeing the perspectives of others. It requires giving without getting, and treating others with tolerance, dignity, respect and patience. "Love is at the root of everything – all learning, all relationships – love, or the lack of it." (Fred Rogers)

Valuing and accepting people for who they are, as they are right now

Beginning with accepting people as they are has long been a principle in education. But often this is viewed in narrowly academic terms like what someone's reading level is, or what they remember about grammar, the Civil War, or organic chemistry. It is not possible adequately to support learning without understanding who the learning person is as well as what they can do in apparently nonacademic realms. This goes in all directions, so in a traditional context not only must an educator understand who the learning person is, but the learning person must understand who the educator is as a person and what they can do. In a Learning Park these roles are shared, so everyone is a learner and an educator. If a group is learning together, they all must understand each other as complex and capable persons. Schools often mis-educate because their pedagogy frequently assumes that students are lacking, ignorant, incompetent, or damaged and need to be remediated as something that they aren't. This deficit-correction model of education undervalues what people already can do, ignores useful idiosyncrasies in learning, focuses on standardized curricula and on teachers as intellectual health providers, and prescribes injections of information whose curative value is evaluated by standardized tests. Learning Parks accept all people as capable in their own right and as learners that have been working on becoming who they are all their lives and who will continue to evaluate their own progress.

Operating on natural time appropriate for human development and purposes

The time of day or length of time a group spends learning together in a Learning Park differs according to personal and resource availability, subject, project, season of the year, endurance, ages of participants, and other factors. For example, we know that time of day for people's optimal attention and readiness to learn changes according to individual differences or their age. Many teens and seniors are ready much later in the morning than many young children and middle-aged adults, and this may differ in the evening. Many creative things are incubated when it appears that people are wasting time, so for many purposes a natural flow of time, rather than scheduled clock time, is appropriate. This may differ for other purposes. For example, natural time for engaging in an orchestra performance is closer to clock time.



Practicing mutual respect, tolerance, inclusion, patience, grace, and kindness

If you can, why wouldn't you practice these things? Part of doing this is giving ourselves permission to do this, of claiming independence from the demands and behaviors of groups or institutions that restrict tolerance and inclusion of those different from us. We can declare our own right to be generous. Part of this is overcoming the hurry that most schools are in to get to the business of remembering a lot of information, scoring high on tests, and preparing to get a job. This rush leads to institutional demands for obedience, conformity, and intolerance of beliefs or behaviors that deviate from a narrowly defined norm enforced by disciplinary authority. There is a better way. Learning Parks practice the authority of respect, dignity, tolerance, inclusion, patience, grace, love, and kindness. There is a proven history of the success of these practices.

Accessing and utilizing all the resources in the surrounding communities

A key aim of a Learning Park – to create a learning environment as rich and complex as the world itself – is only achieved by including the learning opportunities in the local communities. Part of the operating practices is to create collaborations with local businesses, governmental and nonprofit organizations that have existing and potential resources or circumstances for learning. So, for example, existing public libraries, community centers, and sports facilities offer opportunities that can be coordinated with programs and schedules in the Learning Park. Organizations like Habitat for Humanity, Boys and Girls Clubs, AARP, kitchens, and food banks have opportunities to learn skills while serving their programs. Similarly, local shelters for women and children in danger and shelters for the homeless have opportunities for learning in service to their occupants. Some businesses like farms, newspapers, cabinet shops, and daycare centers afford opportunities for learning and service.

Supporting and valuing the local community as a contributing member of it

Because a Learning Park is a local educational organization, it is a member of the community and has many things to contribute to residents and to the quality of community life. There are educational programs in which residents may participate, theater productions, music and dance performances, food production, facilities that may be used by local nonprofit organizations, access to goods and services produced and provided at the Learning Park. A Learning Park is also a source of volunteers and expertise for many organizations or needs in the local communities. Examples of this might be wetlands restoration, community cleanups, or nonprofit management. Of course, the most profound contribution a Learning Park makes to its local community or neighborhood is being a principal, public source of learning, a place of new public education.