



FOUNDATIONS FOR LEARNING EXPERIENCES

FALL 2013

EARL SHAPIRO HALL
ROOM 131

*Inspired by
Frances and David Hawkins*

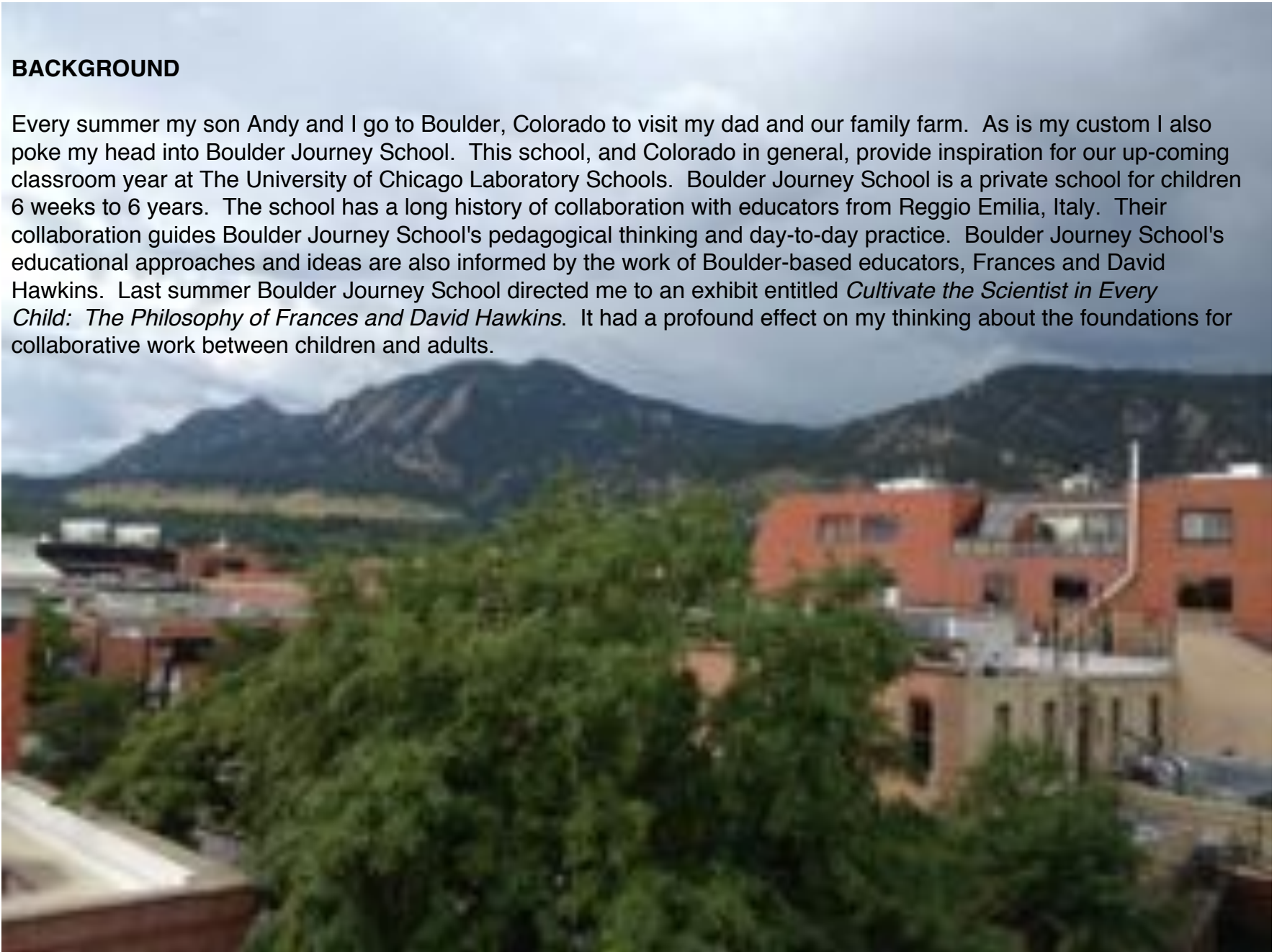
Path Trees

*The two trees closest to us on the left and right
as noted by Thomas Housinger are path trees.*

"When we walk north between these trees they show us the way to the lake."

BACKGROUND

Every summer my son Andy and I go to Boulder, Colorado to visit my dad and our family farm. As is my custom I also poke my head into Boulder Journey School. This school, and Colorado in general, provide inspiration for our up-coming classroom year at The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. Boulder Journey School is a private school for children 6 weeks to 6 years. The school has a long history of collaboration with educators from Reggio Emilia, Italy. Their collaboration guides Boulder Journey School's pedagogical thinking and day-to-day practice. Boulder Journey School's educational approaches and ideas are also informed by the work of Boulder-based educators, Frances and David Hawkins. Last summer Boulder Journey School directed me to an exhibit entitled *Cultivate the Scientist in Every Child: The Philosophy of Frances and David Hawkins*. It had a profound effect on my thinking about the foundations for collaborative work between children and adults.



CULTIVATE THE SCIENTIST IN EVERY CHILD

The exhibit illustrates four of David Hawkins central ideas:

Eolithism

Messing About

I, Thou, It

Teacher As Learner

The exhibit uses descriptions and photos of actual student projects from when David and Francis taught in the 1960s through 1980 and more recent works from the Boulder Journey School.

<http://hawkinscenters.org/exhibit/>



“**Eolithism**,” the use of existing resources, is expressed through a 1973 project in which elementary-aged students studied Varsity Pond on the University of Colorado Boulder campus. Not restricted to following specified areas of study, instead following their own multiple fascinations, the children pursued many subjects that would not have been found together in any textbook. The exhibit’s description and photos are drawn from the book, “David Hawkins and the Pond Study,” by Elizabeth T. Kellogg. There are three types of eolithism:

Intellectual Eolithism: the utilization of interests that currently exist

Physical Eolithism: the utilization of resources that are currently available

Emotional Eolithism: the safety that comes with appreciating current resources



“**Messing About**,” the process of using unscripted explorations of materials to guide learning, is told through the story of young children who begin a journey of varied learning experiences by simply exploring rocks. Their interests in incorporating the rocks into their drawings and studies of balance inspire their work over three years, laying the foundation for designing and constructing a castle for the classroom.

“**I, Thou, It**,” adult and child together absorbed in a shared interest, is conveyed by the story of a teacher (“I”) searching for a context in which toddlers (“Thou”) can engage with different manifestations of light (“It”). Once the context is found, deeper connections between teacher and student follow. There are three phases of exploring a material, idea, or situation in order to bring familiarity, make meaning, and raise further questions.

Phase O: a time for unstructured, open-ended play while teachers observe the children's work.

Phase □: a time for differentiating work by identifying and pursuing multiple possibilities based on observations

Phase Δ: a time for unpacking and verbalizing theories that have developed through discussion among children and teachers

“**Teacher as Learner**” posits that teachers who themselves have “messed about” with materials are better able to enrich unstructured learning experiences of their students. Reliance on predesigned curricula for most lessons leaves teachers less likely to intentionally support their students’ natural explorations of materials. In this exhibit story, a teacher who has explored the concept of balance in playful activity then supports a child’s inquiry.

MOVING FORWARD

In order to better understand these central ideas I decided to try and integrate them into my teaching practice and curriculum this year. I'm writing about and sharing the process to help me clarify this alternative way of making visible how teachers bring pedagogical theory into day-to-day practice.

A central question I have is:

Can these four ideas be used in one educational exploration?

If so, how can I document the four ideas through their representative explorations into a cohesive story of children's learning?

I hope you have questions!

Please share any thoughts you may have with me.

To keep in mind!

The faculties of The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools have much autonomy. We are able to explore the areas surrounding our buildings because they are valued as places of learning. We are very fortunate to be able to "mess about" in these spaces that we consider a part of our available resources.

CHOICE:

Teachers have a choice to bring students to Jackson Park and the Garden because of administrative and parent support.

POSSIBILITIES:

The learning that takes place in these outdoor spaces encompasses all academic areas.

The possibilities for hands-on, integrative learning are endless.

The following rough draft descriptions are how the four ideas (Eolithism; Messing About; I, Thou, It; and Teacher as Learner) transpired in our classroom this fall.

BIRD SONG TREE

Sophia asks us to come with her to a tree.

As we walk closer she points and says, "It's a bird song tree! Can you hear?" *Look closely and you can see the birds at the top of the trees.*

Eolithism

Pathways



A few of the Human made lines students noted on our walks to the garden.

The use of existing resources is expressed through a developing study of lines in our outdoor environments. The idea for using "line" as a provocation came from conversations I had with nursery teacher Donna Mandel. Her study of line with students is expressed through her application of its qualities in dance and movement. Our use of line in my classroom is connected to our walks to and from Jackson Park and our garden at 59th and Kimbark. **In essence, the existing resources are the *pathways* to these places.** As part of our curriculum we discuss directionality and line: What direction are we walking? What compass line are we following? Children get to know cardinal and ordinal terminology. We also verbally take note of the type of lines we notice on our walks (pictures of the lines we noticed along the pathways were taken). We revisit these pathway lines over time. As we go back and forth along the pathways we notice changes that the lines may have encountered due to environmental (weather and construction) conditions. We document and explore these pathway lines with drawings, landscape design materials, and mixed media.

Intellectual Eolithism: utilization of interests that already exists (lines)

Physical Eolithism: the utilization of resources currently available (Jackson Park and Garden)

Emotional Eolithism: the safety that comes with appreciating current resources (the children know and feel comfortable in these open, unconfined spaces)



A few of the many nature made lines students noted on our walks to the garden.

Messing About

Soil, Holes, Roads

Our unscripted outdoor "messaging about" explorations with varied materials are vast. What is most intriguing among the many materials is the children's focus on soil at Jackson Park and the garden. Students in previous years produced soil paintings, made "muck," baked mud pies, gauged the mud depth with sticks, created caldrons of soil soup, and dug deep holes and this year is not different. What stands out this year in our class is when and why the digging of deep holes stopped. There are two places in Jackson Park where students like to use the shovels. The first is at the up-rooted tree directly across and visible from our classroom patio. The second is north of this space in a low-lying area, which, after a rain, the students described as the "lake" or "pond." In both of these spaces the students used shovels to go deeper with their investigations of the space. At a certain point in the year though, something in the soil stopped them. It kept getting in their way. "What was it?" they asked. Suggestions of rocks and roots were made but were quickly dismissed. In their experience rocks could be extracted by finding its edges and prying them out. No edges could be found with this obstacle. Roots could also easily be identified as the soil is cleared. What could it be? One day Bryce brought his red telescope from home to take to Jackson Park. He and Max were looking through its view finder at locations across the major streets that surround our island of Jackson Park. Bryce said out loud, "Roads." He walked to the "lake," picked up a shovel, and made a small hole near the area where holes could no longer be dug. He placed his telescope into the hole and buried it. At least this is what he told me later at school when I asked him where he put his telescope. When I asked why he put it in the hole he said, "So we can know about the roads underground." The next day we went to the "lake" to find the telescope. Bryce and his friends looked and looked, turning over a lot of soil. They determined that the telescope could not be found because the roads took it. They wondered **where the roads travelled underground and who uses the roads.**

Their messaging about at Jackson Park led to theories about the "underworld" that may direct further projects in the Winter Quarter. Clay will be introduced in the studio. This material, found underground, may lead to deeper discussions about roads and life underground.



Messing about has three phases of exploring a material, idea, or situation in order to bring familiarity, make meaning, and raise further questions.



Phase O: a time for unstructured, open-ended play while teachers observe the children's work
We began with this phase. We made the choice to bring children to Jackson Park and the garden for unstructured, open-ended play.

Phase □: a time for differentiating work by identifying and pursuing multiple possibilities based on observations
After several weeks we noted an interest in lines and trees and paths.

Phase Δ: a time for unpacking and verbalizing theories that have developed, through discussion among children and teachers.
During class meetings on Mondays and Fridays we reflect with children. Outside of school, teachers reflect and plan in Professional Development Groups.

I - THOU - IT

Tree-ness

We have three teachers in our class of twenty-five. What can link the teachers with the twenty-two children? I-Thou-It is a story of how three teachers (I) search for a context where their twenty-two four-year-old students (Thou) can engage in different manifestations of tree-ness (It). Once the context (trees) is found deeper connections between each teacher and each student deepens.

Meredith: Tube-tree, path trees, and branch habitats

Steve: Tree-Swings and tree-rope balances

Tomoko: Tube-tree, hand-tree, root-tree



Teacher as Learner

What Ideas or concepts can we play with to better understand and support our children's inquiry?

What have each of us explored to help us understand and support our student's inquiry?

What kind of hands-on explorations will help us as a team of teachers support children's inquiry?

climbing trees

making a variety of tree swings

cutting branches

playing with wind and materials

digging holes

soil and root formation

painting

drawing

clay

landscape design

map-making

always continuing...