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UNCOVERING EVERYDAY LEARNING AND TEACHING WITHIN THE QUILTING COMMUNITY OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Arts

at Massey University, Palmerston North,

New Zealand

Linda Claire Warner

2018

Plate 1 *Te kuira Aotearoa*
Machine pieced and appliquéd, cotton, 1640 x 1890mm
Linda Warner, 2014
Quilted by Lesley O'Rourke
Inspired by New Zealand quilt designers Donna Ward and Jacqui Karl
Photograph: Richard Robinson

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the social and cultural phenomenon of everyday learning and teaching within the communal activity of quiltmaking. Home-sewn quilts are rarely associated with the needleworkers' high level of knowledge and skill; yet, the quilters' act of knowing is practical, inherently social, and intentional. This research study examines the collaborative processes of "quilting together" to understand cultural patterns of participation; and investigates the participants' meaning-making experiences to facilitate an analysis of collective knowledge practices.

Using an ethnographic methodology, this research investigated the lived experiences of quilters within the situated context of two quilting groups, located in Aotearoa New Zealand. Observations were made of participants' engagement in quilting activities as they interacted with each other, material artefacts and quilting tools. These observations took place during regular quilting sessions and special events. Interviews were conducted with founding members to gain an understanding of cultural-historical processes, as well as a purposively selected sample of ten participants who shared their personal quilting experiences. Observation notes, conversation commentaries and interview transcripts were analysed in relation to the research question and two guiding questions.

Key findings are related to a variety of contextual issues surrounding the process of informal learning and teaching as it materialised through the quilters' engagement in idiosyncratic community practices: the practices of which are generative of quilting knowledge and vice-versa. Firstly, through social integration quilters developed a sense of belonging and responsibility. Secondly, cultural patterns of social interaction consisted of multi-directional learning with quilters having complementary roles. Thirdly, due to the tacit nature of quilting knowledge, embodied experiences and material mediations were essential for thinking and communicating with others. Fourthly, a constellation of knowledge practices co-existed in the quilting community. Finally, the quilters' informal learning was organised and supported within the community.

The study contributes to a body of locally-based and international research concerned with informal learning and teaching theory, situated in a quilting community-based setting. The emerging conceptual framework, “Apprenticeship Model of Craft Community Learning”, develops and extends participation-based approaches to learning. In addition, the quilters’ collaborative designing process of inquiry advances understanding of knowledge creation within craft maker cultures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Little is the currency of everyday living.
So let's thank God for little lights,
the warm smile, the hug, the phone call,
a wave from a passing car, a cup of tea,
an open door, a talent freely shared"
(Cowley, 2002, p. 27).

This thesis is a celebration, and recognition, of everyday learning and teaching. It was completed with the encouragement of people who believed in the ethos of my research study, realising its contextual significance in today's changing world.

I am truly indebted to the quilters who participated in this study, generously sharing their practical wisdom and love of quiltmaking. The family of quilters' friendship was a patchwork quilt of caring words, thoughtful deeds, and lots of laughter, as we stitched and learned together.

I also learned much through my supervisors, Professor John O'Neill and Associate Professor Alison Sewell, during the research study:

> *Hapaitia te ara tika pumau ai te rangatiratanga mo nga uri whakatipu.*
> Foster the pathway of knowledge to strength, independence and growth for future generations.

I would like to thank the staff of New Zealand and Australian museums, galleries and archives who warmly welcomed me behind-the-scenes, in order to develop an understanding of material culture, visual art, and social history with subject matters ranging from quilt conservation, patchwork photography to textile narratives.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..... **v**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **vii**

LIST OF FIGURES ..... **xv**

LIST OF TABLES ..... **xvii**

LIST OF COLOUR PLATES ..... **xvii**

CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDINGS ..... **xix**

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION **1**

Why "Learning to Make A Quilt" Matters

1.1 Research Aims and Context 2

1.2 Justification for the Research 4

1.3 Origin of the Study 5

1.4 Organisation of the Thesis 8

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW I **11**

The Historical and Cultural Fabric of Quilting Communities

2.1 Literature Review Methods and Sources 12

2.2 Patchwork and Quilting Traditions through the Ages 14

2.3 Quiltmaking as an International Scholarly Subject 17

2.3.1 Art 17

2.3.2 Material culture 19

2.3.3 Leisure 22

2.3.4 Folklore 24

2.3.5 Gender 26

2.3.6 Social relationships 29

2.4 Aotearoa New Zealand Quilting Tradition 33

2.5 Academic Quilt Studies of Aotearoa New Zealand 38

2.6 Summary 40

CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW II **43**

Everyday Learning and Teaching

3.1 Literature Review Methods 44

3.2 Folk Theory of Mind 45

3.3 Learning and Teaching Frameworks: Selected Historical Perspectives 46
3.3.1 Aristotle: Practical wisdom 47
3.3.2 Craft apprenticeship 47
3.3.3 Traditional craft guilds 48
3.3.4 Family cottage industry 49
3.3.5 Dewey: Experience and environment 50
3.3.6 Piaget: Cognitive development 51
3.3.7 Vygotsky: Sociocultural-historical approach 52
3.4 Contemporary Sociocultural Theoretical Perspectives in Community Settings 54
3.4.1 The nature of everyday learning 55
3.4.2 Social processes and cultural practices of everyday learning 61
3.4.2.1 Affective relationships 62
3.4.2.2 Watching, listening, and attending 63
3.4.2.3 Guided participation 64
3.4.2.4 Contextualised talk 66
3.5 Toward Collaborative Knowledge Creation 67
3.5.1 The nature of craft knowledge 68
3.5.2 Community funds of knowledge 69
3.5.3 Knowledge co-construction 70
3.5.4 Innovative knowledge communities 73
3.6 Summary 77
CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS 79
Learning from the Inside-Out: Apprenticing with Quilters
4.1 Research Questions 80
4.2 Orienting this Study 82
4.3 Philosophical Assumptions 84
4.4 Research in the Area of Informal Learning 86
4.5 Qualitative Research 87
4.5.1 Ethnography 89
4.5.2 Researcher's reflexive approach 91
4.6 Methods 92
4.6.1 Experiencing 93
4.6.2 Enquiring 94
4.6.3 Examining 95

4.7 Multi-Site Case Study 96
4.7.1 Entry to field 97
4.7.2 The participants 98
4.7.2.1 Kōmako Quilters 98
4.7.2.2 Manumea Quilters 100
4.7.2.3 The quilting community context 101
4.7.3 Ethical considerations and principles 104
4.7.3.1 Informed and voluntary consent 104
4.7.3.2 Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity 105
4.7.4 Overview of present study 107
4.7.5 Exit from field 109
4.8 Data Analysis 110
4.9 Trustworthiness 114
4.9.1 Credibility 114
4.9.2 Transferability 115
4.9.3 Dependability 115
4.9.4 Confirmability 116
4.10 Summary 116
CHAPTER 5 ETHNOGRAPHIC FINDINGS I 119
Quilt Culture
5.1 Sewing Backgrounds 120
5.1.1 Nola 120
5.1.2 Nina 121
5.1.3 Jess 121
5.1.4 The seven other interviewees 122
5.2 Social Organisation 125
5.2.1 Motives 126
5.2.2 Belonging 128
5.2.2.1 Newcomers 129
5.2.2.2 Rituals 130
5.2.2.3 Spatial arrangements 132
5.2.2.4 Family of quilters 133
5.2.3 Roles and responsibilities 134
5.3 Multi-Party Interactions 137
5.3.1 Mutual reciprocation 141
5.3.1.1 Partnership challenge 141

5.3.1.2 Cluster sharing 141
5.3.1.3 Spontaneous engagement 142
5.3.1.4 Dovetailing 142
5.3.2 Guided participation 143
5.3.2.1 Seek guidance 143
5.3.2.2 Responsive guidance 144
5.3.2.3 Collective guidance 144
5.3.2.4 Tacit guidance 145
5.3.2.5 Co-equal guidance 145
5.3.3 Modelling 146
5.3.3.1 Explicit verbalisation 146
5.3.3.2 Implicit articulation 147
5.3.4 Demonstration 147
5.3.4.1 Impromptu communal demonstration 148
5.3.4.2 Project cluster demonstration 148
5.3.4.3 Side-by-side demonstration 149
5.4 Summary 149
CHAPTER 6 ETHNOGRAPHIC FINDINGS II 151
Ways of Knowing
6.1 Teaching Perspectives 152
6.1.1 The interviewees 152
6.2 Multiple Modes of Making Meaning 155
6.2.1 Social dimension 157
6.2.1.1 Forms of speech 157
6.2.1.2 Patterns of observation 160
6.2.2 Embodied dimension 163
6.2.2.1 Gestural movements 164
6.2.2.2 Bodily orientation 168
6.2.3 Material dimension 168
6.2.3.1 Written communication 169
6.2.3.2 Technology-mediated tools 170
6.2.3.3 Textile medium for creativity 173
6.3 Crafting Collective Knowledge 176
6.3.1 Everyday knowledge 178
6.3.2 Knowledge practices 179
6.3.2.1 Knowledge reproduction 179
6.3.2.2 Knowledge building 181

6.3.2.3 Knowledge creation 185
6.4 Summary 190
CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION 193
Interwoven Threads: Learning and Teaching within the Quilting Community
7.1 What are the Collaborative Processes of the Quilting Practice? 195
7.1.1 Social integration 196
7.1.1.1 Social organisation of a quilting community 197
7.1.1.2 Quilters' purpose of participation 199
7.1.1.3 Quilters' learning intent 201
7.1.2 Cultural patterns of social interaction 202
7.1.2.1 Collective zone of proximal development 203
7.1.2.2 Participation partnerships 205
7.2 What Multimodal Dimensions Contribute to Quilters' Co-Construction of Knowledge? 208
7.2.1 Embodied experiences and material mediation 210
7.2.1.1 Meaning-making modes 211
7.2.1.1.1 Social dimension 213
7.2.1.1.2 Embodied dimension 216
7.2.1.1.3 Material dimension 219
7.2.1.2 Appraisal 221
7.2.2 Collective knowledge practices 225
7.2.2.1 Cultural practices of knowledge-sharing 226
7.2.2.2 Collaborative designing for knowledge creation 233
7.3 How do Learning and Teaching of Patchwork and Quilting Occur within the Communal Activity of Quiltmaking? 236
7.3.1 "Apprenticeship Model of Craft Community Learning" 238
7.3.1.1 Fostering learning in the quilters' community setting 238
7.3.1.2 "Hands on" and "minds on" engagement in everyday learning 241
7.4 Summary 244
CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION 247
"Passing On" Knowledge
8.1 Conclusions from the Study 247
8.1.1 Top layer 248
8.1.2 Inner layer 248
8.1.3 Foundation layer 248
8.2 Contributions to Knowledge 249

8.3 Implications of this Research 251
8.3.1 Theoretical implications 252
8.3.2 Practical implications 253
8.4 Limitations of the Study 254
8.5 Recommendations for Future Research 255
8.6 The Final Stitched Words 257

REFERENCES 261

APPENDICES 295

Appendix A: Preliminary Exploration of Aotearoa New Zealand's Quilting Community 297
Appendix B: Historical and Individual Interview Question Guide Sheets 301
Appendix C: Pamphlet 303
Appendix D: Information Sheet 305
Appendix E: Consent Form 307
Appendix F: Tracking Co-ordinator's Movement Example 309
Appendix G: Sociogram Examples 311
Appendix H: Tracking Researcher's Movement Example 315
Appendix I: Codebook Excerpt 317

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 *Roundabout*. 7
Figure 2.1 Historical material sample of an eider-down silk. 14
Figure 2.2 New Zealand quilt collection documentation 20
Figure 2.3 "Textile Handcraft Guild Membership" model. 29
Figure 2.4 Ways of learning 32
Figure 2.5 Family portrait of two unidentified girls with patchwork quilt 34
Figure 2.6 Gum digger's *whare* with patchwork quilt and cushions 35
Figure 2.7 New Zealand Red Cross workers' quilt 36
Figure 3.1 "Learning by Observing and Pitching In" model. 60
Figure 3.2 The trialogical approach to learning. 74
Figure 3.3 Features of "Learning by Collaborative Designing" model 76
Figure 4.1 The spiralling research approach 83
Figure 4.2 The interrelationship between the building blocks of research 84
Figure 4.3 Personal practical theories. 85
Figure 4.4 Button token to identify research participants. 102
Figure 4.5 The activity system structure 103
Figure 4.6 Main elements of "making sense" during the integrated research process. 110
Figure 6.1 Embodied thinking using iconic gestures 165
Figure 6.2 V-shaped hands externalise visualisation 166
Figure 6.3 Physical stitching motion using gestural movements 166
Figure 6.4 Visual aids for "5 x 5 Quilt" construction 169
Figure 6.5 Sketching as a "thinking tool" 170
Figure 6.6 "5 x 5 Quilt" participants' (inter)action with quilting tools 171
Figure 6.7 Quilters' knowledge embedded or objectified in Challenge Quilts. 175
Figure 6.8 "Pinwheel Table Topper" Workday project 184
Figure 6.9 Design experimentation during "Block of the Month" activity. 187
Figure 6.10 Comparison of quilts. 187
Figure 6.11 Selection of quilt tops from the "Block of the Month" collaborative design activity 188
Figure 6.12 "Design a Block with a Twist" activity. 190
Figure 7.1 Three defining features that support the social integration of quilters 196
Figure 7.2 Multi-way collaboration 203

Figure 7.3 Understanding the quilters' multimodal ways of meaning-making and appraisal 211
Figure 7.4 Multimodal ensemble of communication 212
Figure 7.5 Contextual configurations of observation 215
Figure 7.6 Engagement in tacit embodied experiences 217
Figure 7.7 Exploring problems meditated through material objects 219
Figure 7.8 Three types of immediate feedback 223
Figure 7.9 Appropriation of communal knowing 226
Figure 7.10 Quilters' knowledge-sharing practices co-exist on a continuum 227
Figure 7.11 The trialogical learning framework applied to the quilters' block designing activities. 232
Figure 7.12 The quilters' collaborative designing for knowledge creation 234
Figure 7.13 "Apprenticeship Model of Craft Community Learning" conceptual framework 237
Figure 8.1 Winds of the Past Unzipped 249

Image Acknowledgements

Gestural movements

- Chapter 6
  ClipartFest (Pointing hand gesture)
  https://img.clipartfest.com/177b05e582e75ab967ae79cb51ce392f_hand-pointing-clip-art-free-clipart-hand-pointing_297-159.png

  Clipart Panda – Free Clip Art (Outstretched hands and V-shaped hand gestures)
  http://www.clipartpanda.com/categories/open-hands-of-god
  http://www.clipartpanda.com/clipart_images/now-if-god-so-clothes-the-34206216
  http://www.clipartpanda.com/clipart_images/hands-open-receiving-hold-34206316

Selective sewing icons:

- Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7
  Tourtillotte, B. (1988). *Copy art for quilters*. Bothell, WA: That Patchwork Place.

Māori patterns:

- Chapter 7
  Brown, P. (2012). *Maori designs: 100 new and original hand-drawn copyright-free designs.* Kent, UK: Search Press.

Other images were produced by myself, unless otherwise stated.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Emerging Interdisciplinary Themes 13
Table 4.1 Data Source Coding 106
Table 4.2 Overview of Study 108
Table 4.3 Data Coding Excerpt 113
Table 5.1 Summary of Diverse Ways of Quilting Together 140
Table 6.1 Summary of Multimodal Dimensions of Meaning-Making 157
Table 7.1 Summary of Key Findings and Themes 194
Table 7.2 Trialogical Features of the Quilters' Knowledge Creation Practice 230

LIST OF COLOUR PLATES

Plate 1 *Te kuira Aotearoa*, 1640 x 1890mm iii
Plate 2 *Te manu e kai ana i te mātauranga nōna te ao*, 470 x 830mm 259

CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDINGS

Contextual semantics provide meaning to a word or phrase used in order to understand their relation to the situated text. To assist the reader, the following terms are explained as well as how they are used throughout the thesis.

- **Apprenticeship**

An apprenticeship approach to learning is reconceptualised for the current study. For centuries, learning through apprenticeship was commonly associated with the crafts, which involved a formal contract between master and apprentice defining the expectations and conditions of their relationship. The connotations of "apprenticeship" have since been utilised to produce contemporary perspectives of informal learning in family and community-based settings, such as situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and guided participation (Rogoff, 1990). The current study develops these contemporary viewpoints of apprenticeship to extend our understanding of participation-based approaches to learning, with the introduction of "trialogical learning". The tacit nature of quilting knowledge requires consideration of the quilters' thinking, learning and development, with regard to their relations and embodied (inter)actions with other people, community, material artefacts and tools, forming a constellation of collective knowledge practices. Community members know who has expertise in particular quilting techniques and approach them for assistance; while those quilters who have more experience provide support and guidance, even when situated instruction or nuanced scaffolding is not intended. The individual learner decides whether to take up, ignore, or transform these ideas. Therefore, the term "apprenticeship" in the quiltmakers' context refers to the development of thinking as a cultural process, where the quilters engage and learn from peers, embodied knowledge, actions, and the materiality of their environment. Consequently, expertise is socially and physically distributed, with the quilters becoming apprentices to their own future practices.

- **Community**

A community is a group of people who have a passion for a particular interest, in this case quiltmaking. As a community of learners they engage in a process of collective learning where responsibilities and roles are shared as they interact in their quilting endeavours. With such an assortment of different types of quilting collectives, for example house group, quilt guild, and quilting chapter, the two quilting groups involved in the current study are viewed as micro-communities within the wider quilting community of Aotearoa New Zealand.

- **Everyday learning**

The term "everyday" is a contestable concept. It is often assumed to be a way of describing that which does not have a cultural history. "Everyday" is regularly perceived as being: ordinary, mundane, routine, commonplace, matter of fact, unremarkable, humdrum, casual, lowly and nondescript. When applied to *learning*, within family and community-based settings, "everyday learning" has been described as: natural, practical, simple, second nature, and *informal*. Everyday learning in this thesis is conceived as a question about how and what the quilters know under their ordinary interaction of "quilting together". Therefore, the terms everyday learning and informal learning are interchanged in the text.

- **Gender-specific pronouns**

While acknowledging men quilt too, in this study quiltmaking was a female-dominant leisure activity, and all of the research participants were women. Therefore, feminine third-person personal pronouns are used to signify the female entity rather than remain gender-neutral.

- **Informal learning**

There is an absence of an agreed definition of informal learning. However, the main tendency is to conceive it as *anything* that falls outside non-formal learning and formal education systems. For the purpose of the current study, this common conception of informal learning is positioned within the socially, culturally and historically constituted world of the quilters' everyday social practice. As a consequence, the working definition

of informal learning comprises folk theory and folk pedagogy, practical wisdom, craft apprenticeship, experience and environment, active constructivist learning, everyday cultural tools and events, participation, and community.

- **Master quilter**

For the purpose of this study, a "master quilter" is defined as a person who understands and employs the basics of the quiltmaking process, paying attention to details with accuracy and competency, to produce high quality quilts. While these quilters are identified as having extensive knowledge, skills and experience in quiltmaking, it does not necessarily denote that they are professional quilters, teach quilting classes, or exhibit quilts.

- **Patchwork and quilting**

The evolution of quilts is closely connected to the historical development of patchwork and quilting. Technically, patchwork involves sewing pieces of fabric together either in the form of piecing with seams, or by appliqué where material pieces are stitched onto a fabric foundation. In addition, some quilt tops can consist of a single, large piece of fabric, known as wholecloth. Quilting, on the other hand, refers to the stitching of two or more layered textiles to hold them together. The terms – patchwork and quilting – are frequently interchanged, engendering common inference to a quilt or the act of making a quilt (Audin, 2013). In accordance with etiquette expressed by the quilters participating in the present study, the word "quilting" is used in the thesis.

- **Quilt**

Basically, a traditional quilt is a textile sandwich consisting of three layers: a cover top and a fabric backing with a layer of padding in between. The layers are held together by stitching which often forms a pattern on the surface.

- **Supplementary information**

Content footnotes supplement information in the text by providing readers with additional content, explanation and/or description.

- **Teacher / teaching**

Exploring the nature of informal learning, itself, views the quilters and the environment as learning resources. Thus, it may appear that the role of "teacher" and "teaching" are inconsequential or absent altogether. In this thesis, learning-and-teaching are considered to be inseparable with exchanges about how to do things occurring amidst other happenings. In the current study's informal learning context, a different conception of "teacher" and "teaching" arose during the quilters' social practice, whereby a) relations mapped their organised learning sequences in the improvisational flow of quilting endeavours; and b) the learning process was organised by ongoing process. Therefore, situated instruction (Lave, 2011), cultural teaching (Maynard & Greenfield, 2006), and my own term of "participation partnerships" (p. 206) identify that "teacher" and "teaching" are seen through, and in, the processes of learning. During the quilters' collaborative processes there are diverse ways in which quilters assist and guide one another, thereby taking on the role of teacher or performing an act of teaching. In the present study, the quilters use a cultural category of folk terms which has its own intrinsic properties to describe the sharing of ideas or making suggestions, for instance "*I'll show you...*", "*You do this...*", "*Would you like to learn how to make...?*" To advance understanding about everyday learning and teaching activities, it is important to develop and use the language of informal learning as it pertains to the community-based setting.