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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.
"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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- 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/clipart_images/now-if-god-so-clothes-the-34206216
    - http://www.clipartpanda.com/clipart_images/hands-open-receiving-hold-34206316

Selective sewing icons:
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- Chapter 7

Other images were produced by myself, unless otherwise stated.
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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 quilters’ 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.