

Changing the Places and Faces of Changing Wisdoms

Changing Wisdoms had its origins during one of the most trying periods of my life. The worst had already past, but there was still psychological peril in the paths of recovery that I tread and that lay ahead. My then wife, desperately trying to cope with treatment for paranoid schizophrenia, had departed a few years earlier. The divorce was complete leaving me to care for a middle childhood family of twin girls sandwiched in age between two boys. The cherished campus school that I had toiled to preserve for more than a half decade was being closed. I had failed to secure a grant for sustaining and further developing the wonderful system for organizing knowledge and inspiring learning that we had developed. A friend, who had promised to help me start a foundation that engendered the *Changing Wisdoms* name, had gotten so embroiled in falsehoods that it became impossible to untangle them.

My path was to seek a more diverse life. I grew up in a campus school and went straight to college, graduate school, and college teaching before returning to do research and lead another campus school. On the other side of the continent I discovered that there was much life and learning in the business world. I remarried to a true helpmate. During a term as long as my campus school leadership, I had a small computer company and through work in my local Chamber of Commerce even helped to locate a campus of the state university system in my smallish suburban community. When my wife persuaded me to return to academia so that I could continue the research that spawned *Changing Wisdoms*, I brought new knowledge of sales, marketing, accounting and community leadership to students from the southern Appalachian coal fields. My teaching helped my students become “Chapter of the Year” of the Association for Psychological Science and the progress on *Changing Wisdoms* brought me the Association’s prestigious James McKeen Cattell Fellowship. The progress was to thoroughly establish the succession model that tied together all the thousands of data points on knowledge development that we had gathered in the campus school.

One of my old customers from back across the continent hired me to use the results of my Fellowship year to help systematize his growing company in preparation for his sons to take over. As a two-year job turned into four, I helped systematize labor tracking, personnel management, OSHA regulations, warehouse organization, inventory control, and web programming. But the *Changing Wisdoms* research progressed little in these efforts. Something was still missing.

Across the continent again, I stumbled upon a missing ingredient in the *Changing Wisdoms* research that stimulated more than a decade and a half of further findings. I had opened a small store devoted to books and musical instruments related to the founding traditions of a small coastal city—Native American, English, Irish, Jewish, and African. A *Changing Wisdoms* seminar in the store accidentally ended up in a developmental interview with an intellectually stunning collaboration with an aesthetically stunning vocal musician. That collaborative interview eventually led to 80 others as an assessment staff member of the Savannah College of Art and Design. My knowledge of the range and usefulness of design thinking was forever transformed by designers from a score of different disciplines. But the assault of modernism seemed to abandon wisdom.

Hebrew Union College spans the upper world—Los Angeles, Cincinnati, New York, and Jerusalem. It also ties some of the world's most ancient wisdom with the best of modern scholarship. For the first time since the campus school, we were able to show through thousands of data points that developmental ratings inspire learning. The brilliant thinking about ways to connect ancient sources with modern life has stayed with me. But science was largely missing, so I thought a stint at a liberal arts college would help close the gap. There, the cultural separation of sciences, arts, and social sciences embodied in the curriculum separated lives and thoughts as well. With a book contract from Routledge in hand, I resigned to capture what I learned in the last fifty years. The result was my 2017, *Teachers, learners, modes of practice: Theory and methodology for identifying knowledge development*. I call it *Modes of Practice* or just *MOP*.

But the story is impossibly (for me) far from done and like Robert Frost found, there are two roads diverging in the wood. One is the road of formal educational settings, the assessment, administration, accreditation communities have done almost nothing to advance the science of knowledge development. There are millions of projects implied in MOP but barely a handful have begun collecting data. The other road is every day, local, personal living. The internet and artificial intelligence draw us to the most remote corners of human places and times. But it is in the faces and places of daily life where knowledge develops. The focus on every day, local, and personal begins here.

There's an irony, here, of course. How does one focus on every day, local, and personal aspects of life while writing potentially to anyone in the English-speaking world with access to the internet? One beautiful feature of the succession model is that primary practices do not vanish when more advanced practices have become established. Scribbles can be found in Picasso's paintings...and geometric figures and Grandma Moses shapes, as well as some of the most fascinating multiple meanings in art. The developmental interviews began with a single person and expanded to friends, but as they expanded into the hundreds, the current, face-to-face, down-the-street community began to fade. It must be up to anyone reading these pages to help restore their beginnings. If you care to write, use ddirlam@changingwisdoms.com. If you put CW at the beginning of the subject line, I'll be sure not to miss it.