



Music Composition • Education • Psychology • Religion • World Order

# THE LEGACY OF THE GRAWEMEYER AWARDS

1985-2015



The *Grawemeyer* Awards

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

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## SHIRLEY BRICE HEATH



Shirley Brice Heath, linguistic anthropologist, studies learners across the life span in non-formal environments of learning. She gives primary focus to the ways in which speakers, young and old, learn the structures and uses of language as well as the attitudes, gestures, and interactional ways called for in learning environments of all types. In community arts organizations, she has examined the learning outcomes that result when youth living in under-resourced communities participate in planning, creating, producing, and critiquing products and performances. Within community sites dedicated to involving young people in sustained science learning, she has given special attention to the ways in which science learning demands close analysis of visual detail, trial and error, sketching and modeling projects, and strategic problem-solving. In her research on families, friendship groups, and community organizations, she studies how responsible roles accelerate desires for organizational, scientific, and mathematical knowledge.

She is the author of *Words at Work and Play: Three Decades in Family and Community Life* (2012) and the classic *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms* (Cambridge University Press, 1983/1996). Heath has taught at universities throughout the world,

most notably Stanford University and Brown University, and as visiting research professor at King's College, University of London. Of particular note are Heath's publications written for community advocates of creating environments, in which the arts and sciences are both viewed as essential to building highly effective learning environments. In 2004, with Shelby Wolf, she published for teachers and arts practitioners a series on "visual learning" and in 2005, she published a similar series on learning through drama and in arts and science project-based work. In several nations, she has studied youth-based community organizations in which the young devote themselves to environmental projects, social justice, enterprise development, and educational inclusion. Her resource guide and prize-winning documentary *ArtShow* (2000) feature young leaders in four interracial and cross-class community arts organizations in the United States. She also directed and produced two short documentaries on youth organizations dedicated to sustainable agriculture and environmental architecture. These are available with *ArtShow* on a DVD (2005) entitled *ArtShow 2 Grow*.

## THE CREATIVE LOCK-IN

by Shirley Brice Heath

All awards carry some degree of irony. I won the Grawemeyer Award with Milbrey W. McLaughlin, my colleague in public policy at Stanford University, for our book *Identity and Inner-City Beyond Ethnicity and Gender* (1995). For me, the privilege of winning came with an unusual twist of irony. H. Charles Grawemeyer personified the research questions for which Milbrey and I won the award in 1995. Though he came from a family of modest means, he achieved much.

Milbrey and I had set out in 1987 to answer questions surrounding the puzzle of how individuals born into families with little financial or social capital developed exceptional lives of civic and economic success. Grawemeyer grew up among people with differing points of view, aspirations, energy levels, and imaginative power. As a young person, he applied his entrepreneurial spirit to meet their needs and to begin to generate income sufficient to allow him to pursue his early interests in science. When his aspirations met roadblocks, he found alternative means of learning and moving forward as an innovator, businessman, and education supporter. Grawemeyer represents a model of the kind of person who led us as scholars to want to know the environmental features that individuals born into poverty transform as they work their way out of poverty into highly successful and generous lives.

I am an anthropologist, while Milbrey centers her work on questions of public policy. As an anthropologist, I seek always to understand how individuals learn on their own and how they find internal and external resources to do so. Milbrey and I wrote several volumes from our decade of research that also included more than 30 young scholars scattered from a small town in Hawaii to urban and suburban communities of Boston, Massachusetts. All of us as researchers dedicated ourselves to understanding questions surrounding voluntary learning or the gaining of knowledge and skills that lie *outside* formal education. Such skills range from learning to use telescopes to study the night sky, to acquiring a deep interest in the flight patterns of birds, to seeking ways to use vacant spaces that can be turned into rental storage areas. Such skills invariably spring from curiosity, need, or crisis. Applying skills to plan and initiate projects inevitably makes individuals aware of the need to acquire knowledge from a wide range of sources. Many such individuals do as Grawemeyer did and eventually find their way to study in institutions of higher education. Throughout the lives of the young people we studied, learning never seemed to stop as individuals moved from generalized interests and specific curiosities toward more

particular areas of study that in turn led them to want to acquire more knowledge.

In particular, our research team wanted to understand the out-of-school learning environments that drew in young people of poverty and kept them following special interests, developing skills, and seeking experts. These environments included organizations devoted to one of three primary activities—sports, community service, or the arts. We studied more than 100 organizations (divided about equally among rural communities, urban centers, and mid—sized towns located across the United States). In every case, the adults in these organizations relied on young people to take responsibility and leadership for daily operations, the group’s performance, and the integrity and respect of its members.

Over the decade of our study, members of the research team went to “hang out” in organizations nominated by state and regional leaders as “exemplary.” Our goal with the young people in these locations was to learn about their attitudes toward work and play, families and communities, and schools and employment opportunities. In every location, we recorded hundreds of conversations with young people and organizational leaders, collected weekly journals from many young people, and trained some to transcribe recordings and to do interviews with individuals in their region who had inspired them. (All of this work went through regular rigorous human subject clearances, and all writings about the study masked names and locations unless organizations and all participating individuals requested in writing that they be identified.)

What did we learn? Everything that H. Charles Grawemeyer demonstrated in his life and more. Of course, not every one of the young people who came through these organizations matched Grawemeyer’s

ability to give back so generously to his local community and to areas of essential meaning in his life. However, leaders of the organizations as well as volunteers and young people of the communities we studied reflected characteristics that would have made Grawemeyer proud. Many of the young people now work as adult leaders in community organizations and small businesses.

One feature of the learning environments of our research merits particular notice: time commitment and extent of practice under the scrutiny of professional experts. Participants in all the organizations voluntarily went to these organizations and determined for themselves their length of membership and level of commitment to the expected rules, risks, and roles. Individuals who gained the most in leadership skills, curiosity, and drive for continued learning, as well as personal confidence, were those who remained within their chosen organization for a year or more with at least 10 hours weekly of participation through most months of each year. In short, practice mattered in multiple ways.

### **CREATIVITY AND CONNECTIONS**

After our decade of this research, Milbrey and I each chose particular strands of questioning to pursue in the coming decades. Milbrey turned her attention to policy work within school reform and to building at Stanford University the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, with special focus on school districts of the Bay Area region. My research sought to understand reasons behind the exceptional patterns of achievement by young people who were long-term members of exemplary organizations dedicated to the arts. These youngsters, in contrast to those who dedicated themselves to sports or community service, showed inexplicable growth in language and cognitive development, as well as resourcefulness in meeting family and community needs. Thus, for a portion of the arts groups we had learned of early in our study, I continued to examine their approaches

to learning and also followed as many of their alumni as possible into further education and career development.

Three patterns emerged to explain the exceptional value of sustained high-demand participation in arts-centered organizations. Most critical were the professional artists and critics who regularly interacted with the young people. These individuals cared deeply about quality of Work, constant improvement, and knowledge of science and artistic principles behind techniques. An additional pattern emerged after the long hours of observing, studying details, and making comparisons across modes of artistic production and exemplars. The final pattern rested in the highly playful, ever-creative, and ongoing innovative spirit of productions surrounding all art forms, from theater to visual arts. Individuals had to observe, give explanations, offer descriptions, make judgments, meet deadlines, and think entrepreneurially. As they remained year after year in their arts groups, they grew in leadership capabilities; met more professionals; knew more galleries, studios, and theaters; and gained enormous social and professional capital.

All of these connections “locked in” their attitude toward creativity and set them on their way to further study and small-business development. The majority of young people from arts organizations worked for small businesses within the first decade beyond completion of secondary school, and nearly half of these started a small business of their own, often simultaneously Working in regular wage or salary employment as well.

During the years following my experience at the Grawemeyer Award ceremonies, I have thought often of the inspirational interdisciplinary collection of other winners who came to Louisville in 1995 with us. The musician honored was John Adams, whose reputation was climbing rapidly. The award in religion went to Diana L. Eck, whose work in

comparative religion, and particularly in the promise of the religious diversity in the United States, generated considerable recognition of the need to acknowledge common bonds across differences. The winner in world order was Gareth Evans, whose central message was the absolute need for diplomats, policymakers, and educators to understand the intertwining of economic change, human rights, and governance. (The year 2004 was the initial year of an award in psychology, so we had no winner in psychology before that year.)

Though perhaps not consciously, much of my research since the award has reflected themes and experiences that the winners of 1995 also embraced. My research on the voluntary learning in the arts and sciences of young people who live in under-resourced communities has taken me from the United States to South Africa, Australia, and Europe. In all of these locations, the rapid shifts in economic change brought about by multinational corporations, the Internet, and communication technologies have made critical at local and state levels the need for the kind of consultation and deliberation Gareth Evans promoted. The research of Diana Eck foreshadowed what every young group and community has to learn and relearn everyday: common bonds have to be sought within the religious diversity supporting highly divergent values surrounding gender, childhood, violence, and right and wrong.

As for John Adams and his impact on my thinking in subsequent years, that story relates to changes in opportunities in classical music for young people growing up in impoverished communities. When Milbrey and I were in the opening decade of research on youth organizations and activities, we could find no learning environments dedicated to ensemble instrumental music. The expenses, professional demands, and practice requirements exceeded what grassroots organizations could provide. However, in Venezuela, Jose Abreu accepted none of these limits and set out to provide throughout



his country instrumental music and choral opportunities for all children. Thus El Sistema, a system of youth music study in under-resourced communities, developed and grew. By the opening of the 21st century, Venezuela had the highly accomplished Simon Bolivar Orchestra, made up of young musicians who had come through El Sistema programs in Venezuela. The young conductor, Gustavo Dudamel, known around the world by then, had come through El Sistema, and his promotion of the value of instrumental music study for all children convinced other nations that they too could and should develop and sustain their own El Sistema programs.

The United States chose to do so as well, and thus El Sistema USA began in many low-income communities for children whose families could otherwise not have provided instruments or instruction in classical instrumental music for their children. I was fortunate enough to have been in on the beginnings of El Sistema USA, and I set out to study how the learning environment created within instrumental ensemble work affected young players. As I did so, I often recalled my conversations back in 1995 with John Adams who had openly spoken of his own introduction to music and composing. He had grown up playing the clarinet in bands and orchestras and had begun to compose music during his teenage years. No one suggested to him that this role could not belong to someone so young or that his evolving contemporary and humanistic approach to the scores of operas might be considered too “new.” John Adams had told me that, for him, music had opened unexpected pathways. I’ve kept my conversation with John Adams in the back of my mind while studying features of learning that characterize El Sistema-inspired youth orchestras across the United States.

## ENDURING DIRECTIONS

Curiosity and creativity go hand in hand for all scientists and artists, as does the attitude “I want to know and do something different.” This combination of attributes goes a long way as a mantra, as we learned in our research and see also in the writings of Grawemeyer awardees and others whose humanistic creative reach has gone beyond the norm.

Along the way, learning has to be lifelong, life-wide, and life- deep. Generally, we speak of lifelong learning in casual ways and think little about the habits of curiosity, persistence, and often stubbornness toward innovation that sustain such learning. We rarely think, however, of the life-wide learning that inspires these habits, for in this kind of learning, we reach beyond the usual, connect the unlikely elements, and consider the value of bringing together wide-ranging alternatives. But above and beyond the Width and length of the kind of learning reflected in the Grawemeyer Awards is life-deep learning. Here lie the soul, the generative spirit, and the humanistic and ethical core of whatever we create. This difference marks all the awardees whose work I know. This is the core that keeps on giving.