

What Changes When Learning Becomes Relational?

Relational Experiential Learning in Practice

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From content delivery to application, creative agency, relationship, and reflection



THE IDEA...

Learning Is More Than Content Delivery

Relational experiential learning does not require abandoning lectures, course content, or academic rigor. It changes what happens around and after content delivery.

ENCOUNTER → APPLY → CREATE → SHARE → REFLECT → INTEGRATE

The educator designs the conditions for learning. The learner has agency in how they enter, explore, and express the experience.

What do I want students to experience, not only know?



THE RELATIONAL LAYER...

What Are Students Becoming Connected To?

**SELF • STORY • PEERS • COMMUNITY • PLACE • MATERIALS • IDEAS •
THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN WORLD**

Relational learning considers the relationships learners develop with themselves, others, knowledge, place, and the world around them. It invites wonder, inquiry, problem solving, creative risk, and self-trust.

When learners encounter something unfamiliar without being given one prescribed way to respond, they have opportunities to make choices, take creative risks, discover their own capacities, and develop trust in themselves.

It empowers them to recognize...

**I did not know how to do this, and I trusted myself enough to
find a way.**



THE EDUCATOR...

Creating the Conditions

Creative freedom requires a learning environment where students feel safe being exactly who they are.

The educator:

- Creates structure without prescribing every outcome.
- Provides opportunities for application.
- Invites multiple forms of participation and expression.
- Makes room for experimentation and uncertainty.
- Encourages learners to bring their experiences and ways of knowing.
- Supports reflection and integration.



The goal is not to make every experience comfortable. It is to create enough trust for students to enter unfamiliar territory.

QUESTIONS FOR DESIGNING RELATIONAL LEARNING

Before designing a lesson, assignment, or learning experience, ask:

- What do I want learners to experience, not only know?
- What can they do with the content after they encounter it?
- Where can I offer meaningful choice in how they explore or express understanding?
- What relationships might this experience deepen, including the learner's relationship with themselves?
- Am I creating enough trust for students to experiment, take risks, and be themselves?
- How will learners encounter perspectives beyond their own?
- Where will reflection and meaning-making occur?
- What might learners discover about their own abilities, creativity, or ways of knowing?
- What might they carry forward after the assignment or course ends?



ACROSS AGES AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

This approach works with young children, adolescents, college students, adult learners, and community groups. The complexity of the content, questions, expectations, and reflection changes with the learner.

A young child might explore through sensory experience, play, making, and storytelling. An adolescent might use creative choice to explore identity, community, or place. A college student might connect an embodied or creative experience with disciplinary concepts and critical reflection. An adult learner might bring professional knowledge and lived experience into collaborative inquiry. Adapt the complexity of the inquiry, not the learner's opportunity to experience, create, choose, share, trust themselves, and reflect.



Sometimes the most important thing a student carries away from an unfamiliar learning experience is not the thing they made. It is the discovery,

“I did not know how to do this, and I trusted myself enough to find a way.”

WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE...



ART - EXPLORATION AND PLAY

Concept → Material Encounter → Experimentation → Making →
Reflection and connection



Encounter: Students explore a concept, artist, material, spatial problem, creative idea.

Apply and Create: Students work directly with materials through experimentation and making. The process allows individual interpretation rather than requiring everyone to arrive at the same outcome.

Share and Reflect: Students discuss their choices, relationships with materials, process, unexpected outcomes, and what they discovered through making.



ECOPSYCHOLOGY - EMBODIED LEARNING

Concept → Place → Embodied Experience → Creative Response →
Reflection and connection



Encounter: Students explore concepts related to ecological identity, place, relationship, well-being, and the more-than-human world.

Apply and Create: Learning moves beyond abstraction through direct encounters with place, sensory observation, field experiences, artmaking, ecological autobiography, and other place-responsive practices.

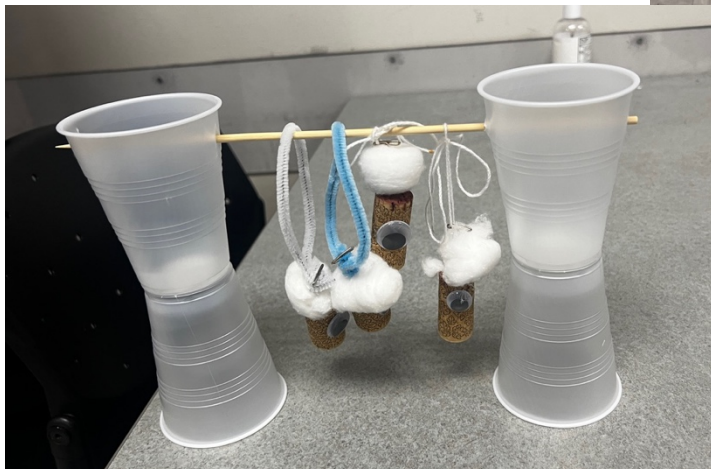
Share and Reflect: Students connect their experiences with course concepts through conversation, creative response, writing, storytelling, and reflection.



HUMANITIES - THE METHOD CHANGES.

The relational structure remains.

Story/Idea → Collaborative Inquiry → Creative Interpretation → Sharing
→ Reflection



Encounter: Students engage with a myth, cultural tradition, symbol, or concept through lecture, reading, video, storytelling, or discussion.

Apply and Create: Students work in groups with a prompt and creative freedom in how they respond. With simple materials and available technology, they might draw, act out a myth, build a map, create a mock podcast, record a video, tell or reinterpret a story, construct symbols, or develop another way to demonstrate their understanding.

Share and Reflect: Groups present their interpretations. Students encounter multiple ways of understanding the same material and reflect on what they learned through making, collaboration, and seeing the work of others.



TRY IT YOURSELF...

Redesign One Learning Experience

What do I currently teach?

What do I want learners to experience, not only know?

What relationship could this experience deepen?

- ☐ Self
- ☐ Story
- ☐ Others
- ☐ Community
- ☐ Place
- ☐ Materials
- ☐ Ideas
- ☐ More-than-human world

Where could I offer greater creative agency?

How will learners reflect and integrate the experience?

What might they carry forward?

LET'S CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION...

Reflect on the relationships this learning created, with knowledge, with others, with the world, and with the learner's own sense of self, and consider,

What might I carry forward because of it?



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EDUCATOR WORKSHOPS AND COLLABORATION...

Interested in developing experiential and relational learning within your classroom, program, or institution? I welcome opportunities for educator workshops, curriculum conversations, and collaborative learning design.



Begin with what is present.

Invite learners to notice.

Create space for direct experience.

Allow multiple ways of participating and knowing.

Make reflection part of the experience.

Let relationship become a learning outcome.

Expand their world view.

Let's make education something to embody rather than something to
consume.



References, acknowledgments, and authorship:

Dream Design

This booklet draws from **Dream Design**, first developed by Jamie Moon in 2025 in *Regenerative Learning Without Overwhelm: A Dream Design for Learning as a Living System*. The framework explores regenerative, relational learning through story, place, creativity, embodiment, reflection, and connection with the more-than-human world.

The relational experiential-learning practices presented in this booklet represent an ongoing application and evolution of Dream Design through my teaching and educational practice. The practical learning cycle used in this booklet is informed by Dream Design but is not intended to replace its original regenerative learning cycle or 4D framework.

Moon, J. (2025). *Regenerative Learning Without Overwhelm: A Dream Design for Learning as a Living System*. Unpublished course manuscript, VPRL 640, Southwestern College.

Photography and Original Material

All photographs in this booklet were taken by **Jamie Moon**. Unless otherwise noted, the curriculum examples, educational applications, written material, and original learning-design content are also the work of Jamie Moon.

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