

"What do you want to do with your one wild and precious life?" poet Mary Oliver asks me almost every day. What I want to do is make a difference. A difference in how people feel and act so they can be part of creating a sustainable common future and feel good about doing it. I want everyone to think in systems to change the paradigm of how we treat ourselves, each other and the natural world. I can't make it happen; I'd been trying and it was too slow, too random. Also not sustainable. Real change comes from within, becomes ingrained as mental models in the stories we live by. First you know, then it matters, then you act. I couldn't even get to the "know" part with many. It became apparent to me that I needed to learn how to foster change organically. My practicum is important because it gives me with tools, skills and experience to address Mary Oliver's question in a better, more lasting way. It's also important because community gardens are a fundamental tool for paradigm change. People intuit the systems connections and value in community gardens. Maybe they think and act differently because of community gardens. Failed community gardens don't give the right message. Right now gardens operate in a vacuum. Networking them together within a community of practice will help strengthen all and support the growth of more gardens. It may even bring policy-level changes.

Systems theory teaches that there are leverage points that can shift the direction of system feedback loops and move the system to a more resilient place. I think food is one of these points and community another. We all eat; we all hunger for connection and purpose. Awareness around these two themes has exploded recently, sometimes expressed as "localism". Much of the work I did at Antioch addressed these themes from different angles. There is evidence that food and community are natural gateways to shift mental models toward systems thinking, resilience and accountability. Backcasting shows what tools will be effective in changing stories. Tools are the implementation of models; models are expressions of design. My practicum project is

essentially a tool. I knew that I had to acquire new methods for engagement and collaboration, and that the design had to be rooted in user needs, not my own agenda. The practicum gave me an opportunity to explore interactive social research and learning communities. It gave me a chance to design an experiment, which may become a model. I was supported in this journey by feedback, expertise and the freedom to try something new. The process was good. Some of the assignments were less valuable than others. Although exposure to a variety of project planning techniques and academic practices has overall value, I would have preferred to focus on the most applicable ones and to incorporate more heuristics.

I am greatly challenged to communicate effectively and efficiently. I go too far, too wide, too fast and too deep. I am over-eager to share everything I know or think I know. I assume. I linger too long or not long enough. It frustrates me and lord knows frustrates anyone trying to have a dialog with me. They give up. I try harder, talking more. It's just plain stupid. I faced this challenge throughout my experience at Antioch, but since Practicum is really about messaging, I faced it square on here. I am working on several techniques. It's important to introduce one thing at a time and let it germinate on its own, so I'm trying to use a parking lot to store thoughts. I'm taking a breath or two to assemble thoughts before speaking. I'm trying to ask questions that will spark conversation rather than delivering pronouncements. With the community of gardeners, I'm asking and listening as a participant, and I'm learning a lot that way. Having the opportunity to 'message' the project repeatedly in the cohort's safe environment of feedback was valuable, and I have enlisted several people for on-going feedback. The poster exercise and the postcard were illuminating; they were my most effective communication because I didn't over-think and imagery replaced words. That is why I feel my instinct toward constructing a model is a good one. It's not like this is a new challenge, but Antioch was the first time I recognized two things: a

single concept conveys layered meaning so let it be; and most important I *can* improve my communications skills *if* I stay *present* and *practice*.

The personal success that will resonate through my future came in a dream. I have shared it with only a few friends. I didn't have children. I think I would have made a good mom, but there was always something 'off' when the opportunity presented itself. The opportunity did present itself, several times, and I chose to abort each time. I do not feel regret; it is what it is and my life has been rich. However, I also aborted my college degree. I didn't graduate because I didn't finish the thesis. I have lived with a personal story of aborted potential for thirty years. That story is over. I have changed my own mental model by getting a degree. This is an incredibly deep and powerful knowing for me. David Korten writes that we must be "the midwives for change" in the world, helping to birth a new paradigm. My practicum project, the Seacoast Community Garden Network, is designed to encourage a paradigm change. I have had the idea for years but the time wasn't right and the technology not there. Both are present now. In the dream I was giving birth to it. This might sound odd, but in the process of "birthing" I have been given a doula and a number of midwives. (A doula provides spiritual and emotional support). The doula is my project partner and sounding board; the midwives the wonderful people who stepped forward to design and build the website, facilitate marketing, and otherwise help the birthing process. Like a child, the Network has a dual role as experimental model and community asset. Just like a child, success comes with birth but also when it's walking on its own. (It says 'Mama' in another dream, but we won't go there). So it's really twins I'm having: a degree and a project.

I do not think I have expertise in sustainability nor do I think I want it. Experts talk, learners listen. I talk too much as is. I want to be open to learning about sustainability. We set personal goals in the very first class. Mine were "be a better participant and redefine my view of success".

Success had always been about checking accomplishments off a list. Not very satisfying, but I didn't know why or what to do about it. Sustainability on the other hand is about evolution, inquiry, uncertainty, lack of control, collaborative process. These are all learner's skills because they are infinite. There is an element of Zen mind to sustainability. I am very happy to have mastered skills at being a learner in sustainability. Primarily these have been on the 'human' side of the discipline, which we covered a lot in the MBA. I would have liked to experience more applied theory and practice on the 'hard' sides of economics, metrics, emerging green technologies, systems modeling, climate change and environmental science – or even specifics like water and waste management strategies. I would have liked the opportunity to research and write case studies on targeted issues of sustainability as applied to business operations. It is where the discussion is now, particularly in the business community. I do not feel a comfort level in these areas. In many cases, however, the conversation has to pass through them before it gets to where I feel more competent, changing hearts and minds with human dynamics.

I used human dynamics skills and strategies extensively in the project including situational leadership, group dynamics, operational framing and participative decision making. Being a quiet leader is also being a better participant. The teamwork at Antioch (more than in my entire life) has spoiled me! Knowing how and when to give up control has been wonderful. Control is overrated. Clarifying responsibilities and working to consensus is much better. These team management skills created the Network and will enable it to be self-organizing. The science of social capital metrics and how to put boundaries on systems had direct application to the project; as have qualitative research tools. We studied systems thinking in almost every course, and I find myself looking at everything from a systems lens: what or who else is connected and what are the impacts? It's the whole reason behind my practicum. A systems perspective – understanding

that every action and object exists in a web of interconnections - is the most significant contributor to advancing sustainability. Systems thinking enables me to see and think like a learner, much more open to input and change. To summarize the core skills learned as they applied to practicum: I was able to lead participative design in an experiment that will affect mental models, attitudes, values and beliefs; deliver quantitative and qualitative measures of social capital over time; replicate and evolve as a self-organizing system; and possibly influence change in behaviors and decision making toward sustainability on a large-scale basis. I have exercised skills in a variety of group processes, marketing, communication and media, and can apply participatory research methods in every case to ensure valid measurements. I can objectively track what I did, evaluate and correct, envision possible scenarios, and I am comfortable with not knowing what will happen next (but I know what to watch for).

It is challenging to define specific content and skills used in the practicum because I have integrated what I learned so fully into what I do and who I am. For the same reason it is a challenge to examine personal growth over the last two years. I wish I had included journaling or blogging! That would have helped my writing skills, too.

In 2008 I wrote a complex paper for Complex Systems. The paper included an energy audit and emissions inventory with recommendations for energy efficiency improvements in 20 buildings at the museum where I work. I had started an interdepartmental Green Team there and positioned myself as an expert. The results and recommendations of the audit were delivered. The entire thing was a colossal failure. Light bulbs were changed and buildings shut down, but nothing substantive changed culturally. The Green Team ended without even a whimper. What would I do differently as a champion now? Everything. Top-down mandates don't permeate culture. Leadership vision and guidance is needed, but change has to start with values alignment

and participation. Even before that it has to begin with listening. The Green Team never even got to the "P" of purpose in the PERFORM model. As the self-appointed expert, I did not demonstrate objective self-assessment or humility. I didn't ask for help, bring out people's innate gifts or interests, see what was going on or cultivate collaborative community. Existing models remained frozen in place. There was no assessment of needs or framing or strategic alignment.

All of this and more is present in the current change initiative, the practicum project. All of these considerations and many others learned at Antioch are in the structure of the model. Personal skills such as intuition, flexibility, objectivity and humility are so ingrained that they came naturally to this project. Being in a supportive and inspiring cohort has made me want to give that same gift in every group endeavor. Clearly it's all about relationships – just as systems thinking is about looking at the relationships and patterns, not the component. Above all, sustainability at any scale is a process, not a product. I am confident that I can be a catalyst as a green champion in the future. My big hurdle is still communicating a message so that it is heard. The practicum project involves a group that is relatively conversant in systems and environmental sustainability, even if they don't call it that. It has made communication easier. As the project progresses, I will have more opportunities to deliver a focused message to a broader audience. I hope practice makes perfect!