

## The Troll Village

When I was ten years old an amazing thing happened to me, I entered my first open corridor classroom at P.S. 75 on Manhattan's upper west side. Up until that very moment, I and the 29 other students entering that classroom, had been squished, three astride into bench seats made for two. We had been silent and passive learners, and the days went by with few meaningful interactions with our teachers or each other. I knew my mother had been very busy studying new ways of teaching at City College, and bringing those ideas and approaches to P.S. 75, where she also worked. But she had not prepared me for what I was about to experience in Michael Tempel's room.

The first thing my friend Beth and I noticed was there were no desks, per se, but tables in all sorts of configurations. The room was broken into nooks, all for different purposes: art, reading, project work, science, or PLAYING GUITAR! What is this, I thought to myself...where do I sit? Our first homework assignment was to go to the grocery store and get a fruit crate. Thirty ten year olds lugged these fruit crates from blocks away to school where we would learn how to make our own cubbies. Tools were strewn on the floor, and as we learned how to use crow bars, wrenches, and hammers. The best way to lay on paint, and how to collaborate. This year was promising to change our lives.

Constructing was a way of life in this classroom. After constructing our cubbies, we constructed a pond in the classroom. We lugged buckets of water and critters from Belvedere Pond in Central Park along with critters, to fill a classroom made plexiglass pond for the purposes of our observing and learning. Before long, kids were always making things, building things, and trying things.

Trolls were the rage in 1970's, So it was natural for us to create a built environment for the trolls that some kids were bringing into class. Not all of us had trolls, yet, creating structures and small habitats for them on the tables allowed all of us to enjoy them. As we began constructing homes for the trolls the project developed, and became more complex. Structures began to be joined as in a village, and because the classroom encouraged students to develop a project or follow a line of inquiry, the Troll Village grew and became more inclusive.



Michael did not supervise this project. He did not co-opt the project into *his* curriculum. Through making the space for students' questions, ideas, and constructions, and providing materials, and time for us to work, Michael allowed this emergent project to become part of the fabric of learning happening in the classroom. In Michael Tempel's fifth grade open classroom, an example of an emergent classroom phenomena, itself a powerful idea, flourished. As the troll village micro-world grew it led me and my friends to consider powerful ideas such as resources,

physical feedback such as whether a structure would hold, and interpersonal feedback on each other's work, and systems for our work as well as those we were providing for our troll citizens.

The emergent curriculum is one that finds its origins in students' invention, but is adapted to become a part of the learning in the classroom. It requires something different from the teacher than leading a study, teaching a lesson, or developing and assigning a project. It requires the teacher to keep their ears to the ground, their eyes peeled, and their mind open to the possibilities. In the emergent curriculum the teacher amplifies, extends, inquires, and supports. Most importantly, the teacher trusts the students with the work of learning.