

# “Doing Double Dutch”: Becoming Attuned to Rhythms of Pathways In and Through Community Spaces

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**Abstract:** As activists and co-researchers from the university and the Cedarwood community, we have engaged in a long-term participatory ethnography to uncover and inform the transformation of an urban community. Our research focuses on understanding relationships and pathways within and across “hubs” emerging in the neighborhood that lead to authentic and meaningful change. This paper presents our current analytic attention to the boundaries, pathways and spaces between hubs. Adopting the metaphor of “doing Double Dutch” emerging from team analysis, we develop the themes of “pathways in” as opening doors; “pathways through” as feeling the rhythms; and the learning and dexterity that energizes trajectories beyond the hubs in the neighborhood. We propose the constructs of rhythm, attunement and dexterity as conceptual and analytic tools to inform our understandings of pathways and boundaries as “hidden energies” for community development and their generative potential for learning. We conclude that stagnation is not an option.

**Keywords:** boundaries; community transformation; pathways; rhythms; attunement; dexterity

*Rhythm is the soul of life. The whole universe revolves in rhythm. Everything and every human action revolves in rhythm (Babatunde Olatunji, 2000).*

## Introduction

Educational researchers and activists interested in community transformation have demonstrated increased attention to the generative potential of boundaries as spaces of learning and change. In particular, many scholars have stressed the learning potential of boundary crossing (Akkerman, 2011; Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). Cultural-historical theorists have explored the changing nature of participation over time and across dynamic communities (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003) and horizontal learning across activity systems (Engeström, 2001). Boundary crossing has been proposed as a way to introduce new ways of participating in established practices as well as expanding and transforming these practices (Akkerman, 2011). This analytic lens can lead researchers to examine how people “traverse or otherwise connect one environment with another in their everyday lives” and how opportunities to learn are “organized and accomplished through trajectories connecting multiple places” (Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010, p. 331).

Trajectories also imply movement and energy. Leander et al. (2010) apply the metaphors of houses from the critical geography work of Lefebvre (1991) and rhizomes from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to emphasize the “continual movements and transformations” and connections across places and within spaces (p. 341). Although a house may appear as a stable physical structure, it is actually a nexus of in and out conduits through which energy flows, just as social spaces are produced through energy and movement. Lefebvre encourages us to increase our sensitivities to movement and the “diverse, multiple rhythms of everyday life” (2004, p. 20). In a similar way, rhizomes are connected yet open systems through which nutrients flow. With underground systems of roots, shoots, and nodes, they mirror the ways surface entities that appear distinct have deep subterranean connections. The rhizome metaphor (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) illustrates the generative yet often hidden energies and capacities across spaces. These theoretical approaches treat structures and places as sets of networked assemblages that are “composed in unfolding activity” (Leander et al., p. 341).

As activists and co-researchers from the university and the Cedarwood community, for the past five years we have engaged in a participatory ethnography aimed to uncover and inform the transformation of an urban community. Our research spans activities across “hubs” that together we have identified, including the Liberty Market (a corner store), The Liberty School Summer Program and Café, Central City Development (CCY) (an active community development office and organization) and the Greenhouse Collaborative (a new initiative of

community gardens and greenhouses). Our overarching goal is to understand relationships and social pathways within and across these hubs that lead to authentic and meaningful change of individuals and community. This paper presents our current analytic attention to the boundaries and spaces between hubs, to the rhythms, pathways, and the generative potential of boundary crossing. It has led us back to our field notes and interviews from the beginning of this long-term ethnography, as we began our research in the hub of the Liberty Market, and our evolving conceptualizations of engagement and belonging in community. As we revisited transcripts and field notes in team meetings with this new lens, a community researcher proposed a new metaphor to capture the movement we are uncovering within and across spaces:

Have you ever done Double Dutch? That's what this reminds me of...these circles are constantly moving. You Double Dutch on the side until you decide to jump in at one of these pathways...then you jump in, you slide, and there you go. [Team Meeting, 10/2015]

Building on this metaphor, we constructed questions to guide our current data collection and analysis: How do community members pick up on, and become attuned to, the varying rhythms of community places and practices? How does this learning lead to engagement in the neighborhood and trajectories beyond the community?

Our interest in transformation and social justice is consistent with the conference theme of transforming learning and empowering learners. The generative nature of boundaries and spaces also leads us to consider how learning environments and community practices are being mutually constituted to enable learners to acquire the kind of learning that empowers them to design their own social futures. This takes place within and across hubs, along pathways and trajectories, and across the community and university. In this paper, we present findings emerging from this new analytic focus. As we explore these spaces, we are learning about “pathways in” as opening doors; “pathways through” as feeling the rhythms; and the learning and dexterity that energizes trajectories beyond the hubs in the neighborhood. We propose the constructs of rhythm, attunement and dexterity as conceptual and analytic tools to inform our understandings of pathways and boundaries as “hidden energies” for community development and their generative potential for learning.

## Theoretical framework

We reach across cultural practice and activity theories of learning (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010) and a rhizomatic model of interdependence and generativity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to frame and guide our interest in spaces and pathways, rhythms and trajectories. Leander et al. (2010) examine the relationship of learning to space and place and, in particular, the relations between learning and movement or mobility. They build on the sociocultural attention to ways learning is distributed across people and places, as well as Lave and Wenger's communities of practice, but also claim that these theories adopt “container narratives” that perpetuate images of bounded spaces. In contrast, they encourage researchers to attend to “how opportunities to learn are organized and accomplished through trajectories connecting multiple places” (p. 331). Cultural practice approaches conceptualize learning as a process occurring within ongoing activity and recognize the diversity of activity settings and practices. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) address some of the challenges of engaging in dynamic practices and shifting activity systems. As people move across systems, they propose that they develop dexterity in navigating practices and participation appropriate to different activity systems.

Our attention to movement has also made us aware of the threats of stagnation. The radical democratic construct of dissensus (Ziareck, 2001) helps us theorize a different boundary crossing; creating spaces to speak across difference and to respectfully challenge differing perspectives of theoreticians and practitioners. This is most evident within our research team, in our daily interactions, where we resist the temptation to insist upon consensus and allow our mutually respected differences to inform authentic debate to energize our research and practices.

Together, these theories provide a framework for considering pathways in and through community spaces and trajectories beyond. They remind us that spaces and practices are shifting and non-linear and that they are situated in “a culture that's constantly being built” (Research team member, 10/2015). We find this focus on movement and change presenting unique methodological challenges.

## Methods

Nespor (2006) describes the work of researchers and ethnographers as looking for patterns. He conceptualizes patterns as “descriptions of processes and networks through which things are moving and changing” (p. 300). He points out that the problem is that we, as researchers, are not good at “thinking movement.” Nespor describes the challenge as navigating a “moving dance-floor (historically shaped and propelled) where dissonant orchestras of social relations battle to define the rhythms” (p. 300). To enter into moving and shifting spaces and practices, he

recommends that we take the advice of Latour (1987) and “follow the movement of things.” We are directing our research and theoretical lenses to spaces where practices are in the process of being mutually constituted, where different rhythms are taking shape.

To address this challenge, we adopt grounded theory approaches to ethnographic inquiry (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001) within a participatory action research (PAR) framework (McIntyre, 2008). In our work, which is by nature iterative in the ways that theory and analysis inform and energize our practice as activists, we are not able to ignore the ethnographic attention to culture and everyday life. We engage the PAR cycle of data collection-analysis-implementation-collection in iterative cycles to build a local evidence base and inform practice. Residents have been trained in research methods and ethical practices as co-researchers, and together with university team members, work as co-authors and co-implementers to address community-identified issues. As we developed our current questions, we returned to transcripts and field notes from across our data set. Our data is coded using grounded theory approaches: themes are iteratively generated and validated through assiduous member checking processes. Adopting the constant comparative method and theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014), as we explored the concepts of rhythm and movement in our research team meetings, the metaphor of Double Dutch emerged. We adopt this metaphor to frame our presentation of findings and analysis.

## Findings

Nespor (2006) directs us to “note how both people and things change as they move through networks that mesh at some points and generate tensions at others” (p. 301). As we look at what moves, Nespor (2006) recommends challenging the boundaries and looking at how neighborhoods are defined by the intersections of multiple pathways. As we explore these pathways and spaces, we are learning about pathways in as “opening doors”; pathways through as “feeling the rhythms”; and the learning and dexterity that energizes trajectories beyond the hubs of the neighborhood.

### Opening doors - Pathways in

As we developed our model of interdependent hubs, our initial concept maps depicted the hubs and pathways but it had the appearance of a closed system (Appendix A). We had focused on the processes and activities, but, as Nespor (2006) noted, we were challenged in seeing the movement and in particular the movement in and out. In the store and across hubs, we recognized the challenge of engaging community members who have traditionally been “dis-engaged,” directing our attention to “pathways in.” Our data suggested that this begins with meeting people “where they’re at” and not judging others:

I think it’s more like, how do we go about reaching the people without it, without them getting offensive. To you talking to them, and then, meeting them where they’re at. Trying to find out what’s going on, to just not always being judgmental. [Greenhouse Collaborative Meeting, 2/2015]

We realized that as community activists we needed to attend to what “meeting people where they’re at” looks like, and how it can be facilitated. As we were analyzing data, a co-researcher suggested that it begins with opening the doors wider:

So when we were talking about the guys on the street corners and the dealers and stuff, but making pathways available for them as well? You can’t judge them because that’s where they are right now, but instead you have to connect with them and have pathways for them...And some of them won’t. We may not get all of them, but if we get one or two to come along we’re making progress. So, that’s harder work, going from feeling totally disengaged to entering the work that you want to do. How do we pull them along or at least make pathways for them? Cause it can’t always be them that are there and ready to move. Sometimes you’ve got to make the door wider open some way or another. [Team meeting, 9/2015]

Parents and community developers talked often of making pathways for everyone who “wants to come along” and opening the doors in intentional ways. Our data has many examples of an apprenticeship model across hubs with attention to providing first time experiences to youth and adults. Through the Work Experience Program (WEP), adults have come to work in the market, the CCY office, and the Liberty School Café. Youth are also trained at the market and as “junior servant leaders” in the Liberty School. A community member described these interactions as “reshaping what interactions look like in the community.” Processes of building relationships and

ways of interacting echo across the hubs – the consistency is intentional. Rather than accepting silos, the connections between spaces ensure the consistencies as individuals move along the pathways.

This means that “pathways in” can occur through any hub. At a team meeting, a co-researcher pointed to the lines we were drawing between hubs on our concept map:

That’s what I would say about these lines. It’s intentional. It’s organic but it’s intentional. It’s intentional for them to come to any one of these hubs and to be able to organically, to be exposed to each of them.

Several years later, this was articulated through the Double Dutch metaphor. We recognized the circles or hubs as constantly moving. And then,

You Double Dutch on the side, until you decide to jump in at one of these pathways. Whether it’s the market, the school, university, or garden, you know, you just Double Dutch. Then you jump in, and you slide, and there you go.

### Feeling the rhythms - Pathways through and between hubs

Opening the doors is the beginning. A co-researcher described how participants enter on pathways through and between the hubs. It begins with listening and using ideas shared by residents:

So that they know, hey, I am relevant, I am important, I am a part of it. Then through that, it allows them to spread the word or the message to others. But when you don’t make them feel welcome, you don’t make them feel like their voices are heard, they’re going to continue down the same roads that they’ve been. It’s just the bottom line. [Team meeting, 10/2015]

Feeling the rhythms means feeling part of something bigger. A team member described this as people “becoming conscious or aware and feeling, you know I’m a part, because the conversations that we now have, they participate in, where before they didn’t” [Team meeting, 10/2015]. They are now “at the table.” They are part of the “Freedom Movement.”

The Double Dutch metaphor becomes powerful here for illustrating the challenges of feeling the rhythms across hubs. The Double Dutch conversation continued in our meeting, focusing on “getting the rhythm” so that you can jump in. We noted that you get better at “jumping in” over time, that you can’t be “stagnant” because once you’re in you have to be a part of it. CCY’s director asked if we all knew how to “twirl,” noting that everyone can’t jump in, but most people know how to twirl. He extended it further:

So that metaphor is, you just, what you’re doing is you get into rhythm. So as we start to talk about energy it’s attunement. Cause we’re using static in different ways - static being still or static where tuning in stations. So you’re tuning until you get to the right station. So it’s energy. So what you’re trying to do is get on the right energy level...so that’s Double Dutch. You have that pathway to get in, but you have to Double Dutch to get in, and once you get in you have to have the right energy to get in rhythm with everything else. [Team meeting, 10/2015]

The pathways through and between are also co-constructed in intentional ways. In our early renditions of our model, we began to recognize the hubs and the consistency of processes within them. We spoke of “challenging the norms” that have come to be accepted in the community by building rhizomatic connections between spaces that echo similar messages, practices, and expectations. Again, the rhythms of different hubs were noticed:

All components at some point tie in on a different level, whether it be social, economical, health, educational...so there’s like a constant interjection between them. So even though it may look static-y, it may be static, but at any frequency there’s always going to be static until you fine tune it. It’s the fine tuning of all the components together that makes you come to a strong frequency to push out there. [Team meeting, 9/2015]

Pushing “out there” means moving beyond, extending the movement beyond the neighborhood.

## Sharing the rhythm and developing dexterity – Pathways beyond

Part of moving forward is sharing the rhythm and “passing it forward”: “You reach one, you teach them, and then you let them reach someone else.” Keeping up the momentum and sharing the rhythm is described as central to the “Freedom Movement.” This was illustrated during a team meeting using our model of rhizomes:

HC: I know irises grow in a rhizome and that’s how they spread. I mean I don’t know if this is an issue, but after a while if you don’t cut them up and replant them the center will die.

LJ: So what does that mean for our data?

DJ: Well, you’re never going to stop, you have to keep changing and developing and if you’ve got entrepreneurial ventures that become their own nodes, they are building on the same principles, same processes that we’ve been talking about, and then they move to another community.

RG: Yeah, and what does that mean for this work?

LJ: So they can become centers of their own.

RG: There you go. [Team meeting, 4/2013]

Another “pathway beyond” takes shape through developing the skills or the “dexterity” to enter different spaces with different rhythms. Stories of community residents who are “making it” are shared often. Abby began as a WEP worker in the store. She worked in the café and received her safe food certification, and she now has a job downtown. One researcher noted that Abby could have kept working her WEP hours, but “now she’s in the mindset of I want something of my own.” Community members, both adults and children, navigate the multiple rhythms of the different hubs in the community, learning how to “jump in” and participate. Similar to the repertoires for participating in practices proposed by Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003), we can encourage people “to develop dexterity in determining which approach from their repertoire is appropriate under which circumstances” (p. 22) or across varying activity settings. We propose that following participants like Abby can add to our understanding of “how engagement in shared and dynamic practices of different communities contributes to individual learning and development” (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 21). We also argue that developing this dexterity is part of the learning that can empower people to design their own social futures.

Within our research team, we also became aware of how work at boundaries generates learning. Akkerman and Bakker (2011) identified transformation as a recognized mechanism for constituting the learning potential of boundary crossing. In this framework, moving or transgressing from expected roles or modes of interpretation can open up spaces for the construction of new ways of being and thinking. In our roles as university and community researchers, we entered this emergent zone of contact and this joint work at the boundaries. We use the concept of dissensus (Ziarek, 2007) to illuminate the ways that collaborative research can foster generative tensions at the boundaries. A doctoral student on our research team summarized this tension in a memo:

We do create shared narratives. We also embrace the continuous joint work we are crafting at the boundaries – our unique frameworks, experiences, identities and practices shape the dialogic spaces we co-construct; lead us to embrace dissensus and recognize the generative potential it holds for us as a research team. [Memo, 5/2012]

Whether in the store or in our team meetings, friction and dissensus emerging from boundaries ground our “constant move forward.” As we work together toward urban transformation, stagnation is not an option

## Conclusion and implications

The theoretical lens framing our current analysis encouraged us to treat structures and places as networked assemblages that are “composed in unfolding activity” (Leander et al., p. 341). The themes of boundaries, movement and rhythms have permeated our data from the very beginning of this long-term ethnography. We adopted the theoretical metaphor of rhizomes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to bring attention to pathways and their transformational potential. However, we had been conceptualizing the interdependent hubs as a closed system of relations. Returning to our data and devoting research team meetings to this analysis created a dialogic space to uncover what is happening along the pathways connecting hubs and at multiple boundaries. Metaphors of Double Dutch and notions of “attunement” emerged from these meetings, providing conceptual tools to add to our understandings of the pathways and spaces, their rhythms and “hidden energies” for community development and

their generative potential for learning. This metaphor extended our attention to pathways in and pathways beyond, reminding us that the systems are open.

As social activists and researchers, we align with the conference goal of uncovering ways that we can empower learners to design their own social futures. In our analysis, this emerged as “pathways beyond.” Building on the concept of repertoires of practice developed by Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003), we propose that examining the dexterity to feel and navigate the rhythms of different spaces suggests a new way for us to explore how people are learning. Our findings mirror notions of learning as increased participation in valued practices of a community, but also provide insights into how this learning can move with and across spaces, and how it might empower learners to extend across and beyond participation in the hubs in the neighborhood.

Our analysis is also pointing to challenges and barriers, to processes that constrain access or challenge the momentum toward transformation. As we focus on movement and dynamics, we also need to consider cohesion or stasis. As a community member stated, “Stagnation is not an option.” We proposed “pathways in” taking shape as opening doors by creating spaces for voices and we recognized that the intentional redundancy across hubs was providing multiple entry points. However, we know that some community members do not “feel a part of” the changes under construction in Cedarwood. We are also interested in why some may choose to stay out, and the physical and psychological barriers that persist. Exploring historically closed doors can help us challenge simplistic views of access to resources based on physical accessibility, especially as we consider “pathways in” to the shifting rhythms of community spaces.

Consistent with the conference theme, our goal as researchers and practitioners is to uncover development and learning across spaces in community, and in particular the kinds of learning that might empower community members to engage with and design their own futures. As we have uncovered the generative potential of working the boundaries and pathways across hubs in the community, we have also explored ways to make the connections and rhythms more intentional and explicit. Recently, our “visual connections” initiative has emerged to create a visual representation of the pathways across hubs of activity. A series of mural and community arts projects are being created that link these pathways through powerful images, spoken word, and digital media (#FreedomSankofa, Figures 1). Our research continues to guide our practice as we work toward engaging community in imagining pathways and creating spaces that foster connections across their histories, within their community, and toward their futures.



Figure 1. #FreedomSankofa

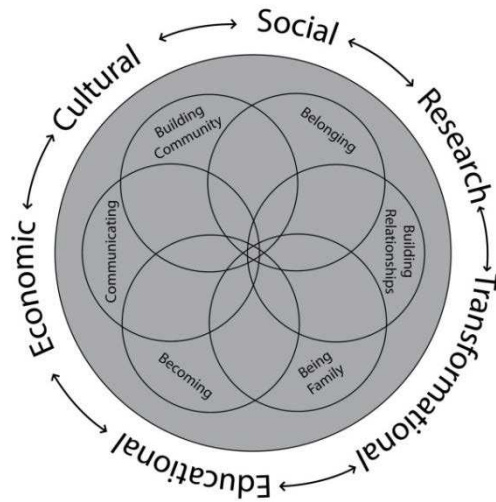
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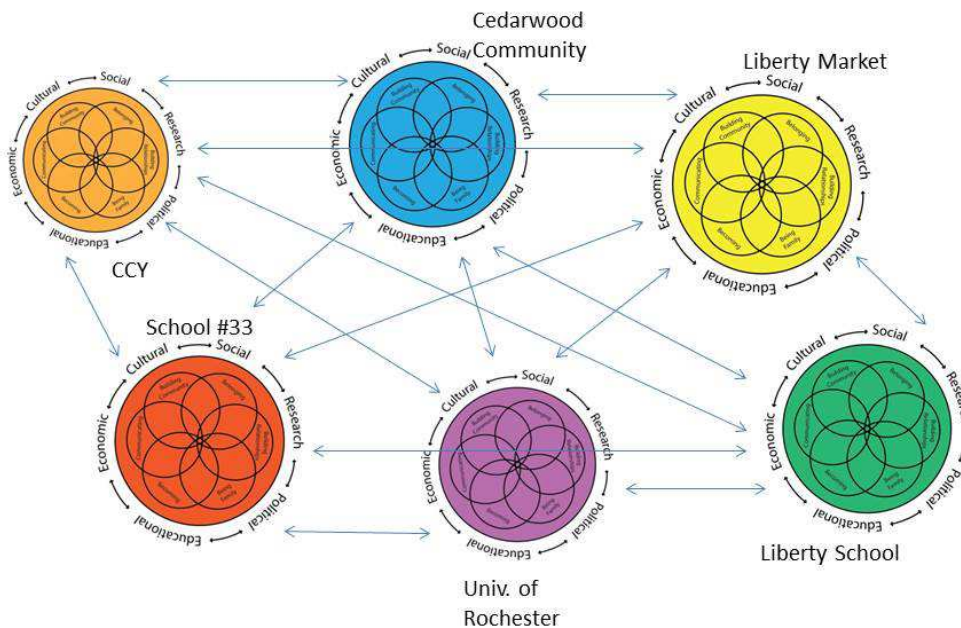
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**Appendix A:**

**Model of Interdependent Processes & Transformational Pathways\***



**Interdependent Hubs & Transformational Pathways**



\*As presented at:

Duckles, J.M., Moses, G., Moses, R., Gallegos-Greenwich, J., & Stroud, B. (2015, February). Co-constructing active and collective pathways of family and community engagement: A community-based approach. Data Analysis Session. 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum: Inequality, Poverty and Education: An ethnographic invitation. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.