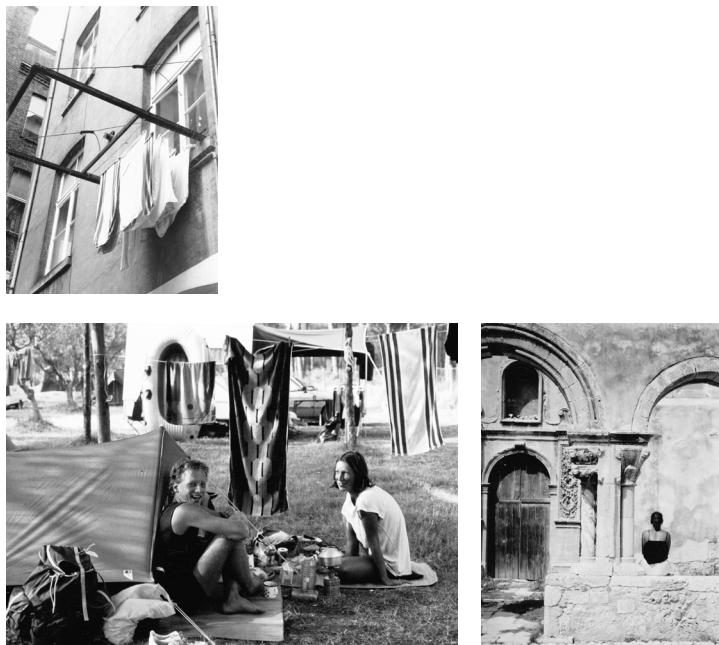


## **6 Experiential Learning Across the Fields**

---

The Irish philosopher John O'Donohue writes in his book »Anam Cara« (1997, p. 207): »Autumn is one of my favourite times of the year; seeds sown in the spring, nurtured by the summer, now yield their fruit in autumn. It is harvest, the homecoming of the seeds' long and lonely journey through darkness and silence under the earth's surface... Correspondingly, when it is autumn in your life, the things that happened in the past, or the experiences that were sown in the clay of your heart, almost unknown to you, now yield their fruit. Autumntime in a person's life can be a time of great gathering. It is a time for harvesting the fruits of your experiences.«

Anyone who accumulated wide ranging experiences in teaching faces a creative choice in putting that legacy to paper. The author in this case chose to use a series of photos with text to illustrate formative and inspirational moments from his several decades as a dedicated teacher, and father. His account begins with university studies in special education and gifted education, followed by years of teaching school while living a rich family life with his wife and two boys, and it ends with his pedagogical research activities in the field of higher education coupled, in part, with retrospective reflections during these later years. The chapter closes with selected material from an intergenerational learning project that served to put the author in touch once more with his own roots.



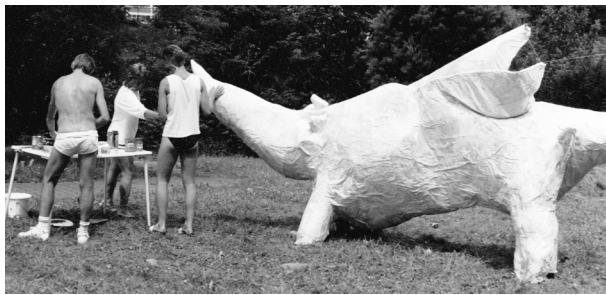
Figures 6.1-6.3

A touch of Italian ease wafts through this Cologne rear courtyard. These were the student years, a time of transition, of loosening old familial ties, of experimenting and taking soundings, of exploring and testing ways, that ranged from art through meditation to psychoanalysis, and of dealing with emerging life themes. Throughout, it was also a time for earning educational qualifications, markers on the way to building both his professional and personal lives (Fig. 6.1). We traveled light as we explored Italy's Renaissance towns and art treasures, from Tuscany to Sicily. Financial resources may have been very tight, but it was also a time of great freedom and youthful joy. Studying pedagogy at the university of the 1980s was a wide open expanse, with great substantive possibilities, from the writings of Erich Fromm (»To Have or to Be?« or »The Art of Loving«) to those of Henry Miller (e.g., »Plexus«), or Vladimir Nabokov (e.g., »Ada or Ardor«), all books that we carried in our rucksacks (Fig. 6.2 and 6.3).



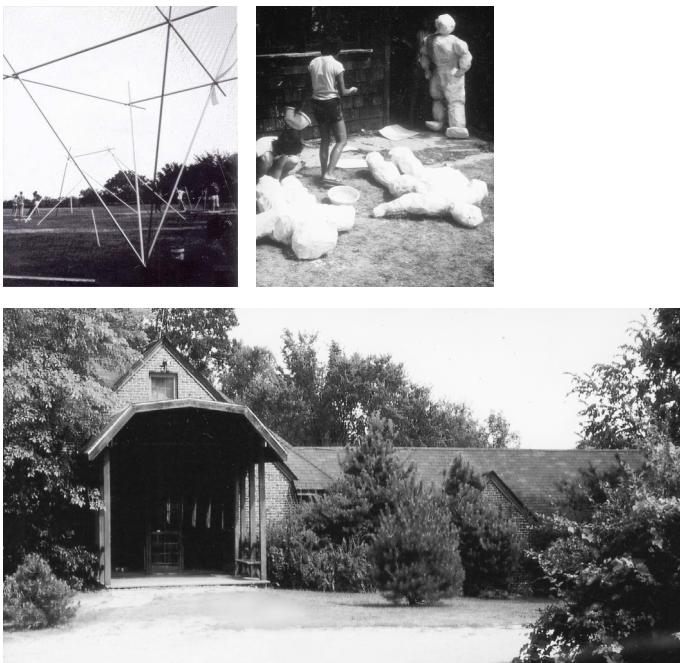
Figures 6.4 and 6.5

The Balearic Islands and Italian coasts at times also became places for contemplative inquiry by artistic means. Back then, I experienced time as a *here and now* that could run on practically forever. The professional life of a special education teacher that I would embrace after matriculating at the University of Cologne still lay far in the future and had hardly any definite contours. With the student life in Cologne also having its share of hardships while working as a waiter and night shift taxi driver to earn a living, those sojourns by the Mediterranean served to plumb and capture the pauses in my biography. They let me merge with time (Fig. 6.4). The 1980s were the time of the therapeutic society. Self-discovery in realms like yoga, meditation, Zen, Tai Chi and breathing or bioenergetics therapies all belonged to the trove of experiences of many university students in those days. Starting from Carl Rogers' pedagogy of freedom, it was thus not much of a leap to even more liberated designs (e.g., the philosophies of Swami Muktananda, S.N. Goenka, or Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, later: Osho) – and to why these ideas, experiences and concepts should not also benefit children and youths with emotional, social and behavioral difficulties? Contemporaneously, within humanistic psychology there developed the so-called holistic or gestalt therapeutic action models (e.g., Fritz Perls) extending to music therapeutic or body-centered spiritual approaches. These currents also found their expression in German pedagogies. A friend (Preerna) sent me the picture (Fig. 6.5) with greetings from her workshop in Bhagwan's ashram in Puna, India, where she did studies in meditation and creative arts.



Figures 6.6 and 6.7

Scenes from inclusive German-French-Polish-Hungarian summer camps for youngsters and young adults with and without disabilities that we conducted near Passau in Lower Bavaria. Visually-, physically-, and mentally-challenged young people augmented each other with their respective abilities, learned also to communicate across language barriers and to work toward shared goals. The Grimm Brothers fairy tale of the Bremen town musicians provided inspiration for the hands-on oriented project activities. Bettina von Grandidier and I, joined by a small team of other university students, led these inclusive summer camps for the erew-Academy Viersen, Germany (with Eva Kluge and Karl-Josef Kluge as directors), with support from the Franco-German Youth Office, and in cooperation with the University of Cologne (Department for Special Education). Richard, a colleague from a special education institution in French Alsace, seen here in Fig. 6.7, was a dependable collaboration partner during three summers in the practical implementation of the camp and in completing projects. He was always ready to pitch in with energy, perseverance, ideas and humor.



Figures 6.8.-6.10

Considering that I am the son and grandson of South Westphalian blacksmiths, as were many generations before – including the two great-uncles who emigrated to the United States around 1850 – it was in some ways a poignant social and cultural leap when, in 1984, I flew to Michigan to work in David P. Weikart's HighScope International Summer Camp. Here I took on teaching duties and the occasional art project with highly motivated young people from around the world. Young people from all over the United States, from South America, Asia, and Europe lived and worked in the HighScope Camp with a team of dedicated counselors. The workshop that David P. Weikart founded in the 1960s, together with his wife Phyllis, was all about thinking productively, designing creatively, and building constructively while developing shared ideas and social responsibility (Broecker 2015 a). After the two months in Michigan I explored parts of the United States.



Figures 6.11 and 6.12

Here from my student teaching days in Solingen, Germany, is a picture of students in a classroom for youth with emotional and behavioral difficulties I engaged with in hands-on learning. Using wood, sheets, and plaster of Paris, together we built a model of a specific Alpine region, the area around the Zugspitze Mountain. We calculated the altitude relationships, the height of the mountain tops, the distances between the individual mountains and then transferred them to our home-made model. Finally, we added detailed features such as mountain lakes, trees, shrubs, huts, summit stations and ropeways (Fig. 6.11).

Inviting artists to take part in pedagogical work at school can open up new perspectives. This student with behavioral and learning difficulties is working with artist Gunhild Lorenzen on the subject of right-wing violence. The youth had fled with his family to Germany from the Balkan wars. Anti-foreigner tendencies in German society in the mid-1990s gave rise to fears in the boy that he is expressing here and reflecting on together with the artist (Fig. 6.12).



Figures 6.13 and 6.14

The snapshot on the left came to be when I developed a thematic framework for a hands-on learning project in a specialized classroom for students with emotional and behavioral difficulties that I based on the Grimm Brothers' children's and household tales. We knocked together a witch's house using discarded construction wood and knocked-down old furniture that we then could crawl into and read fairy tales out loud. Building the shack offered a rich array of chances to communicate but also of technical-practical learning. Since only one student in that learning group had an intact father relationship, for the rest of the boys I facilitated some belated experiences that they otherwise might have experienced in a family environment with an active father of their own (Fig. 6.13).

In Mark Twain's »Tom Sawyer«, the hero lets the other village kids give him their little treasures in return for *allowing* them to help him paint a long wooden fence. It was a very unusual deal that astonishes today's children. Still, this literary work provides a motivational instruction to pay attention to the little treasures that children, learning in an inclusive setting in elementary school, keep in their junk drawer. A little museum can easily be arranged with them, in a paper-lined shoe box top. A story goes with every object that a child contributes that can be shared, verbally and in writing (Fig. 6.14).



Figure 6.15 and 6.16

What grammar school boy would not enthuse over King Arthur and the Holy Grail, over knights jousting and what it was like to live in a castle? The same holds true in a specialized school for boys with emotional and behavioral difficulties shown here. We lined two walls of our classroom with butcher paper which we then covered with Middle Age-type imagery. In play scenes, the boys used halberds, shields, capes and other props, some of which they had made. I started the instructional units with a general overview of works of art or movies that might show a market in the Middle Ages, for example, or by playing recordings of typical music of the times. A collection of picture- and non-fiction books, such as an account of the training a squire or knight had to undergo or of life in a castle, let the boys access the topic individually and in depth (Fig. 6.15).

The photo on the right shows a class scene from an alternative school for students with emotional, behavioral and learning problems. The immediate object was a reenactment of the »Snow White« fairy tale. The students could make use of a stock of clothing, shoes, bags and other props. In this scene, the play acting had suddenly achieved its own dynamic of enacting the birth of a child. The back story for this was that a student had experienced just such an event in his family. In this way, the subjective contents of the students' real lives find their expression in an instructional setting that offers the means and room for play (Fig. 6.16).



Figure 6.17

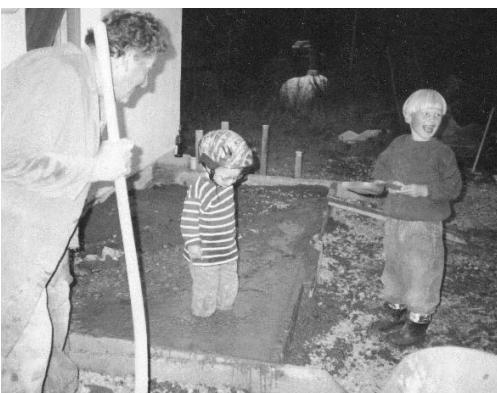
A good way to start a conversation with youngsters (and also with university students in pre-service teacher education), whose educational biography and way through life are marred by the multiple burdens, conflicts, and crises that we frequently encounter in the context of emotional and behavioral difficulties, is by joining them in reconstructing their cultural orientations (e.g., from the world of Hip Hop and Rap) in the form of pictorial design or text or music productions. What takes place behind the surface of their behavior in terms of identity-forming and emotional processes becomes visible, at least incrementally, and, within limits, accessible to pedagogical thinking and adaptation (Broecker et al., 2017).



Figures 6.18 and 6.19

I made the hand puppet on the left from a wooden spoon, a bit of fabric and a piece of rabbit fur. I used it over the years in the field of special education and inclusive education, particularly when working with young children. With this little fellow, I would get children talking who at first did not communicate with anyone. Children who seemed to tune out or ignore their teacher's verbal messages paid attention to what the puppet poised on my hand had to say, and eventually they also responded to it (Fig. 6.18).

That a boy in third grade who at times exhibits severe behavioral problems is nevertheless capable of special creative achievements – as long as he is intensively supervised and constructively counseled and supported in his strengths and abilities – is shown by this highly original purse lantern that he designed. He fashioned it from chicken wire on which he then pasted translucent colored paper. He proudly carried his lantern in the St. Martin's Day parade that the school put on in the city neighborhood (Fig. 6.19).



Figures 6.20 and 6.21

Children want to test themselves and master real, meaningful tasks. In doing so, they come to know and train their strengths. The expansion and remodeling of our house and yard (in the »Bergisches Land«, a rural region east of Cologne, Germany) here proceeds as a multigenerational project that even grandfather helps out with and serves in as role model for his grandchildren. In later life, after the boys complete their studies, they may very well play a role as engineers in the construction of buildings, bridges or train trestles. Here, together with father and grandfather, the action involves pouring concrete for several superposed stair steps. It may even be possible to talk of precocious project experience, practice in teamwork and acquisition of materials as well as technical-artisanal capabilities as being part of it.



Figures 6.22-6.23

Contemporaneous with my work during the 1990s in specialized schools for children and youth with emotional and behavioral difficulties, I taught a recurring continuing education course focused on the creative arts. It was an in-service training program for individuals who had already been active in social and pedagogical fields for some time. This activity as group moderator over the years put me in touch with many fascinating people versed in life and their professions. All along, it was I who also learned in these workshops.

Together, the participants in these creative arts workshops and I worked through an abundance of living-learning processes. As action guide framework models served the »Encounter Groups« that Carl Rogers had led at one time as did Ruth Cohn's »Theme-focused Interaction«. I always emerged from these seminars newly inspired and energized to return to my own classrooms in specialized schools for youth with emotional and behavioral difficulties.

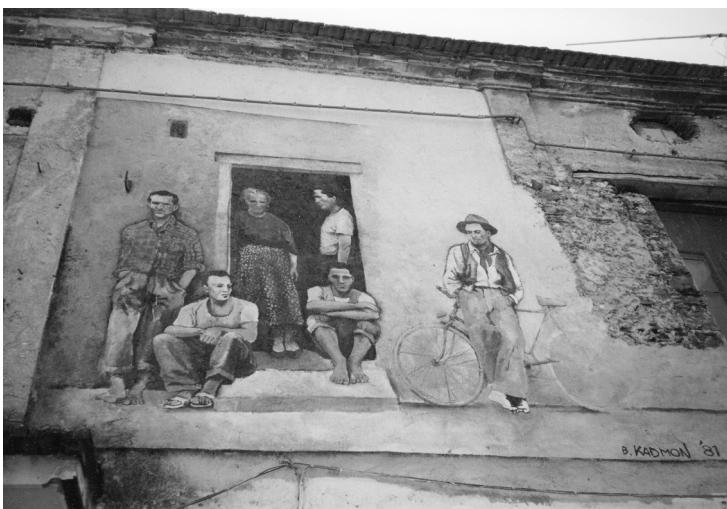


Figure 6.24

Be it Campania, the Basilicata, Apulia, Calabria, Sardinia or Sicily, southern Italy was and remained throughout the years of teaching school a longed-for destination, a world to retreat to, to slow down in, to contemplate it all from – a counter world to my solid-booked professional and familial existence. One time I traveled to Procida, Ischia or Capri, always combining it with a shorter stay in Naples; another time it was to Bari, Monopoli, or Lecce. Learning the Italian language also served this tapping into and navigating this alternate world. The murals I discovered on one of these journeys in the small coastal town of Diamante, Calabria, reflected at once the story of economic and social hardships of my cherished »Mezzogiorno« and the resulting great wave of emigration to the United States that took off in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Figures 6.25 and 6.26

It was a hugely engrossing project, building a little hut of sticks, branches, and twigs with our children and the children of our village neighbors. The children readily picked up on my suggestions regarding construction technique, as in how to weave the differing materials together. At the same time, they also tried to figure out on their own how to fasten sticks together. The children's motivation to pitch in was naturally present; there was no need for psychological tricks to bring it out or give it wings. The motivation was simply there and plenty of it. Overgrown by now with bean tendrils, the little shack the children and I built with sticks and branches has become their space for play and fantasy.



Figures 6.27 and 6.28

In many spots on the beaches of the Île d'Oléron the children found stones worn round and flat that they stacked up in fantastic stone towers. Stacking and building high seems to be a concept that is naturally present in the child and emerges unprompted. Stacking stones on the one hand has the traits of an absorbing game, but at the same time material properties and physical laws have to be investigated and factored in (Fig. 6.28)

Next to diverse stone towers, my younger son erected a kind of labyrinth of stones. The question remains in the air: is this an archetypal motif in us or is there an external stimulus for it? With the stick end, which easily could be thought of as an arm extension, the youngster taps along between the stones to explore the possible routes, entrances and exits of this labyrinth. This scene, too, appears as a self-absorbed game. At the same time, the action can be interpreted as anticipating situations and tasks that will have to be handled later in life (Fig. 6.27).



Figure 6.29

The dunes on the French Atlantic coast, quite steep in places, make it possible, for instance, to toss bocce balls up a dune and let them roll back down to you. While the children initiate the movement, the balls will roll back down each time in an idiosyncratic way, taking routes that partly vary depending on how they arrived at the top. It's a game very much sufficient unto itself, in Friedrich von Schiller's sense, who praised such games as the highest fulfillment for the human being.



Figures 6.30 and 6.31

This was a project that I carried out with my students from the University of Cologne in the kindergarten that my youngest son also attended. This scene shows construction and sculpting work with Ytong aerated concrete (Fig. 6.30). With the university students helping out, intensive pedagogical work was possible with the children and also allowed them to handle materials and tools that otherwise are often left out because of expense or potential risks. After completing the art projects we arranged a museum exhibition of the created objects. The picture shows me giving the interactive opening remarks as part of which I placed tools and work materials in my younger son's backpack, including a hammer, pliers, paint brush, sticky tape, etc. so that he would be equipped – symbolically – for his life's journey and for creatively handling tasks that he would confront at each stage. A small packet of Band-Aids also went into the backpack, just in case (Fig. 6.31).



Figures 6.32 and 6.33

»At the end of a long day on a Scotland trip, eating peanut butter sandwiches while sitting in pajamas by the window, my son is watching the busy back and forth of fishing boats in the harbor of Mallaig and the ferries that connect the mainland with the Isle of Skye« (Fig. 6.32)...

»Even in October, Sardinia's noonday heat prompts taking an extended siesta in the cool of our hotel room. My still youthful travel companion on his own displayed a talent for the contemplative life in how he dove in a very natural way into the long stretch of time that such an afternoon becomes. I then fixed a little snack, made some tea, rinsed out some shirts, and made notes of ideas for projects that I just then was working on, while my older son followed his own thoughts« (Fig. 6.33) (the father's notes).



Figure 6.34

On a summer's day under a bright blue sky, with the water's surface a green-turquoise, sunlight bathes this frisky group composed of my younger son, a friend and his children. The bodies dive into air, light and water and build a constantly changing formation that continually relates each to the other. There is something light and euphoric about these water games. Together we enjoyed this leisure-filled life in our region's outdoor pools for several years and during cooler seasons we pursued such happy doings in indoor pools. This water play was a restorative intermezzo in the often tightly scheduled professional, school and family day-by-day.

Since I have an intense relationship to water myself, I did not find it hard to pass on the joy of moving in the watery element to my two sons, supporting and accompanying them every step along the way as they learned to swim to when they earned their lifesaving certificate and started swimming competitively. The public pool during the summer, with its special play of light and color, the coruscating green, blue, and turquoise, surely belongs to the best ways for the children to hit the water, especially when we choose the rather less crowded morning hours to visit the pool. And so often I returned home from swimming with thoughts, ideas and tentative solutions that moved me along in my mental and academic work.

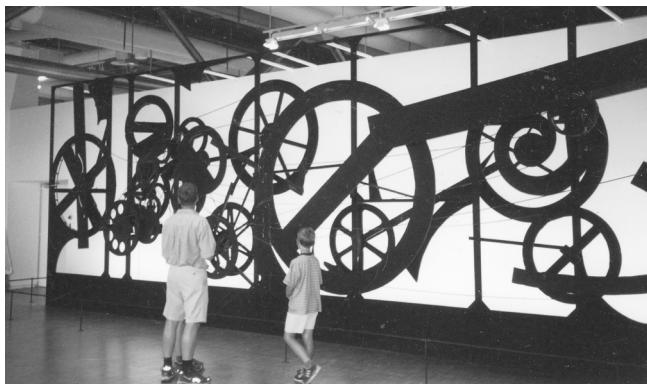


Figure 6.35

Modern art, as here in the Centre Pompidou in Paris, can become a catalyst for thinking, problem solving, designing and inventing. Children react completely spontaneously and with a rich flow of ideas to the exhibits, especially when you pick up on their ideas and thoughts right there on the spot and give them additional food for thought.



Fig. 6.36

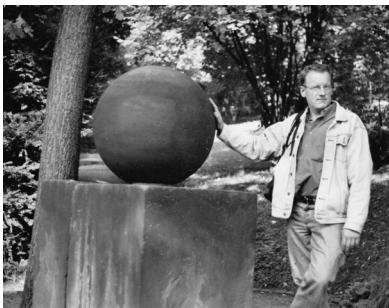
This picture was taken in a youth hostel in Clichy near Paris where my wife and I and our two boys shared one room with double bunk beds. The mattresses sagged, so that we put some on the floor and used them in this way for together reading out loud and reading ahead in Preußler's book »Krabat« in the evening. The scene amenable possibly to symbolic interpretation, showing as it does, the boys looking out from the still-protecting familial inner sphere into the world outside.



Figures 6.37 and 6.38

Here is a summer garden scene filled with sensory experiences of colors, flour paste and light. Blossom scent and humming insects surround the children. Completely absorbed, the two boys busy themselves in the cooling shade of a sun umbrella. The garden turns into an art studio. By stirring, smearing, rolling and troweling, the children gain experience with colors, paste and the most varied kinds of tools. Flickering light, coruscating color effects – the children are completely engaged in the present moment (Fig. 6.37).

Once I gave each boy a package for Christmas that contained multicolored materials from a home improvement store. There were plastic tubes of various types and sizes, strings and cords, duct tape, metal chains, assorted pliers, funnels, plastic boxes, plastic parts suitable for fitting together like those mounted under a sink; there were also trowels, brushes and much more. I had simply wandered through the DIY store and picked up anything that seemed suitable for creative activity in the garden or on the basement workbench. I'd bought everything in duplicate so that I could tie up the same package of materials for each of the boys. The boys knew what to do with the material, taking this or that for experiments in the most varied connections and situations. At first, some of the materials seemed to be useless until, with time, it turned out they were of use for something after all (Fig. 6.38).



Figures 6.39 and 6.40

Amid the shouting of the sutlers, the clatter and clip-clop of horse-drawn wagons, the clacking of looms, the house on Weimar's Frauenplan was not always quiet enough for Johann Wolfgang von Goethe when he wanted to concentrate. By contrast, he found total peace in his country cottage in the Ilm valley. Anyone exposed to other peoples' busyness – how often was this the case for me, even in the small village where we lived – longs to a special degree for such a refuge, needing it for engaging in reflection, cleaning up thoughts, working out ideas and doing creative work (Fig. 6.40).

In Goethe's garden that is part of his refuge here by the Ilm sits this stone sculpture: a ball placed on top of a squared stone. The theme symbolized here is particularly deep and invites self-exploration and reflection. The stone block stands for everything that is firm and stable in life and the ball for everything that is mobile and changeable. Perhaps the merging of the polar forces of *male* and *female* as archetypal life theme could also be extrapolated from this sculpture. True, it took some time before Carl Gustav Jung would take up this topic, but Johann Wolfgang von Goethe already knew, like many others before him, about their central role in human life (Fig. 6.39).



Figures 6.41 and 6.42

»My younger son had often expressed the desire to visit Wartburg Castle in Thuringia. It was not just that the castle seemed to him exceedingly picturesque and represented for with all its details an extremely interesting castle construction from medieval times, but it is also known as Martin Luther's hiding place where he translated the Bible. Just investigating this background absorbed in school was worth the trek up to the castle for my son. Even I was transported back to my childhood when I collected pictures of castles and read tales of knighthood« (Fig. 6.41)...

»To wander on mountain paths like here the ›Merano Höhenweg‹ (high path) with a child is not only valuable in a pedagogical sense, but also holds great significance for life. For instance, there are steep climbs, where you have to struggle, alternating with flat or descending segments that make for easy, even speedy, going. Some parts are rocky and when the fog moves in, visibility can be very limited. The boy learns here how important it is to have good equipment along, plan a realistic distance to travel that also challenges and trains his endurance and stamina but in no way overtaxes him and, with all that, he must keep an eye on the weather and gauge how it may change« (Fig. 6.42) (the father's notes).



Figures 6.43 and 6.44

Here a boy who until now loved to paint, draw, and design above all starts in a very natural way to take part in the pavement work using natural stone and to test and develop his related skills and dexterity. Thinking about, designing, and constructing takes place with regard to structures, patterns, and forms. The individual pavers have to be gauged carefully for size and shape and then positioned on a bed of sand. On the one hand, there is the overall structure, designed by the grandparents and parents beforehand, but then when it comes to the detailed work it all depends on the child's individual dexterity. Therein could also lay a symbolic deeper meaning relating to one's own life (Fig. 6.43).

Children will very much treasure letting them help in a meaningful, age-appropriate way in real activities. This scene is about laying the driveway to our house (in the »Bergisches Land«, east of Cologne, Germany) with natural stone. The total mass of cobblestones required was substantial, so that we bought an additional load from another village resident to fill remaining empty spots. In loading them up together, riding along on the tractor's trailer, followed by unloading the stones, the boys, helped by two neighborhood friends, were all business (Fig. 6.44).



Figures 6.45 and 6.46

The sleeper berths in the night train from Munich to Naples for many years counted among the most attractive overnighting-cum-transportation options during that trip. Here there was much to climb on, snuggle in, and listen to, like the rhythmic clickety-clack of the train wheels. And imagining the train in the middle of the night high up in the mountains heightened the adventure just that much more for them.

Walking the coastal route connecting the Cinque Terre in Italy's Liguria with the children was a wonderful shared experience. Every individual segment is of incomparable scenic beauty, every little scene has its unique allure. Green, blue, or turquoise seas often break in white foam on the rocks far below us. The historic little towns entertain us with ice cream, espresso and other delights (Fig. 6.45). Exploring the city of Venice, with its many canals, bridges, busy and sometimes sleepy out of the way piazzas was another welcome adventure for the children. The visit to the Palace of the Doges and its adjoining prison became a special experience by my having read to the boys the part of Casanova's memoirs where he describes his flight across the infamous »piombi«, the leaden roofs located in the Palace's upper part. It is where he had been imprisoned because of his inopportune publications (Fig. 6.46).



Figures 6.47 and 6.48

Age-old myths and symbolism have grown up around the lighthouses that stand on France's Atlantic coast, particularly the tallest among them. Anyone who had Michael Ende's book about Jim Knopf and Lukas, the locomotive driver, read to him or her during childhood can't help being fascinated by a tall lighthouse like »Le Phare«. You climb on a spiral staircase through the turquoise tiled interior all the way to the top at dizzying height, while shimmering sunlight filters through small window niches. Far below sat the corpulent, contented light house keeper with a blue cap on his head. He gave the boys some well-meant advice about holding on to their caps really well on top where it was very windy indeed. Finding themselves at such a height with a 360 degree panorama view, like here on the »Le Phare« lighthouse on the »Côte Sauvage«, and the earth's curvature becomes easier to grasp for the children. The sensation up here is of a near infinite vastness.



Figures 6.49-6.51

Living for a few days under the blue summer sky on the Atlantic coast of France serves to create distance from the familial and professional routine, from the multitude of small things necessary to ensure such a family life and to enable it in the first place. Still, the tasks and responsibility involved in the family's protection and safety remain as constants, even if we are all on the road together, as symbolized here by the half erected tent not far from the surf breaking on the beach at »Côte Sauvage« (Fig. 6.49).

To actually be in the very village of Giverny with its old walls and the hollyhocks that bloom here in all colors and shades! It was my wife's heartfelt wish to travel to this wonderful place with me and the children. And there we were, in Claude Monet's country house, the interior painted in pastel tones, with its studio and the surrounding garden with flower beds, water lily ponds and old trees! Collectively, it means an intense, sensory immersion in the world of Impressionism (Fig. 6.50).

Crossing France at summer's end on »Routes Nationales« you roll through captivating landscapes spread out under an infinite sky. Harvested cornfields alternate with undulating sunflower fields interspersed with newly-mown pastures with straw or hay bales on them. Children who watch these landscapes roll by now and then also want to experience them with the senses (Fig. 6.51).



Figures 6.52 and 6.53

Water bubbling from a spring is wonderful refreshment when doing day hikes with the children in the Alps, be it in Austria, South Tyrol or in Switzerland. In this natural setting, the children discover the fundamental significance that water has for us. After a few days of Alpine trekking, the mind, too, becomes as clear as mountain water. So-called civilization with its cultural artifacts and diversions recedes totally into the background. This, too, holds an enormous significance for children who are under way on Alpine mountain hikes (Fig. 6.52).

Wandering along South Tyrol's »Waalwege« was entirely involving. The children closely watched the water flowing next to them, and they thought about the engineering skill that underpins this elaborate Alpine irrigation system. They also enjoyed the freshness that spreads out on a warm summer's day from the cool water flowing alongside the path (Waalwege are paths alongside channels carved into South Tyrol mountainsides that carry mountain water down to the drier inhabited areas) (Fig. 6.53).



Figures 6.54 and 6.55

The photo on the left shows my kitchen that doubled as my study in the back of a roughly 300 years old half-timbered house in Stendal, East Germany. Here, in the city of Johann Joachim Winckelmann's birth, also the source of inspiration for Marie Henri Beyle's pseudonym »Stendhal«, I spun many a thought and penned many a sentence. Sitting at this table, I also read a great number of literary works, to unlock other worlds and for a while lose myself in them. From here I had a view of a rear building that had a great hall in it and had stood empty for years. From the year 1900 on, when the house in which I lived was still a parsonage, this hall had served as a church assembly room. Now all was silent – the piano and the organ that stood in it, the cabinets with dishes and hymnal books had been untouched for decades. Of course, you had to climb a bit because the stairwell's rotten woodwork had collapsed. In those cold Stendal winters, fern frost collected on the tall windows. It was a suggestive place that gave wings to the imagination (Fig. 6.54).

I rode my bicycle to the banks of the Elbe from Stendal while I was teaching there. Here I found a still countryside, almost devoid of humans, a singular, meditation-inducing flow of water – just me, my bicycle and my thoughts (Fig. 6.55).



Figures 6.56 and 6.57

To explore Yellowstone National Park with a boy and overnight in its lodges brings you in close contact with the primal forces of nature: constantly on the lookout for bears, we experienced the awesome force of water close up and let ourselves be reminded standing before highly active geysers that we live on just a thin crust of earth stretched over fluid, glowing magma. When night falls in Yellowstone Park and there are no media for diversion in our room in the lodge and no air conditioning is needed thanks to the cool night that even lets us crack open the windows, then there is just one thing to do: to listen into the silence of the night and from time to time pick up signals from the animal world and become aware of your own existence on this planet in a new and deeper way (Fig. 6.56).

To prepare for our journey to the USA, my younger son had assigned me Dan Brown's »The Lost Symbol« to read in the original English. While reading it, I was supposed to make notes about the various locations in the novel set in Washington D.C. When we arrived there eventually, we reconstructed the action and beyond that there was of course quite a bit more architecture, art and technology to discover in this city before we journeyed on to the western United States (Fig. 6.57).



Figure 6.58 and 6.59

Anyone who delves into Friedrich Nietzsche's life and work knows the significance that Sils-Maria, Switzerland, held for the philosopher as a place of retreat for thinking and for writing. It was not all that different for me, coming to the Upper Engadin with many abysmal experiences from schools and universities that needed sorting out and needed to be quarried for their deeper substance. Suffering damage after being active in pedagogical institutions for periods of time is unavoidable unless now and then a time-out is taken. Its survival value resides in contemplative phases, breathing fresh air, movement, mountain ascents, or looking into the distance. Sils-Maria is an auspicious starting point for this. It is about stepping back from the many small impositions of the pedagogic workaday; about distancing the self from the many small administrative acts which we must contribute simply in order to secure our livelihood. The mountains surrounding Lake Sils in the Engadin are highly conducive places for me in this respect, because of the region's special character that so many intellectuals experienced before me. I visualized the library (Fig. 6.58) in the Hotel »Waldhaus« (Fig. 6.59) as a place for conversation and reflection, for thinking through discrete episodes from schools and universities. The idea was once more to have the various stages of professional and familial life pass in review with an attentive conversation partner. The sojourn in Sils-Maria in a certain sense turned into my »Zauberberg« (Magic Mountain, a novel written by Thomas Mann), seeing that I had sustained during the past decades a series of physical and psychic wounds that required taking this cure.



Figures 6.60 and 6.61

Being permanently bound up in the institutional processes and compulsions of schools and universities invariably produced in me the need to leave it all behind, at least for a limited time, to come up for air, to clear the head, to open the perceptions and consciousness again for things other than the professional details and to strip away the institutional conditioning and psychic deformation that can result. For this, a backpacking trip on the »South West Coast Path« through Cornwall and Devon was the highly conducive means. The photo on the left shows the view from a bedroom in a cottage near Porthleven. The Atlantic Ocean breakers roll in right behind those hills (Fig. 6.60).

Human science departments in German universities can at times be very politico-ideologically stamped, intellectually narrow constructs with only a modicum of academic freedom left in them to think and act. Instead, micropolitical tactical maneuvering, power struggles and intrigues often condition the daily academic routine and the work atmosphere. Having involuntarily found myself in such a situation for a number of years, I began to seek out collaboration partners in the USA as a positive counterweight. The transatlantic work, the appreciation for freedom and pragmatism of my American partners reinvigorated me, gave me new meaning and perspectives (Broecker et al., 2014). The terminal for flights to America at Frankfurt am Main airport here assumes symbolic importance, as my own, salutary »Luftbrücke« (This term refers to the »Berlin Airlift« organized by the Western Allied army air forces in 1948-1949 to break the Soviet blockade of Berlin) (Fig. 6.61).



Figure 6.62

Leaving the conference hotel across from Chicago's Hancock Tower after lectures and workshops, I put on jogging shoes and ran down the city's wide avenues all the way to the Loop, the city's heart. The run induced a wonderful sort of euphoria as did my entire stays in the city of Chicago, and other big cities in the United States, like New York City, Washington D.C., Boston, or Los Angeles. I reflected that our American lineage, my paternal forebears, emigrating in the 1850s from South Westphalia, helped build this, too. And, of course, so did the Irish who color the Chicago River green on St. Patrick's day every year and make music in the streets: such dynamism! Philosophies, that had the power to help me to overcome and transform the »confining cages« in my working life, which were shaped through the structures in the German school system, and also through the power struggles and intrigues in Germany's university system here in these open and wide urban spaces came to light again. The writings of John O'Donohue, Erich Fromm, Osho, S. N. Goenka, Swami Muktananda, Henry David Thoreau's book »Walden«, as well as the 4500 years old »Book Kohelet«, led me to a new freedom of reflection and action.



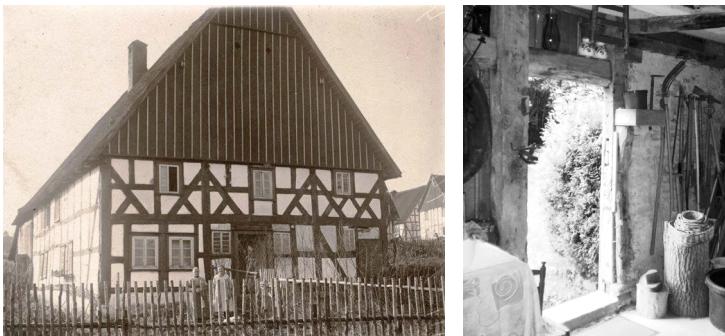
Figure 6.63

From today's vantage point, it is hard to imagine that this building was actually a village school constructed around 1850. The scene documented by the photo here dates to the 1930s. At far left, we see the village blacksmith, my paternal grandfather, next to him the teacher and his family. In the right foreground is a vegetable garden with cabbages. The smithy was located just a stone's throw from the school. Just what the topic of conversation here was lends itself to speculation. The learning progress the blacksmith's children were making in the school? Or had the teacher commissioned something from the blacksmith?



Figure 6.64

This 1930s scene shows members of my paternal family or their progenitors. It was a community of several generations living together on the farm. This is the workman-farmer ground in which my own hands-on pedagogy has its roots.



Figures 6.65 and 6.66

I had a vague notion dating back to childhood and youth that this half-timbered house built in 1650 in South Westphalia was for many years the place my own family on my father's side called home and that many a story had grown up around it. But I only gained deeper insights into these connections when I began a multi-year project (see Broecker, Davis, and Painter 2017; Broecker, Painter, and Davis, 2018) with other members of the family that we called intergenerational and would involve gathering materials like deeds, letters, photos, etc. as well as anecdotes passed down as oral history (Fig. 6.65).

This picturesque threshold is on the side entrance to the barn of the half-timbered house built in 1650 that is my paternal family's residence and ancestral home in South Westphalia (Fig. 6.66). This threshold became for me the strongest symbol during the entire intergenerational research, no doubt also influenced by my having read the works of John O'Donohue (1997, 1998). Someone is born into a protective house; from there he or she stepwise conquers parts of the world but still keeps coming back to its security. Then, at some point he irrevocably crosses a threshold into life, into the world and conquers something new and different, until, many decades later, he thinks back to this once-crossed threshold and to all the supportive relationships and philosophic orientations that he benefited from before stepping over it – but also to the constraints, depending on the generation, that then drove him to develop throughout his entire life, to redesign his existence time and again in the way that Jean-Paul Sartre so aptly described as »transcendence«, in his book »Being and Nothingness«.



Fig. 6.67

Inspired through the reading of Walter Benjamin's »Arcades Project« about Paris, and Alfred Kerr's Berlin diaries and letters, also guided by a growing literature about the »Creative City« (e.g., Florida 2005) and about »Cultural Mapping« (e.g., Duxbury et al., 2015), I started to do extended field studies in Berlin, beginning in October 2015. I booked rooms in private flats via Airbnb, in the quarters of Wedding, Mitte, Charlottenburg, Prenzlauer Berg, Neukölln, Schöneberg, Friedrichshain, Kreuzberg etc., to explore the diverse social, cultural, geographical and economic living conditions, scenes, life worlds and life styles of Berlin. Since the fall of the »Wall«, like already during Imperial and Weimar Germany, the city has the image of a creative, dynamic and glittering metropolis, comparable with New York, London or Paris, a city that attracts people from all over the world, by providing them space for the development of identities and the creation of life styles. The driving motivation behind this endeavour is an educational one and hopes to collect ideas for the building of innovative school cultures. Cities increasingly have become focal points for negotiating rights, living space, and access, with many cities balancing the coexistence of privilege with the lack of opportunity (Florida 2017). Innovative projects which explore new forms of ownership and access, collective production and reproduction, right and solidarity, provide valuable impetus for more sustainable forms of community development and public education (e.g., Broecher and Painter, 2019).