

Name This Space: Consilience

By Erika Paleck

Does *consilience* mean (pick one):

- 1) **Two people together sharing a vow of silence**
- 2) **A convention of people wearing silly hats and blowing noisemakers**
- 3) **The joining together of knowledge and information across disciplines to create a unified framework of understanding**
- 4) **One of the main reasons for writing this column**

It's got to be number three—a joining together of information across disciplines to try to figure out how the world works, right? If that isn't all about being creative, I don't know what is.

Looked at broadly, our entire lives are all about consilience. Remember back to your infancy (or check out the neighbor's kid if that's easier). What was it all about? Survival, right? How do we survive? By mixing and matching information to our own advantage. Hungry kid looks for a bottle of formula or mom's breast. That's a pretty one dimensional skill, but when that infant turns into a teen-ager hanging out at the mini-mart, it becomes way more complex.

First, she's got to get there so there is the transportation problem to be solved and the questions of where it is and how to find it need answers. Second, social skills are required—skills that have usually been learned over a long period of time. This teen-ager is able to communicate what she wants by reading labels and/or asking for information, therefore she has language skills (many that adults don't share, but that's another story). She knows that by going into a public place with others of her species she must meet certain social requirements such as wearing clothes; not only is she wearing clothes but clothes acceptable to her peer group. She also knows something about barter and exchange. In exchange for services rendered, she has acquired something we call money. She understands numbers and amounts so that she doesn't offer fifty cents for three bucks worth of chicken strips and a coke. There you have it—by blending all these skills so painstakingly developed and honed, the final finished product is a teen-ager with (tasty) fried food and a pop.

Okay, so maybe the final product could develop her survival skills. She could have had a V-8 and an apple, but she is still a work in progress. As she matures, she will be learning about nutritional value of different foods and the effects that they have on her body. As she develops an interest in health she might scour the Internet for tips on how to have a healthier body, leaving the chicken strip behind for just an occasional snack instead of an every day lunch.

But let's go back to the details of our lives and how we use consilience every day in a conscious way. I'm hungry, so I'm thinking about what I'm making for dinner. Spaghetti sounds good, so I par-boil the tomatoes to remove the skins, chop them and cook them along with garlic, onions and peppers in olive oil, boil water for the pasta, throw in some red wine and oregano on the sauce, cook my spaghetti al dente...and without a cookbook I have created a tasty meal. I've accelerated the oxidation process of my foodstuffs by exposing them to heat, but not so much that I've burned them. This is incorporating my experience into a creative process. My hungry stomach somehow equals dinner.

So where is the line drawn between consilience and creativity? Cooking is certainly blending different disciplines, and it is frequently creative. How about ceramics? That must surely be a blending of different disciplines using chemistry and anecdotal evidence gathered over thousands of years. Have you seen the flyers about the classes being taught at the Learning Center this summer? Beth D'Aubigne will be teaching ceramics classes in the evening in a four-part series that started June 30th. Consilience here is respect for the clay and its properties so that it doesn't blow up in the kiln, having a vision of what you want to create in clay, learning to use color and design, and maybe what you plan to put in that beautiful vase you've made to blend with your extensive décor.

Or if you attended Eileen Williams' discussion about animal communications at the Grange last First Friday, you might have taken away many more questions than you got answers about what in the world connects us all. Do animals have language or do they speak a universal language that we unwittingly translate in our heads when we do pick up messages? (I can hear one coming in now: "Go to the kitchen. Pick up the can opener; pick up the can opener...")

All of this begs the question of where do our ideas and information come from. Why does one teenager choose chicken strips while another is chomping down on an apple, both as a result of the worldviews they have assimilated? And why will one person be in that pottery class making a vase and another making a figurine? What happens when they all meet? One teenager makes a figurine, another makes a vase. While working they talk about how they saw in their own minds what they wanted to create, and they wonder: where do these ideas come from?

Did you ever wonder about a Thermos bottle and how it keeps hot things hot and cold things cold? Do you wonder how someone can credibly claim to hear animals? How anyone can take a blank piece of paper and create something lovely we hang on our wall? Do you know where your inspirations come from?

There is no line drawn between creativity and consilience. We need to be creative to survive, but in order to flourish we need consilience. That is our lives every single day. That is Life: the creative blending of knowledge and information across disciplines to create a unified framework of understanding. What will we do with that framework is another question.

One answer to that question is shown on First Fridays when Madison north of Bridge Street is closed off. There at an Open Air Market you will find some of your friends and neighbors answering that very question with arts, crafts, jewelry, photographs, baskets, and ceramics.

For those of you who guessed answer number four to the original quiz, that, too, is correct. But you knew that!



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These advanced classes are \$18 each with a limit of two classes per teen. We'll make fun, delicious snacks each day, so please bring your own lunch. Spend the week with old and new friends, learning cool things, and making new memories! Then, top it all off with a Friday night presentation proudly showing what you've learned to those you love!

*Chamber Music will be offered to ages 12 and up (younger with teacher's recommendation).



Cost

1st camper: \$68.00

1st camper plus 1 sibling: \$116.00

1st camper plus 2 or more siblings: \$150.00

Prices apply to registration forms received by July 10th.

After that, add \$15.00 late fee per camper

Advanced class fees: \$18.00 each

For any questions, or for teens interested in helping out with morning classes, please call Carol at (503) 429-0437 or Rachel at (503) 543-8662.

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