

Pedagogy of Experiential Learning: Annotated Bibliography

Prepared by Rachel Hammerback for the Experiential Learning Network

Curzon-Hobson, Aidan. "A Pedagogy of Trust in Higher Learning." *Teaching in Higher Education* 7.3 (2002): 265-276.

Curzon-Hobson subscribes to the notion that trust is an essential component of higher level learning (266). The aim of this pedagogy of trust is the realization of “unique potentiality” or a student’s willingness to continually become what they already are not (266). As seen in much of the literature, the goal again is to provide a transformative education to students. Similar to the views of Michelle Fine (see annotation), Curzon-Hobson believes that the critical evaluation and dialogue are important for higher level learning. Instead of focusing on freedom or politicization as a foundation for transformative schooling, Curzon-Hobson advocates for a pedagogy of trust. In a classroom operating on such a philosophy, students would trust in the teacher that their “projections of potentiality” will be encouraged and rewarded (268). Curzon-Hobson has found that as students change and grow they will develop a stance and the freedom to engage in dialogue as well as the ability to defend and modify their unique perspective. This he says is a critical part of the education experience.

Of course, this dialogue is dependent on a classroom climate of trust. Curzon-Hobson believes that by taking the role of fellow learner, teachers can serve to lessen the power differential and facilitate the creation of such an atmosphere. This balancing of power does not mean however, that the teacher has no authority. Instead, students respect the authority of the teacher as they guide dialogue and challenge student perceptions (271). In return, the teacher respects the student’s opinions and validates their lived experiences.

Unlike most of the literature in the topics surrounding experiential learning, this article

discusses the topic of evaluation. The author finds that accountability mechanisms such as grades may get in the way of trust-building, thus restricting the transformation of the learner. Curzon-Hobson argues that most schools believe they ascribe to a philosophy at least somewhat based in trust. He says, though, that almost all of these schools have instead implemented trust as a policy where instead it should be trust as a passion (273-274). For him, this trust as policy looks like the syllabi most students receive at the start of each new course. "If assessment criteria need to be exactly stated in the course outline", he argues, "then [the course] will be hopelessly inadequate for the diversity required for individually meaningful developmental outcomes". In other words, it is not a one-size-fits all education system. The big question remains though, is it possible to evaluate students in a setting such as this one? Would any evaluation - be it of quality of output or participation - not be a detriment to trust? Interestingly, student's evaluation of teachers is also discussed. The conclusion is much the same. If teachers need to be evaluated specifically on knowledge and expertise of a topic, then it is unlikely they will show vulnerability and adopt the role of learner.

Ferguson, Sue. "How Grades Fail Our Kids." *Maclean's Magazine*. 12 Jan. 2004.

***Maclean's*. 22 Jan. 2014.**

This Maclean's article looks at the achievement oriented culture of today's schools and how this may be affecting students. Ferguson reports that letter grades can dampen a student's zest for learning and have been shown by some studies to be linked to dropout rates (3). The article quotes W.B. Yeates as a reason for a re-evaluation of school assessments saying education is "not about filling a bucket, but lighting a fire". Similar to other readings, this article advocates against a highly structured system, citing the individual differences in development. They use

Quebec's curriculum and new reporting system as an example of what all Canadian schools should potentially be moving towards. The article seems in line with much of the transformative education literature, supporting the notion of greater trust in the classroom by saying that students need to be responsible for their own learning and evaluation (4). The notion of self-evaluation might be relevant to future research on experiential learning.

This article focuses primarily on the effects of evaluation on childhood development at the grade school level. This aspect may be less relevant to our search.

Fine, Michelle. "Silencing and Nurturing Voice in an Improbable Context: Urban

Adolescents in Public School." *Silenced Voices and Extraordinary Conversations: Re-imagining Schools*. New York: Teacher College Press, 2003. 13-37.

The premise of this chapter is the silencing of student and community voices which, in Fine's view is an unfortunate though standard practice of our education system. She writes this chapter following a yearlong ethnography of a high school in Manhattan. That said, she focuses primarily on the public school system at a high school level. She juxtaposes silencing with naming. Naming is having critical conversations about students' social and economic arrangements (18-19).

In particular, Fine looks at the effects of silencing on students who are considered low in skill and income. Fine believes that in order to maintain student interest, the lived experiences of the students must be named and worked with. For example, many of the students she observed experienced racism and had less-than-ideal home lives. She said these students are often disengaged from the classroom because their reality has been ignored throughout their schooling. One interview with a student revealed that when topics of a political nature such as race, are

brought up in class, many teachers will abruptly change the subject, fostering a climate of silence and control (23). The student went on to say that from this, she had learned non-participation in the classroom. Though I would like to think that this type of situation would be less common in Canada than in the States, I can see how this may be the case for some of our Aboriginal population. Is the classroom culture another way in which the Aboriginal people are being marginalized?

In her experience, it is these students considered low in skill, income, and motivation who were most eager to partake in a curriculum of lived experience and engage in participatory pedagogy (17). This demonstrates that perhaps labeling someone “low in skill and motivation” does not mean they are lesser than the “good” students. Perhaps instead it is the limiting “banking” method of education that is failing them. Discussions of this topic can also be found in the works of Curzon-Hobson, Freire, Schon, and Segarra and Dobles (see annotations).

While she does not necessarily name experiential learning in her discussion, Fine advocates for student’s bringing their lived experiences into the class room. An experiential learning placement could be a springboard for these all-important discussions surrounding life outside of school.

Freire, Paulo. "Chapter 2." *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th Anniversary Edition ed. New York: Continuum, 2000. 71-86.

This chapter looks at the problem with the contemporary “banking” concept of education and how these problems can be overcome. Freire says that education is afflicted with a sickness whereby teachers seek to fill their students with information oftentimes completely alien to their existential experience (71). It is from here we get the term “banking” – knowledge is

“deposited” by teachers into “receptacles”, namely students. Freire argues that such an act is dehumanizing to students and treats individuals as spectators, not conscious beings (75). Freire goes so far as to say that banking education is necrophilic or nourished by death and oppression. This may be a bit dramatic but I can certainly relate to being “student as spectator”. I am sure many students have sat through a 75 minute lecture where the professor did not once make eye contact with the class.

Freire’s solution to this system is “problem-posing” – or dialogical par excellence – education. Here, through dialogue and self-questioning people develop the ability to perceive critically the way they exist in and relate with the world (83). Freire says that a liberating education (to contrast our oppressive one) would consist of acts of cognition, not transmission of information (79). Through this, people will come to see the world not as a static reality, but instead as an ever-transforming reality in progress (83). Without naming a philosophy of transformational education, it seems that is what Freire is advocating for. That is also what McWhinney and Markos took away from his ideas as they are the basis for their journal on transformative education. Freire’s chapter is a good mix of philosophy and practicality.

Freire, Paulo. "Chapter 3." *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th Anniversary Edition ed. New York: Continuum, 2000. 87-124.

Freire’s third chapter looks at the dichotomy of action and reflection, or what he called praxis. The chapter then goes on to discuss the relationship between praxis and dialogue as well as the all-importance of the latter. He says if you focus solely on action to the detriment of reflection, you nullify the true praxis and make dialogue impossible. However, he tells how the reverse is also true. If there is no element or intent of action in your reflection, then the words

become empty and thus, transformation is out of the question (87). A true word is one which has both reflection and action, and it is through these words that we transform the world (88). To go further, if it is by speaking true words – or naming – the world that people are able to transform it, then it is through dialogue that people achieve significance as human beings. That is the reason Freire says, that dialogue is so critical to our existence.

This philosophical chapter goes on to talk about the rise of Otherness when dialogue does not take place (90). Based on this, it seems that experiential or community-service learning could be an important facet of social sustainability. In Freire's view it is through contact and critical conversation that we rid ourselves of notions of "us and them" by rehumanizing the Other. It is upon this platform that lasting relationships could be built.

Though many academics have borrowed from Freire, I have not read his thoughts on love anywhere else. Though others have called it a pedagogy of transformation, I would go so far as to say that alternately his is a pedagogy of love. To summarize his discussion on the topic, Freire believes that if you do not have a love of the world, of life and of people, then you cannot enter into dialogue, which again is essential to our humanness (90). To look further into pedagogies of love, one could look at the writings of and/or on Martin Luther King Jr. or Gandhi to name a few.

The beginning of chapter three connects to almost every reading I have done on the pedagogy behind experiential learning. As a founder and leading advocate for the critical pedagogy it is no wonder that so many in this realm have been influenced by Freire. These few pages of text are but few and yet offer almost a summary of sorts of this particular transformational school of thought.

The second half of the chapter is a rather dense discussion of how educators could

complete an investigation of the “thematic universe” or the totality of the class’s “generative themes” prior to facilitating dialogue in the classroom. Though quite a difficult read, it seems that this portion of the chapter is perhaps too specific for our purposes.

Graff, Gerald. "Clueless in Academe: An Interview with Gerald Graff." Int'd by John

Warner. *The Morning News* 16 Sept. 2003. Online at

<<http://www.themorningnews.org/article/clueless-in-academe-an-interview-with-gerald-graff>>

This interview with Gerald Graff, writer of the book *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind*, discusses the book’s subject matter – the gap between teacher and students. He maintains that many if not most students are and will remain outsiders to the academic intellectual world due to the nature of our school system. He echoes the sentiments of many other academics in saying that the education system is failing to produce informed and sophisticated citizenry even though that is exactly what the success and growth of our world requires.

This interview left me wondering about his thoughts on how to remedy the ‘cluelessness’ that he believes pervades our education system. This piece is more *against* current educational practices than *for* new and/or experiential ones. I am sure though, that his book would be more in depth and two-sided.

Hooks, Bell. "Introduction ." *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. 1-12.

In this anecdotal piece, Hooks talks about her experiences in education. She explains the

stark contrast between the segregated schools she attended in her younger years where students were taught to be political and the integrated schools she later went to where topics even vaguely political in nature were quickly silenced. She cites the terrible boredom she experienced in these non-political classrooms as what sparked her to re-imagine the teaching and learning experience and pursue critical theory.

Hooks' short-essay format is quite accessible but is lacking in theory and connection to other scholarly work (of course it is only the introduction to a larger work). This particular print-out of the article also includes a partial table of contents. Chapter 10: *Building a Teaching Community: A Dialogue* sounds like it could be relevant to our discussion and may be worth looking into if further research in this area is desired.

Hooks, Bell. "Dancing with Words." *Remembered Rapture: The Writer at Work*. New York: Henry Holt, 1999. 35-45.

In this short-essay, Hooks defends critical writing, which is often considered dull – especially by students. She argues that this is not the nature of this type of writing itself, but instead a result of backwards University thinking whereby the more dispassionate and “dead” the stance, the more praise given. With objectivity being prized above all, Hooks says fulfillment like that of which she receives from writing is impossible for most “good” students. For these students, writing is about the outcome, not the journey. Hooks believes that the maintenance of such an evaluation and value system is simply a way to maintain status quo – separating the writer from the powerful critic (37). By telling about her own transformational experience through written dialogue, Hooks makes a commentary about the state of our current education system. She effectively argues for change in the direction of engagement in critical dialogue and thusly of freedom.

The remainder of the article discusses how she came to choose the short critical essay as her primary medium as well as how her own education and writing experiences have influenced her teaching philosophy as she works in a University classroom. Again, Hooks is an engaging writer but her writing is centered in her own experiences and thus does not seem to generalize or apply to larger research very well.

Mayo, Peter. "A Rationale for a Transformative Approach to Education." *Journal of Transformative Education* 1.1 (2003): 38-57.

Mayo asserts that our domestic and formal education system is a byproduct of the neoliberal ideals upon which our society operates. That said, he believes that current educational practices focus on marketability over social justice and serve only to strengthen the status quo (38; 40). As an alternative, Mayo argues that educational processes should be liberating and driven by a vision of “what should and can be” (42). He says this type of education would be a “practice of freedom” (a term coined by Richard Shaull) where people deal critically and creatively with their reality and learn to participate in the local and global community.

For Mayo, a theory of transformative education is one that is cognizant of the political nature of all educational interventions (since as, in the words of Freier “there is no such thing as a neutral education process” [as qtd in McWhinney and Markos, 20]). This reminds me of Lloyd Kornelsen’s chapter on global citizenship. He advocates for global and local practicums as a good way to create globally aware, mindful, and well-rounded students. However, this comes with a catch – if students partaking in these programs do not recognize through critical reflection the political implications of their participation in and existence of these programs themselves, then they can have a negative effect, serving to strengthen views of “us and them” and making a reciprocal relationship impossible. (Kornelsen, 27).

This view of education while transformational, is more political and less spiritual than what is seen in Curzon-Hobson's *Pedagogy of Trust* (see annotation), or McWhinney and Markos' *Transformative Education* (see annotation). Mayo's thinking is more in line with Bell Hooks (*remembered rapture* and *Teaching to Transgress*) and Jose Segarra and Ricardo Dobles (*Learning as a Political Act*). For our purposes I am unsure how much of the political argument we would like to bring up in our research as that may be a bit confrontational. This will have to be discussed further.

McWhinney, Will, and Laura Markos. "Transformative Education: Across the Threshold."

***Journal of Transformative Education* 1.1 (2003): 16-37.**

Using Navajo traditions as a foundation, McWhinney and Markos argue in favour of a revamp of the Western education system. Citing technological advances and the resultant increased lifespan as a primary justification for people (especially adults) needing reeducating and reinvigorating, the authors suggest transformative education as a solution. They distinguish between learning, education, and transformation as a starting point for their argument. The authors assert that the goal of contemporary western school systems is education whereby people are socialized to fill their roles in society (20). Instead, McWhinney and Markos say the focus should be on transformation or an awakening of consciousness that gives meaning to life (22). The journey - so to speak - of transformative education begins with a crisis or stress and moves into a threshold the authors call "no-place" (25). This place is an asylum and a safe mental space in which students are free to explore ideas while being free of value judgment (26). Next is the passage stage. This is a time of unlearning, research and a testing of roles culminating in the recreation of an identity. The journey ends in rebirth and reintegration into the community. The

changes may be simply corrective or so profound that the ‘wanderer’ has become almost unrecognizable (29). People will generally embark on these transformative journeys on their own – but not until much later in life whereupon they are likely to be deeply invested in whichever path they chose at an earlier age (34). That said, schools should aim to facilitate and encourage transformation and exploration of transcendental goals so as to allow their students to best fulfill their potential and realize their known or unknown desires.

One manifestation of the transformation process is emancipatory education, or education in the service of society with goals of social transformation (33). This sounds like community-service learning. However, for these authors the community interaction for those on their journey is with fellow wanderers – each helping the other towards self-discovery. Contrastingly (and perhaps more fittingly for our purposes), Schon advocates for students “finding themselves” under the tutelage of a knowledgeable member or members of the community. This view may better account for the skill-development aspect of experiential learning programs.

McWhinney and Markos – like many others – draw heavily from Freire. His works (in addition to those referenced in this bibliography) may be worth some further exploration.

Schon, Donald. “Educating the Reflective Practitioner” American Educational Research Association. Washington DC. 1987.

Schon gives us another look at the inadequacies of the traditional school system and his take on how these shortcomings may be remedied. He differentiates between our current practice of attaining “school knowledge” that is formal, categorical and where there is a right and wrong answer and “reflection-in-action”. Reflection-in-action is the ability to respond to surprise through on-the-spot improvisation. In Schon’s view, the need for this reflection-in-action spurs

from the great divides between school and life, teaching and doing, and research and practice – all of which he says “deaden” the experience of schools. The way, he says, to bring this reflective action to education is through the “reflective practicum” (6). Here, people learn by doing together, with one another, who are trying to do the same thing (6). In such a situation, students would learn in interaction with someone less like a teacher and more like a coach where dialogue would look something like “this is what I make of what you have said. This thing I’m doing now is what I make of what you have said” (6). Schon envisions such a place as a safe space, or a “virtual world” where mistakes are not only okay, but also necessary. Learning in this way would result in quick-thinking and confident students willing to “give their own name to” or stand for phenomena they have seen and believe (7).

Schon’s is an educational philosophy of transformation though he does not explicitly say so. He cites the importance of students in a reflective practicum “plunging into the doing” and educating themselves even before they know exactly what it is they are trying to learn (8). This will result in feelings of vulnerability and incompetency, sounding much like the crisis stage of McWhinney and Markos’ journey of transformational education.

Schon’s presentation offers a perspective I have yet to come across. He accounts for the sciences in his discussion of reflective practicums. While a philosophy of transformation and human consciousness seems relevant and important to students of the arts, it has proved more difficult to see the connection for students of the more practical sciences and trades. He says that while with the sciences you need to be able to set up problems and fix and fit the way that applied science teaches. However, he argues that the best science-minded people will fill the gap between theory and technique and concrete action with artistry. This artistry would come from

reflection-in-action and the reflective practicum. Is this not the goal of education, to prepare students to be the best they can be in their chosen fields?

He does not however, talk about the evaluation of a reflective practicum. I am left wondering who would be doing the evaluating – the coach or the teacher? Or would there be evaluation at all? The grading and evaluation of experiential learning is undoubtedly a challenge that will need to be faced and researched further.

Segarra, Jose, and Ricardo Dobles. "Introduction." *Learning as a Political Act*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 1999. ix-xiii.

In the introduction to their book, Segarra and Dobles advocate for a learning that seeks to enrich, rather than impoverish. They note that the path of contemporary education is rather narrow in spite of the many avenues to learning that actually exist (xii). The authors purposely use lower-case “l” learning out of respect for the notion that there exist many types of learning any of which may be preferred or used by an individual (xiii). They also acknowledge that for many, their preferred pathway for learning falls outside the narrow scope that is rewarded in the typical school (much like the decision we see in Fine’s *Silencing and Nurturing Voice in an Improbable Context*). For that reason, the authors believe a change should be made. For them, this change would allow students to place themselves “within, between, and outside of historical, cultural, national, and political boundaries” (xii). It sounds as though they want students to be able to take a step outside of themselves as they explore topics that interest them. Bell Hooks and Lloyd Kornelsen both advocate for critical reflection as a way of doing this.

The majority of this piece however, outlines how the authors’ experiences at Harvard University helped them to realize this great need for change. This book could potentially be

helpful in our research. It may be a good idea to find a table of contents to find out if this is so.

Snider, J. “Scholarship, Morality and Apologies for Empire’. In S. O’Meara and D.A. West (Eds.). *From Our Eyes: Learning from Indigenous Peoples*. Toronto: Garamond Press. (1996)

Snider echoes Freire in his belief that we are inevitably and inextricably political beings by nature (31) That said, he argues that we are fooling ourselves as we strive for objectivity in the classroom and in our work etc. By adopting this false objectivity he says we believe ourselves to be freed from our collective guilt and sin (34). With that comes academic detachment which is often reinforced by the use of statistics and numbers (38). He uses the case of poverty among American Indians as an illustration. He points out that many scholars will blame the past or the American Indians themselves for their current levels of poverty, but rarely do scholars cite the current marginalizing factors such as our capitalist economy (37). With that, he says it is up to the universities to inform students of the facts without belittling passion because passion comes from the heart and knowledge which does not inform the heart is not knowledge at all (38). Quoting Elie Wiesel, Snider reminds us that knowledge burdens us with heightened responsibility (45). Even if the schools cannot change their objectivist ways, the opportunity for students to learn outside of the institution and gain first-hand knowledge through experiential learning may be beneficial.

The overall tone of this piece is pessimistic and reprimanding. The work looks more at the American Indian situation than at the shortcomings of scholarship.

Srivastava, Aruna. *Manning the Gates: Grading, Assigning, Pedagogy*. University of

Calgary.

For Srivastava, the central problem of our current educational practices lies in the area of academic freedom. She argues that there is a contradiction between the values of our institutions for higher learning – namely values of diversity and inclusivity – and the teaching and assessment practices that actually take place. She finds instead that there is an astounding lack of both of the aforementioned values in classroom conventions (8). This work provides a view of what such a progressive and inclusive would look like:

“the curriculum would recognize the diversity of people’s experience; the pedagogy would be critical and progressive; teaching would empower students; the organizational culture would be based on human rights principles that prohibit unwarranted discrimination; and debate about new directions in research and scholarship would be ongoing” (Jennie Hornosty as qtd in Srivastava, 9).

I wonder how responsive a University would be to arguments such as these in favour of experiential learning. Maintaining the status quo serves the interests of the University, but not the students. Perhaps then it is the students who need to be informed and begin bringing attention to these issues. Without student support, the University cannot be successful.

Like Curzon-Hobson (see annotation), Srivastava examines the evaluation process of students by teachers and vice versa. They share similar views in that student evaluations of teachers are not good indicators of teaching prowess for those who teach against the norm. Students have been socialized to expect education to look a certain way and will undoubtedly evaluate accordingly. The same is true of most educators.

Srivastara is the Associate Head of Undergraduate Studies in the University of Calgary’s English program. She often uses the English faculty as examples of poor evaluative practice in her paper. It would be interesting to know what (if any) changes she has made in the faculty since writing this paper. (The paper is undated so this may be tricky to find out).